

Lee Hyun-Sook on Haegue Yang at Art Basel Unlimited 2016

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Haegue Yang, "Sol LeWitt Upside Down – Structure with Three Towers, Expanded 23 Times, Split in Three," 2015, aluminum Venetian blinds, aluminum hanging structure, powder coating, steel wire, 3 towers, 350 x 352.5 x 352.5 cm each. Installation view of La vie modern, La Biennale de Lyon, La Sucrière, Lyon, France, 2015

(Courtesy Kukje Gallery. Photo © Blaise ADILON)

For all collectors attending Art Basel this month, the Unlimited Section of the fair is an absolute must-see. The sheer size of some of the works presented can often be breathtaking, while the roll-call of participating artists reads like a "who's who" of the art world. This year, visitors can expect to see 88 projects – a record number – including some by heavyweights like Ai Weiwei, El Anatsui, Elmgreen & Dragset, Tracey Emin, Sol LeWitt, Frank Stella, and James Turrell.

Proudly displayed amongst them will be leading Korean artist Haegue Yang's "Sol LeWitt Upside Down – Structure with Three Towers, Expanded 23 Times, Split in Three," an ethereal modular construction of white blinds that is an extension of a series first shown at Yang's solo exhibition "Shooting the Elephant 象 Thinking the Elephant," at Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art (Seoul) in 2015.

We talked to Lee Hyun-Sook of Seoul's Kukje Gallery, which is collaborating with New York's Tina Kim Gallery to present Haegue Yang at Art Basel Unlimited 2016, to find out more about the installation.

Could you describe the significance of Haegue Yang's practice in the context of both her hometown of Seoul and her adopted base of Berlin? Would you say that there is anything at all "Korean" or even "Asian" about her work, or is it globally aware and internationally oriented?

Haegue Yang is inspired by the everyday, as well as deeply engaged with the context of the exhibition space. She is not locked into a framework of being “Korean” or “Asian”; however, her chosen subject matter and mediums do engage cultural perspectives depending on the historical and traditional milieu of the exhibition venue.

That being said, instead of viewing her work as nomadic and unmoored to any geographical site, the artist and her practice can be viewed as engaging with recurring themes, especially her desire to explore the sensuous and intuitive in the everyday.

This can be seen in her major series “The Intermediates,” which is part of her current solo exhibition at the Hamburger Kunsthalle. These works are made primarily of straw, a material which can be found in various cultures, and explore how materials can act as a middleman between the borders of the past and present, the ancient and modern age.

Who would you say are some of Haegue Yang's main artistic influences and predecessors?

Haegue Yang’s practice often revolves around series of related works based on deep research of historical figures and their social history. For instance, Yang approached the subject of diaspora by exploring the work of Korean-Japanese writer Suh Kyungsik, who wrote the book “My Journey to Primo Levi.” This powerful work reflects on political asylum and Yang uses it as a framework to explore her own complex experience living and working in Germany. She organized a lecture with this important author as part of her solo exhibition at Haus der Kunst.

How would you describe Yang's installation for Unlimited in your own words?

“Sol LeWitt Upside Down – Structure with Three Towers, Expanded 23 Times, Split in Three,” which will be presented at Art Basel Unlimited, is an extension of her blind series that was first shown at her solo exhibition “Shooting the Elephant 象 Thinking the Elephant” at Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, in 2015, entitled “Sol LeWitt Upside Down – Structure with Three Towers, Expanded 23 Times.”

In its first iteration, the work was suspended in the air as a single cube. At the Lyon Biennial in September 2015, the work evolved and was divided into three towers with fluorescent lamps installed inside. In this year’s Art Basel Unlimited exhibition, the artist has altered the work once again, allowing it to hang nearly touching the floor and directly engaging the Unlimited sector's exhibition space designed by Herzog & de Meuron.

What are some recent and upcoming projects by Haegue Yang that viewers ought to be aware of, or look forward to?

Her solo exhibition “Quasi-Pagan Minimal” at the Hamburger Kunsthalle opened last month and is on view through April 30, 2017. Also, her upcoming solo exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris will open on July 5, and run through September 5, 2016. A large-scale blind work will be installed in the main Forum of the Centre Pompidou, and this will be a key exhibition showcasing this signature series. The blind series has allowed the artist to explore both compositional aspects and dynamic variables such as the architectural site.

Yang also has an exhibition in Porto, Portugal in June, a group exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bremen in Germany in August, and in October, she will be included in La Biennale de Montréal in Canada.