

# HAEGUE YANG

VOICE OVER THREE

**HAEGUE YANG,** (Top) *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements – Shadowless Voice Over Three*, 2008. Courtesy Galerie Barbara Wien Wilma Lukatsch, Berlin. (Bottom) *Trustworthy Waves I–IV*, from the series “Trustworthies,” 2010. Courtesy Kukje Gallery, Seoul.

Photography by Kim Sang Tae.

Haegue Yang’s first solo show in her native Korea was a compact survey of a dozen sculptures, videos and conceptual works as well as a large installation. In 2009, the then-38-year-old Yang was the first woman to represent Korea in a solo exhibition at the Venice Biennale, and her display there proved a career breakthrough. Her highly distinctive room-sized installations of multicolored window blinds at the Korea Pavilion, and her smaller assemblages of light bulbs and other domestic paraphernalia draped over metal racks in the Arsenale, were internationally acclaimed. Visitors to the Artsonje Center unfamiliar with the wider range of Yang’s practice could be forgiven for thinking they had walked into the wrong gallery—the diversity of material gave the initial impression that this was a group exhibition.

The first works presented on the second-floor gallery were muted, opaque meditations on privacy, a continued exploration of Yang’s interest in the notion of vulnerability. *Trustworthy Waves I–IV* (2010) are large collages made with torn paper strips, each with a distinctive pattern of crisscrosses, undulating lines, zigzags, random numbers and dots of different sizes. Taken from the inside of bank-issued security envelopes manufactured to deliver credit cards and PIN numbers, this juxtaposition of patterns is reminiscent of mountainous horizons, geological strata, economic graphs or, as the artist has it, waves. Revealing the many different camouflages that achieve the same end of concealing personal data, Yang finds abstract beauty in functional and disposable ephemera.

Hung next to these collages was *Certificate* (2010), a single A4 sheet of text, written and notarized in Korean, which states that the artist will disclose her bank account number and password to the buyer upon purchase of the work. In theory, such a transaction exposes Yang to the risk of identity theft, yet one can assume that even a collector who buys the work anonymously could be tracked down and prosecuted should he or she abuse the artist’s trust. Recalling British artist Michael Landy’s *Break Down* (2001), in which



the artist had a team of workers document and destroy every single thing he owned, it is easily argued that Yang’s *Certificate* would really have an impact if it revealed her bank details to the general public without condition of purchase. As is, the work feels somewhat timid.

Several pieces in the exhibition reveal the urban anthropologist in the artist. “Social Conditions of Sitting Tables” (2000–01) is a series of nine color photographs depicting low, handmade tables placed outside shops and residential buildings. The photographs are displayed together with a text that explains the evolution of these tables, which do not have a specific name but can be found throughout Korea, and serve as an essential crucible for social interaction. Low enough to function as chairs but also wide enough to serve as a small platform, people use them as meeting places, resting spots and storage space. And yet, with the increased anonymity of ever-growing urban populations and a rise in traffic in small streets, these “sitting tables” are gradually going extinct. This work is endearing, a touching profile of urban change, but it nevertheless remains little more than an observation.

Yang thrives when she is able to elevate everyday objects to a level of fantasy and wonder: the relatively low-key stillness of the second floor was complemented by the bold, dramatic installation of suspended venetian blinds and mirrors on the third. A riot of stimulation, from the wind of whirring fans to the glare of swiveling spotlights and the warmth of infrared heaters, *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements – Shadowless Voice Over Three* (2008) is a sequence of three partitioned yet interweaving spaces punctuated by dangling scent emitters that gently puff out the smell of fresh-cut grass, French bread and coffee. The installation seems to be in constant flux, with blinds and mirrors swaying in the wind and shadows creeping across the walls—the color of everything changing all the time. The flash of warmth over one’s face when walking under a heater triggers feelings of fear as though one has walked too close to a fire; the relentless glare of sweeping spotlights suggests guilt—being caught in the act. Seductive, blinding and unsettling, Yang’s work is at its best when it makes you feel vulnerability, rather than just think about it.

ASHLEY RAWLINGS

