

PORTIKUS

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Haegue Yang

Opening: May 16, 2008, 8 pm

Exhibition on view: May 17 – June 29, 2008

Press conversation: May 16, 2008, 11 am

Haegue Yang is showing a new installation at the Portikus entitled *Siblings and Twins*. The work is composed of two parts that are connected by substantial metaphorical parallels yet formally distinct. Yang's current works are based on subjectively selected aspects from the lives of a variety of historical characters. In the case of *Siblings and Twins*, shown at the Portikus, these are the fighter for Korea's freedom Kim San and the French author Marguerite Duras. The specific interest is here primarily in the transfer of subjectively felt intensities that underlie the public perception of these characters and the circumstances of their lives into an abstract form.

With this exhibition, the Portikus is part of a serial project Yang has designed for this year; the project calls for further installations—pursuing the same substantive idea, but with different characters and their abstract translations—to be installed in a number of international exhibition spaces, including the Hamburg Kunstverein; Cubitt Gallery, London; the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Gallery Red Cat, Los Angeles; and Sala Rekalde, Bilbao.

Haegue Yang's artistic approach is marked by a particular interest in the language of abstraction, and in particular in how the rhetoric of formal abstraction might make it possible to relate abstractly conceived complex facts about the world in a self-supporting language. Using everyday materials and objects such as blinds, metal structures, light bulbs, perforated metal sheets, and spotlights as formal means, Yang creates an exhibition situation in which the visitor is called upon to face—both physically and intellectually—the plurality of possible interpretations. Yang's subjective reading treats the histories the exhibition engages—focusing on two pairs of characters, Kim San–Nym Wales and Marguerite Duras–Robert Antelme—as comparable in that both lives are marked by an intense struggle with one's own fate and an unconditional devotion, to the point of self-sacrifice, to one's political ideals and the belief in them. This reading contemplates and unites the lives of two individuals as subjects under a single universal and collective aspect. Their specifics may vary, yet the universal quality expressed by Haegue Yang in her installations through the use of abstract forms can be understood as a quest for and assertion of a subjective truth. At stake is here less a precise biographical narration than a rhetorical visualization, universal and yet subjective, of certain intensive states and aspects immanent to the "real" histories. The real histories on which the installations are based might be told in the following way: *Red Broken Mountainous Labyrinth* tells the story of the fighter for Korea's freedom Kim San, who participated in the underground campaign from China against the Japanese occupation of Korea between 1905 and 1938, and his biographer, the American journalist Nym Wales. Over the course of a number of years, the two met a number of times in life-threatening circumstances. Later on, Nym Wales' indefatigable exertions helped make Kim San an icon among the many nameless participants in the fight for Korea's freedom. With its labyrinthine structure, the installation *Red Broken Mountainous Labyrinth* represents an encounter between two people without whom a chapter of Korean history would have been lost to oblivion. The second installation, *5, Rue Saint-Benoît*, points toward Marguerite Duras's apartment in Paris at the same address, which served as a hub and meeting-point and witnessed important events both political and private. Duras lived there with her husband, Robert Antelme, with whom she worked in the Résistance. Antelme, however, was arrested and deported to Dachau. After his liberation, in 1945, he was taken back to the Rue Saint-Benoît and nursed back to health. The installation *5, Rue Saint-Benoît* shows a number of

objects whose measurements correspond to those of objects one finds in the kitchens and bathrooms of apartments—in this case, the artist's own—such as a kitchen table, a water heater, a shower stall, or a stove. The work thus examines the apartment as a site of the political struggle for survival.

Solo exhibitions (selection): 2008: Lethal Love, Cubitt Gallery, London; Baloise Prize, Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg; 2007: Foxed in the Forest, dépendance, Brussels; Haubrokschows – Unpacking Storage Piece, Sammlung Haubrok, Berlin; Seven Basel Lights, Basel Statement with Galerie Barbara Wien, Basel; Remote Room, Gallery Barbara Wien, Berlin; 2006: SA-DONG 30, Incheon, Korea; Unevenly, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht.

Group exhibitions (selection): 2008: 55th Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Whose History, Hamburger Kunstverein, Hamburg; 2007: Brave New Worlds, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Tomorrow, Artsonje Center & Kumho Museum, Seoul; Prague Biennale, Prague; Made in Germany, Sprengel Museum, Kestnegergesellschaft, Kunstverein Hannover, Hanover.

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The exhibition of Haegue Yang's work is one in a series of exhibitions entitled *MainWerk* —a cooperation between Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main, the Städelschule, and the Portikus. Once every year, the exhibition series seeks to show a work of art created especially for the Portikus by a former student at the Städelschule who has successfully pursued a career as an artist after graduation and is being exhibited on the national or international stage. By showing his or her work at the Portikus, the series seeks to bring this artist back—at least temporarily—to Frankfurt and to present his or her work to a local audience. With this exhibition series, Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main, seeks to draw attention to Frankfurt's contribution to contemporary art and to support young artists from Frankfurt.

Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main, was founded in 2005. Its philanthropic work is concentrated in three main areas: education, science, and technology; arts and culture, including preservation of the city's cultural heritage; and social, charitable, and humanitarian work. It seeks to contribute to Frankfurt's development as a model modern and citizen-centered urban society.