ART REVIEW

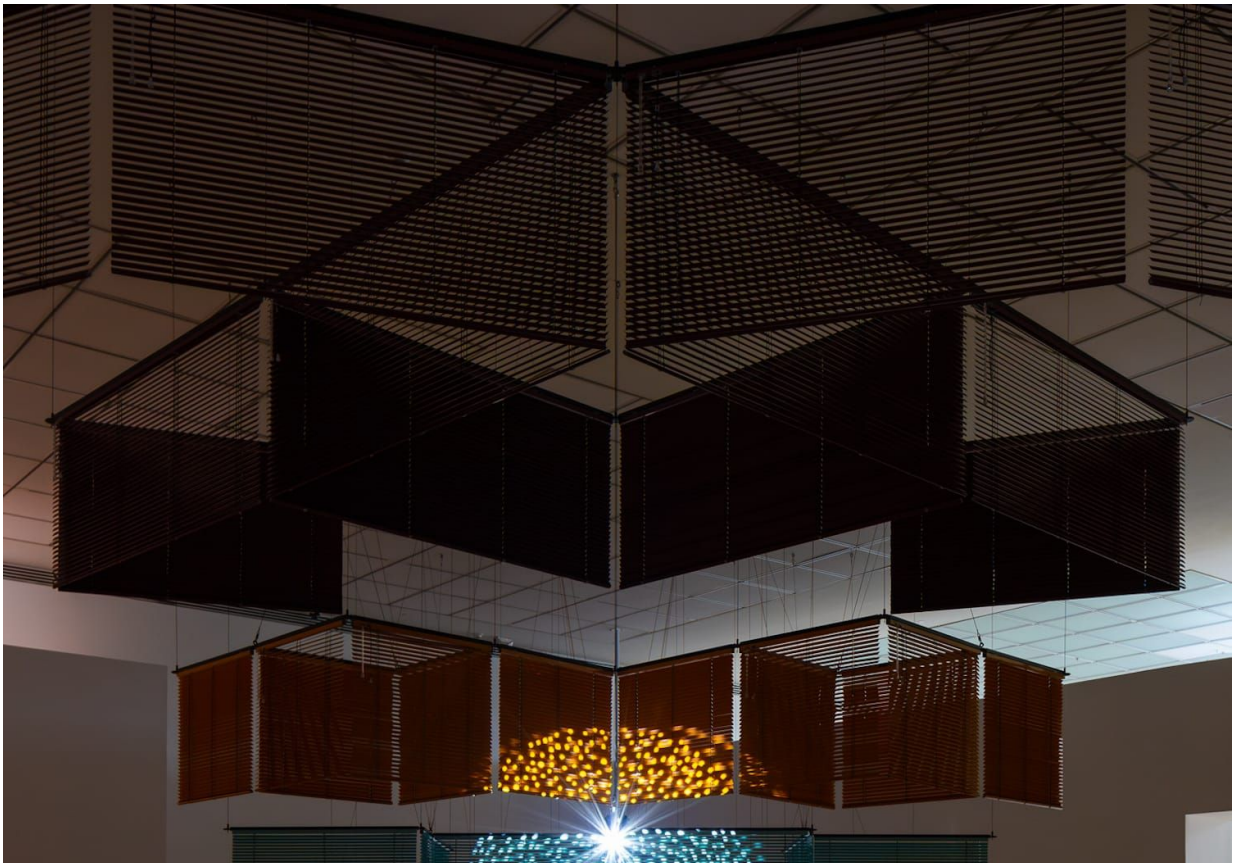
Haegue Yang's Constellations for a Divided Korea

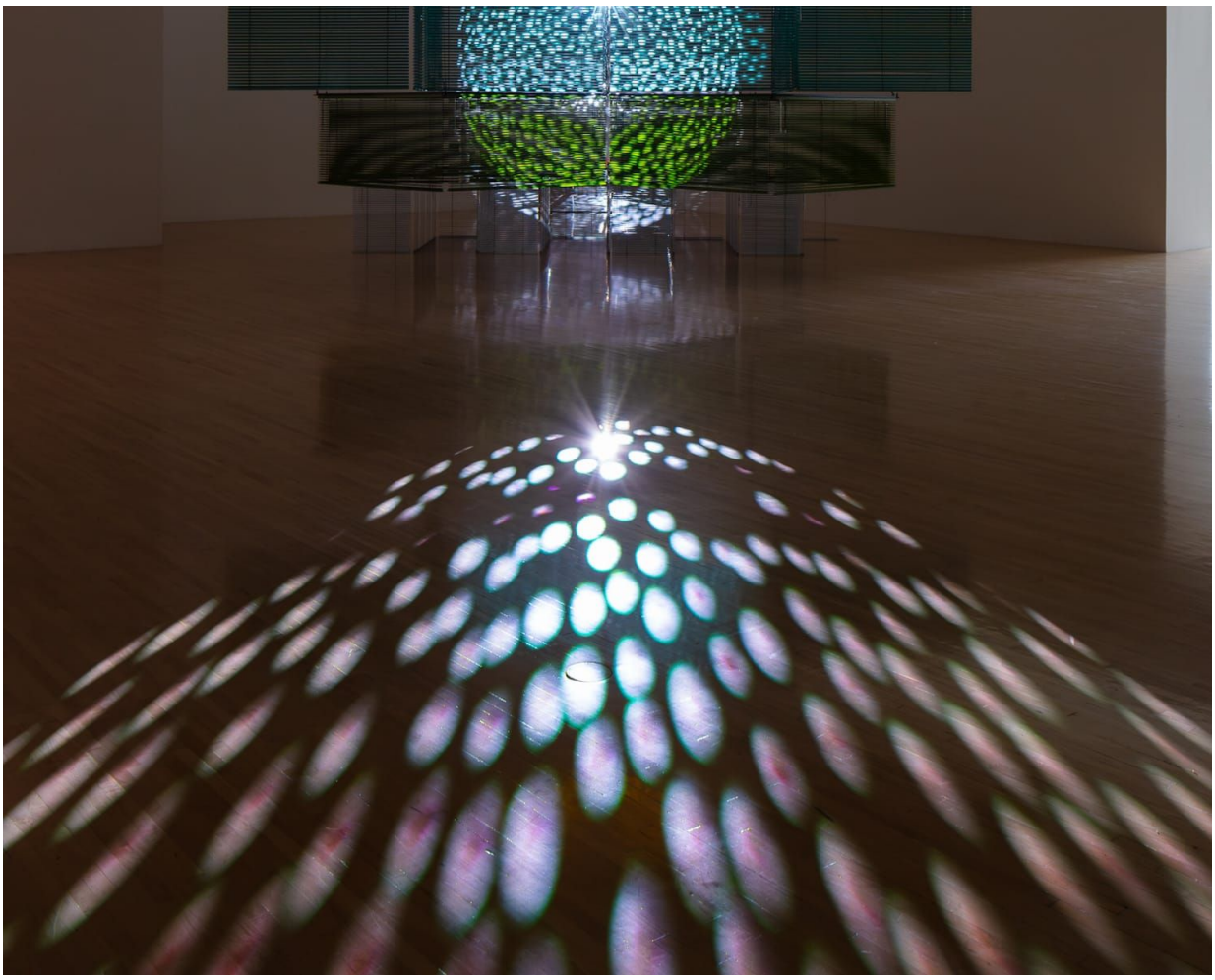
The artist's play on light and shadow transforms Venetian blinds into haunting reflections on exile, borders, and the longing for reunification.



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Installation view of Haegue Yang, "Star-Crossed Rendezvous after Yun" (2024) (photo Zak Kelley, courtesy the Museum of Contemporary Art; all others Alex Paik/*Hyperallergic*)

LOS ANGELES — In August 1945, a few days before the Japanese surrender, two junior United States military officers bisected Korea. With no Koreans present and armed only with a National Geographic map, their arbitrary division has had a lasting and profound impact on Koreans living on the peninsula and abroad.

This division serves as one of the major touchpoints in Korean artist Haegue Yang's *Star-Crossed Rendezvous* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, which presents two Venetian blind installations. "Sol LeWitt Upside Down – K123456, Expanded 1078 Times, Doubled and Mirrored" (2015) is inspired by the American Minimalist's sculptures. Yang's cubes of white blinds hang from the

ceiling, forming a stalactite-like shape. This entire form is repeated in the installation, but mirrored and inverted. By pairing this work with another large Venetian blind installation, the exhibition primes the viewer to start looking for the doublings, inversions, and asymmetries that are often present in her work — a light-filled room versus one cloaked in shadows, monochromatic versus polychromatic blinds, sound versus silence, stasis versus movement.



Installation view of Haegue Yang, "Sol LeWitt Upside Down – K123456, Expanded 1078 Times, Doubled and Mirrored" (2015)

Like LeWitt's work, this installation displays the infinite formal

potential of self-imposed systems within abstraction. But Yang also makes room for deep research and embodied history to create emotionally and personally resonant abstraction, as exemplified in "Star-Crossed Rendezvous after Yun" (2024), a quiet reflection on borders, division, and reunification. The work draws inspiration from the life and work of composer Isang Yun (1917–1995), who was tortured and imprisoned by the South Korean secret police in 1967 after being accused of working as a spy.

The work is based on Yun's "Double Concerto" (1977), a piece that itself references a Korean fairy tale in which two forbidden lovers are turned into stars on opposite ends of the galaxy. To prevent their tears from flooding the earth, birds form a bridge in the sky so the two can briefly meet once a year. In both artists' interpretations, the longing of these two banished lovers is an allegory for their desire for a unified Korea. Unlike in the story, though, separated family members are only sporadically able to reunite in tightly choreographed, government-sanctioned meetings between North and South Koreans, depending on the political climate. Yun himself was exiled to West Berlin after an international campaign demanded his release and never returned to his homeland, though he continued to be involved in efforts to democratize and reunify Korea.





Installation view of Haegue Yang, "Star-Crossed Rendezvous after Yun" (2024)

"Star-Crossed Rendezvous after Yun" is a monumental hanging construction made of colored Venetian blinds. Projections synced to Yun's "Double Concerto" move across the structure, casting fragmented shadows on the gallery walls as light passes through them. This scattering can be read as a visual representation of the dispersal of Koreans across the globe after the division and the Korean War. Each of the four colors makes up a different symmetrical form reminiscent of the geometry of constellations. Arranged in a staircase-like structure, they ascend to the ceiling like the bridge built by birds in the Korean folk tale. However, Yang's

bridge never slopes back downward to meet the other side; instead, we are left with a feeling of unresolved longing. As if to drive this point home, Yun's "Double Concerto" plays for its entirety before being mirrored by an equal amount of silence — a call without a response.

Yang splits her time between Seoul and Berlin, where Yun lived out his exile, and the historical asymmetry between these two cities must be painfully apparent as she moves back and forth. Tellingly, Yang leaves the blinds in her installation half open, insisting on the possibility that boundaries can one day be changed and dismantled.





Installation view of Haegue Yang, "Star-Crossed Rendezvous after Yun" (2024)

Haegue Yang: Star-Crossed Rendezvous *continues at the Museum of Contemporary Art (250 South Grand Avenue, Downtown, Los Angeles) through August 2. The exhibition was organized by Paula Kroll, assistant curator, with Clara Kim, chief curator & director of curatorial affairs.*