

Critical exhibition
review of haegue
yang's the
intermediates



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In an exhibition like this it is easy to fall into the habit of ' lazy looking' (D'Alleva, A. 2006), for one to be overwhelmed by the aesthetics so much so that the analysis of images and objects is overlooked. However, this knowledge of formal and contextual analysis is needed to understand the exhibition's context and contents which, in this case, was lacking. Whilst of course, interpretation is mainly based on the individual, the basic information provided to assist in individual interpretation for this installation piece was extremely deficient and basic. The only wall text provided upon entrance to the installation was thin, small and physically inaccessible for more than one person at a time. Visitors seemed uninterested due to the inaccessibility of the signage and the lengthy words in the paragraphs used and therefore went into the exhibition with no context for contextual analysis, resulting in a quick walk around. That being said, the basic characteristics of the installation were hard to miss due to their scale and colours, so some formal analysis is inevitable.

Haegue Yang's *The Intermediates* exhibition contains mostly installation art meaning it is site specific and creates an environment of it's own rather than existing in an already-made environment. Yang's installation art creates a surreal, jungle-like space that the viewer is placed in the middle of. This combined with little context is potentially problematic and confusing for the viewer as interpretation has lots of avenues to explore. Initially the space feels busy and fast, however, once acquainted with the figures and colours the area becomes relaxed with lots of breathing space to encourage the viewer to mull their thoughts over in peace. The space is designed to be fully immersive, however the viewers are unable to tactilely interact with the

pieces, being allowed to only enter their space. It is difficult to go through and examine each component in the installation due to the expansive variety of materials and objects included in the work.

Nonetheless, the access to the sounds from the speakers (displayed like dangling fruits) in the exhibition helps with the viewers involvement, which creates a trifling sense of interaction with the environment created. The occasional person took in the environment created and submitted themselves to the fully immersive surroundings by manifesting their inspiration through sketches and the creation of short stories about woodland creatures and city souls falling in love and blending cultures (Kirk-Smith, 2018). This response achieved the artist's intentions to open possibilities for communication without language, as well as to be creative and imaginative.

Nearly all the senses seemed to touch base with the viewers; the temperature in the environment was warm to replicate a jungle-like feel, this combined with the sounds as previously mentioned of birds tweeting and water running with the smells of straw and sand provided the exhibition with the overall ambiance of the wilderness. The sheer range of colours used in this exhibition solidifies the importance of its uses in this exhibition. Yang's careful use of colour in the wallpaper framing the space is used to give voice to the local narratives as well as complimenting 'Folk' traditions. The photography images are a collaborative project with Yang's vision and Mikey Carney's digital prints *Dockside Rock and Roll* (2018). The images of quay cranes in the kaleidoscopic wallpaper (McGivern, 2018) are 100% local motifs. This includes; red rocks from across the water on the Wirral, Art Deco <https://assignbuster.com/critical-exhibition-review-of-haegue-yangs-the-intermediates/>

details taken from George's Dock tunnels and Morris dancers. This mixture of real and fake, nature and industry and local and global reflects Yang's desire to translate her native languages to her learned knowledge of Liverpool and the English language. Amongst these unfamiliar surroundings, the viewers were suddenly knocked back to reality when they saw the pictures in the wallpaper of the exhibition. The images being of places they could very well recognise, creating a huge feeling of displacement and confusion.

However, the initial confusion is just the beginning of the challenge to understand and merge differences, not just within art context but within philosophies and beliefs too. Because of the unclarity of one specific culture, it is straightforward to put the whole exhibition under the umbrella term of 'Folk'. This term is vague and non-specific; however, the importance of Folk is prominent because of the traditions subsequent are vague also.

The figures, or *Intermediates*, are made of; artificial straw, powder-coated steel stands, powder-coated metal grids and casters. The cloud-like structures were made of; artificial straw, powder-coated stainless-steel stands, casters, plastic raffia strings, artificial plants, artificial driftwood, passive components and diorama figures. This seemingly organic setting was impaired when the viewers learn that their components were actually artificial. Yang's own words and opinions on this decision are as follows; '*there is the idea of 'us': Who is 'us'? What is 'ours'? [...] Straw in each culture in civilisation [...] is [a] very universal material, and the title 'Intermediates' refers to the mediating role of this material.*' (Chan. M, 2015).

This choice of material therefore unifies cultures as it is seemed as a

common ground material used. The sculptures aim to reach the perfect
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balance of scale models and real building, between ephemeral and the everlasting, between natural and artificial. It is interesting to note that the shape of the *Intermediates* could be compared to African fertility statues surrounded by plastic greenery.

The massive scale of the installation made the viewer challenge their passive status because they become so aware of their smallness. As the exhibition is part of the Liverpool Tate, in the western world, the feeling of unfamiliarity of the viewers surroundings made them conscious of their role as part of culture, history and contemporary life. Using this scale as a vehicle has successfully accomplished the combination of ancient pagan traditions with modern industrial histories. The colourful concrete, straw and sand jungle enabled the viewers to get lost in their surroundings, however the monumental scale combined with the sound installations was potentially overwhelming and sensually intense.

As part of the Liverpool Biennial 2018, *Beautiful World Where Are You?*

Artists like Yang were given the opportunity to address issues and reflect on social, economic and political difficulties in today's problematic society. A biennial with a simple question as a title, like this, has provided over 40 artists from 22 countries with an opportunity to answer through their own opinions and cultures. Yang has created her environment to ask questions such as the definitions of paganism through her use of ancient traditions and modern industrial production techniques.

As mentioned on the information sign outside, the pillars in the gallery were utilised for upside-down British traditional maypoles however, the colours in

the fabric holding reference to the Korean textile Saekdong. Saekdong is a type of hanbok, Korean traditional clothing made by patchworking multiple colours together. The rainbow mix of colours was traditionally worn and liked by children, reinforcing this wonderland jungle environment in this context. The arrangement of the dream-like colours is significant as the ancient Koreans believe it provides wisdom and pursuit of good luck, as well as being aesthetically virtuous.

Haegue Yang (born 12th December, 1971) is a South Korean artist who works and lives in Berlin and Seoul. Yang often uses mundane objects in her works, proving them with a different context and subsequently a different narrative than their original function. Among her numerous art pieces, she has worked with laundry racks, decorative lights, infrared heaters, scent emitters, and industrial fans. The continued themes in her works include; the challenge of paganism, the contrasts between industrial process and traditional processes, the medium of communication without language, traditions and culture and the poetry in the answers provided by the response of the viewers.

It was important for Yang to include her own culture inspirations amongst the mix of many others, this makes the viewers aware of the artists involvement in the project. On the other hand, as an artist who is interested in the passage of time on a grand scale, one would think Yang's personal history would be included more than a reference with colours where her own culture is not referenced much. This considered, Yang's response to the Biennial theme is more observant than reflective. This makes the exhibition more

accessible for the viewer's opinion to grow as they do not need to relate, but instead they are encouraged to interpret.

This is a contrast to other artist's responses to the theme of the Biennial, such as artists like Annie Pootoogook upstairs in the same venue, which is very personal. Pootoogook's drawings are an actual account of her life, like a diary, and present difficult themes head on with blunt directness.

Contrastingly, in Yang's exhibition the viewer has to actively think about what the exhibition is trying to portray, whilst in Pootoogook's work there are no blurred lines and the viewer is faced with the challenging themes straight away. Although both approaches are on opposite ends of the interpretation scale, both have their positives and negatives when deciphering viewer's responses. Both themes are just as important as each other and both methods depicting the themes pursue their intentions with the same amount of impact. Yang's approach to representing themes is, however, easier to digest and therefore, more comfortable. This may help with the viewers understanding of themes positively and subsequently, assist in enjoying the exhibition more. That said, Pootoogook's exhibition may not be intended to 'enjoy' but to be able to relate to.

Overall, Haegue Yang's *The Intermediates* is challenging, yet fun. The exhibition is an opportunity to explore opinions whilst simply admiring a variety of enjoyable materials and colours at the same time as dealing with constant internal struggle between familiarity and the exotic wilderness. The confusion provided by little context and information enabled visitors to explore their own opinions but with little to fall back on. This test was done purposefully by the artist, to test our place in society, to merge the <https://assignbuster.com/critical-exhibition-review-of-haegue-yangs-the-intermediates/>

boundaries of the familiar and the unknown, to educate and inspire people to become acquainted with other cultures other than their own. In today's society exhibitions like this are extremely important when thinking about privilege. Providing the unknown lets us realise our own positions in society. The exhibition exceeded expectations when considering its aims and intentions. Vital and interesting questions were put forward for the visitors to answer and develop as well as educating visitors with a variety of cultures. To put simply, exhibitions are made to impact their visitors and more widely society, in which way depends on the artist's intentions. Yang's intentions succeed with flying colours, quite literally. The visitors engaged in their environment, responded and dealt with the questions raised. Yang effectively created her thoughtful environment, importantly without causing offense, and overcome the problematic initial confusion. If the small signage for (the obvious) context was the exhibition's biggest problem, it is safe to say the exhibition was a vivid triumph.

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