Haegue Yang
Leap Year
27.9.2025–18.1.2026

Curated by
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Leap Year is the first survey exhibition by the Berlin and Seoul based artist Haegue Yang (Seoul, 1971) in Switzerland. Spanning over three decades of artistic exploration, Yang's work resists categorisation, intensely navigating the art historical boundaries between abstraction and figuration. Through diverse media, such as anthropomorphic sculpture, installation, essayistic video, and experiential text, Yang constructs constellations of works that challenge our understanding of contemporary life through intimacies woven between bodies and objects.

In exploring how movement, emotion, and sentiment function within various contexts, Yang's oeuvre simultaneously reveals the personal and the collective, in other words, a holistic unfolding of memories and socio-cultural associations. Themes of identity, biography, and transnationality are central to her work, which reflect her subjective perceptions of the collective fabric of society. Drawing on folk tales and the experience of living and working between two continents over decades, her artistic world addresses the realities of migration and displacement.

The exhibition, *Leap Year* conveys this tension: the discomfort of navigating diverse cultural contexts is felt alongside the resilience and adaptation, and the ongoing processes of observation, learning and unlearning that characterise her peripatetic life. Throughout her prolific and expressive productions, Yang, however, remains somewhat enigmatic, offering only glimpses into possible links to her Korean heritage or extensive research. Her resulting exhibitions often endow presence to the space, filled with inquiry and the potentiality of discovery.

This survey exhibition is divided into four core themes: movement, spirituality, community, and domesticity. In Yang's work, the theme of *movement* is associated with transitory experiences timely, physically, emotionally, and sociopolitically. For example, *The Randing Intermediates* (2020–), produced in dialogue with Filipino artisans over the COVID-19 period, combines universal yet local craftsmanship with international logistics and platforms. Especially in the case of the organic forms of *The Randing Intermediates – Underbelly Alienage Duo* (2020), each resembling sea or mycelial beings, adorned with artificial plants and equipped with industrial handles, the reading becomes hybrid, referring to both mobility and ritual.

Yang draws on the ritualistic usage of materiality to explore the theme of *spirituality*. Her work, *Tutting Seasonal Soul Glyph – Mesmerizing Mesh #183* (2023) is part of her serial production of intricate paper collages, titled *Mesmerizing Mesh* (2021–), which employs a traditional mulberry paper known as *hanji*, *washi*, or *sangpi*. Historically used for rituals in Korea and nearly lost during the colonial period, the material has survived and maintained its vitality and significance within the community.

Issues pertaining to *community* are evident in the seminal work, *Storage Piece* (2004), which reveals conceptual rigor as well as communal kinship within institutional contexts. Reflecting on her autobiographical story about not being able to afford storing one's works as an emerging artist — an issue many artists face in their early career — *Storage Piece* served also as a practical solution besides highlighting broader themes of precarity and artistic survival. Yang's engagements with her idiosyncratic concept of *domesticity* is witnessed in *Non-Indépliables, nues* (2010/2020), where empty drying racks are transformed into expressive anthropomorphic sculptures. While incubating the objects' everyday rituals of folding and unfolding in ordinary life the sculptural piece is hinting at the profoundness of 'bare' life behind those domestic rituals.

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Leap Year features two new commissions that emphasise movement as well as the sensorial and performative aspect of Yang's sculptures: *Sonic Arch Rope – Gold Hexagon Light* (2024) and *Sonic Droplets in Gradation – Water Veil* (2024). Based on ceremonial associations of metallic bells, the works are closely connected to purification rituals where haptic contact as well as rattling sounds resonate with our soul and body. Yang's use of hybrid materials, diverse methods, and complex structures highlights the intriguing acrobatics between agency and constraint – guiding viewers through spaces of both power and instability – which the artist terms as vulnerability.

Yang has also engaged with Western art history as well as tracing or challenging their modernist legacies. In this regard, drawing inspiration from female voices, such as artists Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Barbara Hepworth, as well as Pia Arke, while putting herself in quasi-counterpoint with Marcel Broodthaers and Sol LeWitt. On the ground floor, the walls are painted blue in homage to Yves Klein. This gesture forms part of the artwork *Quasi-Yves Klein Blue*, which raises questions about authenticity, legacy, and institutional power dynamics. To produce this element, the museum team was invited to participate in a survey about the colour closest to International Klein Blue, the shade of blue licensed by Yves Klein. In replacing International Klein Blue with ordinary locally available paint, Yang plays with the familiarity of Klein's blue and the reinterpretation of this monochrome colour by the team in the institution.

Her relatively recent engagement with folk art is further evident in *The Intermediates* (2015–), where artificial straw is woven into frames that create figures or creatures recalling hybrid associations, such as aliens, oddities, shamanic practices, folk festivities, and pagan rituals. Highlighting the fluidity among different cultural heritages and resilience of folk traditions, *The Intermediates* showcases how traditional techniques can be adapted to modern synthetic materials, as well as contemporary contexts. Similarly, *Mesmerizing Mesh* illuminates diverse papermaking traditions as well as the ritualistic use of those hand-made papers in intricate cuts and multi-layered compositions, in Korean *seolwiseolgyeong*, Polish *wycinanki* and Mexican *papel picado*, and the Hmong peoples' paper altars at home, demonstrating a powerful presence of mere sheets of paper.

Leap Year encourages exploration of these intricate constellations, where objects and histories resonate in dialogue with the present, enabling visitors to experience the interplay of movement, form, and sound in ever-evolving ways, even empowering them to perceive materials, histories, and cultural traditions as complex and holistic weaving. Ultimately, the exhibition offers only a mere glimpse into Yang's practice, hinting at the promise of what is yet to come.

Leap Year is organised by the Hayward Gallery, London in association with Kunsthal Rotterdam and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich.