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Schöneberger Ufer 65 10785 Berlin
www.barbarawien.de

Carlos Quijon Jr. *Haegue Yang at Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila, Artforum* January/February 2021, p. 186 – 187
and <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/202101/manila>



View of “Haegue Yang,” 2020–21.

Haegue Yang

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND DESIGN (MCAD), MANILA

Concern is an auspicious word in this climate of global pandemic. “The Cone of Concern,” the title of Haegue Yang’s recent exhibition, refers to the path a storm might take as it gathers moisture and wind speed. The idea became even more apropos when in the first weeks of the exhibition a storm was predicted to make landfall in Manila. The artist’s first solo presentation in the Philippines, the show runs parallel with shows by Yang elsewhere: in Leipzig; New York; Seoul; Singapore; St Ives, UK; and Toronto. The exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design presents newly commissioned site-specific works alongside existing pieces, including collages and prints made of food and household items such as pepper, coffee, tea, and cacao.

A lenticular print looms large in the exhibition space. Titled *The Fantastic Warp and Weft of a Tropical Depression* and covering an expanse of the space’s nearly ninety-foot-long wall, the 2020 work remixes digital renderings of meteorological instruments, windmills, turbines, cyclones, and debris. Perpendicular to the print are floor-standing wooden panels with cutouts that form the pattern of *binakol* textiles, indigenous Filipino fabrics worn to drive away

malevolent spirits. Interspersed throughout the space is *The Randing Intermediates—Inception Quartet*, 2020, a quartet of rattan totems with wings, limbs, and wheels, some with capiz-shell ornaments. Yang created these sculptures in collaboration with local artisans, who used the technique of randing, in which a single reed is woven onto a sculptural frame. Two additional wheeled rattan sculptures, titled *The Randing Intermediates—Underbelly Alienage Duo*, 2020, are more colorful and more squat, with polyps and tendrils growing out of them, and also sport handlebars.

Flimsy flags hover above, and a slight breeze from electric wall fans causes them to flutter, simulating a windy day. The works elicit movement, or at least cue the viewer to move. One hears a barely discernible voice, catching it only intermittently as one comes within the vicinity of two overhead speakers. Walking along the length of the lenticular print, one experiences an illusion that things are moving and that the pattern in the panels extend the wall-bound print. The turbines in the print start rotating; the debris begins to unsettle. The *binakol* panels come to life as a dizzying optical illusion. Although one cannot touch the sculptures, their wheels and handles evoke mobility. Finally, the installations $18.87m^2$, 2002/2020, and $21.33m^3$, 2000/2020, marking a corner of the space with colored string and chalk, also benefit from movement, since they can easily be missed if seen straight on.

Risk and precarity have lately become idioms of abstraction or aesthetic experimentation in contemporary art. In Yang's exhibition in the Philippines, a place frequently ravaged by storms and super typhoons, the image of the cyclone becomes a conceptual anchor. On the day of my visit to the exhibition, I was almost turned away because of an unexpected maintenance issue: A leak had formed in the museum's wall, threatening to damage the lenticular print—and by a remarkable coincidence that leak had appeared near an abstracted image of a cyclone. This disruption was a good reminder of the vitality and ferocity of the world that the exhibition attempts to discipline into interesting form.

Ultimately, Yang's use of abstractions to create material or topical resonances does not succeed. She fails to place her art in a compelling conversation with the contemporary climate crisis, with all its urgency. In light of the exhibition's emergency maintenance, I couldn't help but wonder how a global exhibition might be more sensitive to the contexts to which it supposedly responds.

— Carlos Quijon Jr.