

ST IVES, CORNWALL, U.K.

Haegue Yang

Tate St Ives

The day I visited Tate St Ives to see “Strange Attractors” (on view through May 3, 2021), nature seemed perfectly aligned with Haegue Yang’s vision—charcoal clouds scowled across the sky as Atlantic rollers thundered deafeningly onto the beach below. Inside the show, vivid scenes of wild, frothing seas and churning elemental landscapes appeared to tumble forth from the back wall where Yang had created a vast digital trompe l’oeil collage. This dramatic backdrop activated a variety of beguiling sculptures, including spinning gold and silver orbs with swishing trains and shaggy totemic creatures on casters, which were stationed around the room like

benevolent extraterrestrial guides.

“Strange Attractors” refers to a scientific term describing “the unexpected structures toward which chaotic systems tend to evolve,” according to the gallery handout. I understood this to mean that chaos, while unpredictable, nonetheless manifests patterns in its attraction to strange behaviors. Across three galleries, Yang conjures a thrilling cosmos, weaving threads across scientific, mystical, artistic, and religious ideas bridging civilizations and epochs. The exhibition is framed as a conversation with three artistic forbears: Barbara Hepworth and Naum Gabo, who lived in St Ives during World War II, and

China-born Li Yuan-chia, who settled in Cumbria, northwest England. Works by these three Modernists are displayed at the entrance, and three of Yang’s sculptural totems, all composed of tiny metallic bells and fluffy black plastic fibers, pay homage to their different styles. *Sonic Intermediate—Parameters and Unknowns after Hepworth* (2020), for instance, consists of stacked ovoid forms with voids. The squat creature with a broomstick dedicated to Li alludes to that artist’s 1993 photographic self-portrait as a shamanic figure brandishing a broom.

These life-size totems find formal echoes in three endearing artificial straw creatures on casters called *The Intermediates* (2015–ongoing) and in *Sonic Half Moons* (2014–15), a group of suspended spheres made of myriad bells. These ethereal disco balls (periodically rotated by museum attendants) exemplify the fusion throughout the show of the whimsical and the planetary, the art historical and the pop cultural. Another totem on casters, *Reflected Metallic Cubist Dancing Mask* (2020), invites the viewer to travel back in time and dance with a shimmering, gold-faceted mask.

Prayer cushions embroidered with words such as “tempest,” “climate,” and “eclipse,” alongside illustrations of natural



phenomena, strike a more serious note. These works were inspired by Yang’s visit to a Cornish church, where kneeler cushions had been inscribed with the local community’s hopes and prayers.

Yang breaks up the space in the main windowless gallery with slatted wooden structures that demand circumnavigation and prevent any single coherent viewpoint. Meanwhile the collage lining the back wall effectively creates an exhilarating window onto a roiling natural universe that seems to spiral and cascade outward due to the layering and rotation of images. The wallpaper is adorned with several abstract *Lacquer Paintings* (all 2019),



FROM LEFT: NICK ASH, COURTESY GALERIE BARBARA WIEN, BERLIN / TATE (MATT GREENWOOD) / TATE (MATT GREENWOOD)

REVIEWS



compounding the confusion between two and three dimensions. These paintings, embedded with manmade objects like plastic mesh and ambient elements such as dust and hair, chronicle temporal moments in contrast to the wallpaper's timelessness.

In the downstairs gallery, which curves around the building's central rotunda, the spectacular vista of crashing surf outside becomes part of the show. Yang draped an indigo gauze curtain over the panoramic window, which accentuates the theater of the seascape as well as reflections generated by ranks of sculptures made from laundry racks strung with electric bulbs. Compared to the

solidity of *The Intermediates*, these skeletal forms are so airy and light they might almost be dancing spirits, freed from domestic functionality by the cables that prevent them from being folded away.

Yang's work is full of surprises. The diversity of forms and media in this show constantly thwarts expectations. Yet there is a strong interconnectedness throughout "Strange Attractors." Anchored in complex mathematical and scientific ideas, the exhibition combines the playful and cosmic with a lightness of touch that can't help but set one's spirits soaring in these uncertain times.

—ELIZABETH FULLERTON

FROM
OPPOSITE:
HAEGUE YANG
*Sonic Intermediates—
Three Differential
Equations,*
2020.

Powder-coated steel frame, powder-coated mesh, powder-coated handles, casters, turbine vent, brass, copper and nickel-plated bells, metal rings, plastic twine, and broom, dimensions variable.

Non-Indépliables, nues,
2010/2020.

Drying racks, light bulbs, cable, zip ties, and terminal strips, installation view.

*The Intermediate—
Tilted Bushy
Lumpy Bumpy,*
2016.

Artificial straw, powder-coated steel frame, powder-coated mesh, and casters, 203 x 120 x 120 cm.

