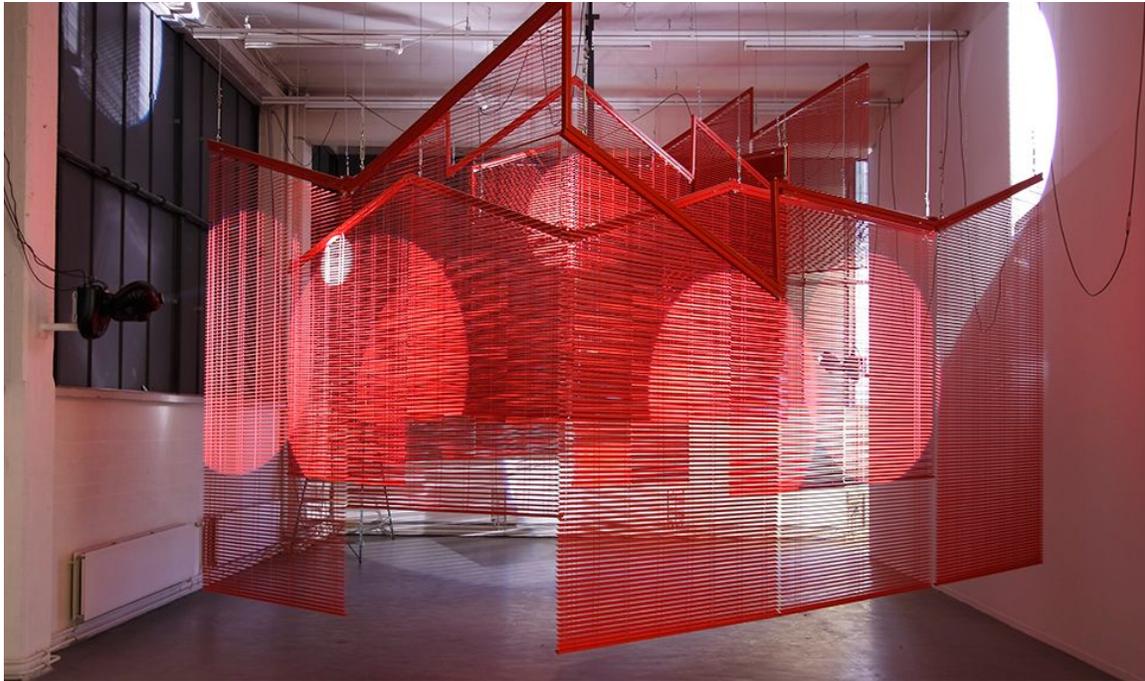


BLOUINARTINFO

Poignancy, Potency, and Presence: "Double Life" Takes Over CAMH

BY RISA PULEO, MODERN PAINTERS | MARCH 01, 2015



An installation view of Haegue Yang's "Mountains of Encounter" 2008 from Wessen Geschichte [Whose (His)Story], Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany, 2008. (Courtesy Galerie Wie/ Photo by Fred Dott, Hamburg)

In a spare and elegant presentation, “Double Life,” on view at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston until March 15th, fills CAMH with poignancy, potency, and presence. Through five works by three artists, the show asks the question: What constitutes a performance? Only one piece, choreographer Jérôme Bel’s *Cédric Andrieux*, 2009, fulfills the traditional definition: live bodies in front of an audience. Video and film by Wu Tsang and an installation by Haegue Yang suggest that performance lies between the space of action, theatricality, and reality, where the performance of the real and the reality of a performance meet.

Bel’s other work in the show, the video *Véronique Doisneau*, 2004, examines this idea of performance most directly. Like his live performance, *Véronique Doisneau* is a time-based portrait in which Bel asks dancers to present themselves by narrating anecdotes from their life and dance segments with which they identify. Doisneau alternates between telling her life story via her career and performing her dance roles. Projected slightly larger than life-size, the installation emphasizes the intimacy between Doisneau and her audience. Bel translates performance across the disciplines of art and dance using temporality as a through line. Tsang’s film *For how we perceived a life (Take 3)*, 2012, claims space for quotation and reenactment of scripts from theater, film, and history as well as showcasing the lip-syncing of drag culture as performance. In the film, shot on a single roll of 16 mm film, five actors play scenes from the famed 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning* about New York’s underground drag ball scene; the shift in context links the present with an enlivened history. Another work by Tsang,

Miss Communication and Mr:Re, 2014, presents the artist and theorist Fred Moten in two facing video channels out of sync with the corresponding audio: a series of voice messages that Tsang and Moten left for each other overlapping in an indecipherable jumble of words. Tsang's two works speak to synchronicity and missed connections.

Yang offers the most radical possibility for performance, as her contribution does not include live or recorded actors. Rather, *Mountains of Encounter*, 2008, is a choreography of roving spotlights across a labyrinth of red Venetian blinds. Inspired by a series of secret meetings in the 1930s between the American journalist Helen Foster Snow and Kim San, a Korean Communist who escaped his Japanese-occupied homeland to work in China, the installation is an abstraction that invokes the setting of these encounters. Continually shifting plays of lights conjure references including the Japanese flag motif of the rising sun (a metaphor of nationality as well as a natural phenomenon), search lights, and clandestine affairs. The programmed sequence of lights is organized by the artist as a performance, adding animation, ephemerality, and disembodiment of narrative to this thoughtful exhibition's expanded definition of the medium.

A version of this article appears in the March 2015 issue of Modern Painters.