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YUKO MOHRI

CIRCUS WITHOUT CIRCUS

Opposite page

MASUNOBU YOSHIMURA

Cooking
1967–76
Kitchen microwave and fluorescent tubes, 40 x 52 x 37 cm.
Courtesy Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo.

This page

YUKO MOHRI

I/O – Circus Without Circus
2016
Paper, wood, blind, spoon, accordion and light bulb, dimensions variable.
Installation view from the exhibition “Circus Without Circus,” at Project Fulfill Art Space, Taipei, 2016.
Courtesy Project Fulfill Art Space.

If you walked into Taipei’s Project Fulfill Art Space in June or July, you may have been greeted with the sound of an accordion chord, ringing out into the otherwise quiet gallery space. With no performers in the room nor speakers projecting the sound, the audio intervention, part of Japanese artist’s Yuko Mohri’s solo exhibit “Circus without Circus,” made for an unexpected but pleasant surprise. The sound was created by an actual accordion sitting in a corner of the space, triggered by a combination of wires and a mechanized wheel. Part of *I/O – Circus Without Circus* (2016), the instrument was one of many objects that made up Mohri’s handful of kinetic sculptures on view. “Circus Without Circus” presented a sort of unfussy minimalism. Though some of the materials that made up the pieces on display threatened to overshadow the finished products, Mohri’s sculptures proved to be endearingly scruffy and calming.

In a video interview helpfully screened near the gallery’s entrance, the Tokyo-based artist explained that the title of *I/O* stemmed from the Indian Ocean, which she had seen on a trip to Australia. Inspired by the sight of slow-moving tides, the installation features scrolls of paper hung in a wave-like formation from two wooden frames suspended from the ceiling, which are surrounded by cables mysteriously linked to a plastic bag, metal spoons, the aforementioned accordion and a set of automated window blinds. One of the paper rolls, adorned with dark stains, drooped down to the gallery floor, leaving black powder on the ground. In the interview, Mohri noted that the detritus on the gallery floor was meant to evolve over the course of the exhibition, with the movement of the paper determined by optical sensors included in the installation.

Nevertheless, how the installation actually functions remained opaque, causing frustration

but also adding to the viewer’s sense of wonder. Besides the accordion sounding every 15 minutes or so, the blinds also stood out—as a seeming reference to Sol LeWitt or Agnes Martin pieces. The effect was playfully humorous, but also subtly crafted, particularly in the way the white blinds reflected light ever so minutely, which changed as the slats opened and closed automatically.

Another highlight of the exhibition was *Trope* (2016). Suspended from the ceiling, a thick spinning rope swept against a pile of stones, gradually changing the latter’s arrangement on the floor. The piece’s simplicity and infinite nature kept the title’s wordplay from taking up too much attention. Also on view was *From A-02* (2016), a collection of lights, fans, wires and a metallic letter “A” arranged across three canvases on a gallery wall, which didn’t manage to engage to the same degree. Although the installation’s backstory—that Mohri had found the “A” sign on a street in New York—added interest, the overall piece lacked the implied narrative or concise forms of the other works on display.

The lone video in the exhibit, the 21-minute *Everything Flows* (2016), was a more successful work inspired by Mohri’s travels. In the video, the slow rustling of leaves, pieces of plastic attached to traffic signs, and protest tents from the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong echo the way Mohri’s sculptures are configured to shift unpredictably. Presented alongside her installations, *Everything Flows* peeled back the layers of Mohri’s creative process, providing insight into how research and observation fuel her art.

“Circus Without Circus” drew its titular inspiration from John Cage’s *Musicircus* (1967), a conceptual composition comprising instructions for a large group of musicians to freely play their instruments as they please. Thus, part of the fun of Mohri’s exhibit was watching disparate objects interact with each other at the artist’s whim, without necessarily feeling the need to pause to reflect on deeper intentions. Sometimes the different objects distracted from the unity of each complete work, yet it was evident that there is an underlying logic to Mohri’s practice, influenced by real-life mechanisms and patterns. Whether using window blinds or an accordion, she has a talent for recontextualizing the mundane into playful, aesthetically pleasing forms.

SIMON FRANK

