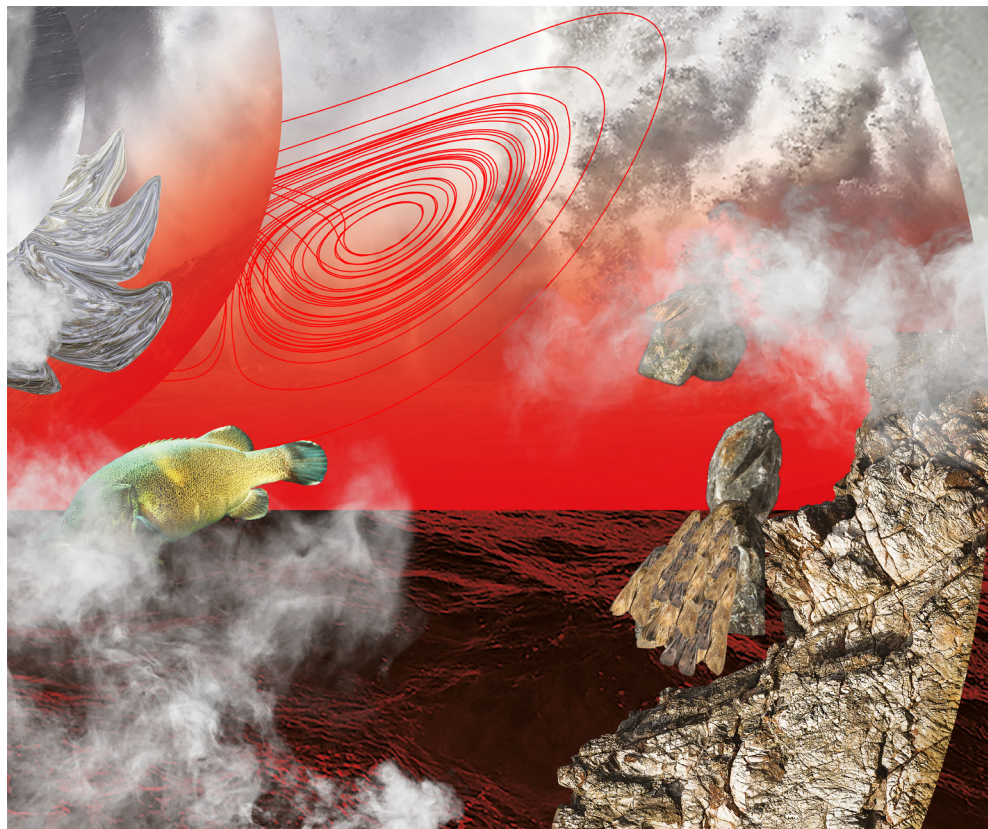


HAEGUE YANG: CHANGING FROM FROM TO FROM

27 MAY-15 OCT
2023



Haegue Yang: Changing From From To From

Always on the move, Haegue Yang eludes categorisation, seemingly on the run from established artistic conventions. She is continually seeking out new ideas, processes and media, and making connections between disparate locations, periods and cultures.

Underpinning all her works is a commitment to abstraction: while acknowledging the influence of western modernism, Yang challenges its legacy and embraces an elastic, mystical abstraction which offers alternative possibilities for generating evocative, indeterminate forms.

This exhibition features four works that convey different strands of Yang's practice, linked by her ever-present concern with movement, migration and transformation. The exhibition title evokes such movements between locations and stems from a poem by the conceptual artist Li Yuan-chia (1929–1994). Along with the pioneering sculptors Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975) and Naum Gabo (1890–1977), Li is one of the figures that inspired Yang's sculptural trio *Sonic Intermediates – Three Differential Equations* 2020. Li's singular journey, while reminiscent of many historical migrations, saw him leave China for Taiwan in 1949, before moving to Italy and then Britain in the 1960s, where he joined the cosmopolitan scene around Signals gallery in London, a hub for experimental artists such as David Medalla (1942–2020) and Gustav Metzger (1926–2017). As with Yang's sculptures and installations, Li's work invites participation and incorporates everyday materials and actions.

The central work in this exhibition, *Sonic Intermediates*, brings together two of Yang's sculptural series over the past decade: *The Intermediates* and *Sonic Sculptures*. The former evokes manual folk traditions such as straw weaving, yet questions authenticity by employing contemporary synthetic materials. The latter is characterised by its primary material of metallic bells, which cover the surface of the sculptures and rattle when activated, in an allusion to shamanic ritual. Craft traditions are also evident in *Triple Chalkies* 2015, a suspended three-part macramé piece that foregrounds ornamental and geometric patterns, traits conventionally

underestimated and rejected in modernism. Their use in an abstract sculpture challenges western hierarchies of cultural value, conveying Yang's subversive approach in which practices categorised as 'female' or 'ethnic' are celebrated rather than undervalued.

The 'differential equations' in Yang's title refers to calculations of the movement of objects or energy flows. Such human attempts to map natural forces are also a theme of Yang's wallpaper *Non-Linear and Non-Periodic Dynamics* 2020, which is inspired by mathematician Edward Lorenz's use of differential equations to model the chaotic behaviour of weather. The wallpaper's imagery of crashing water and spiralling motion conjures up continually shifting and increasingly unpredictable environmental conditions. Australia is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and Yang has embedded in her design references to local Kamberri/Canberra waterways and ancient sites – reminders of millennia of careful land management prior to the destructive impact of colonisation, extractive industries and urban development.

Emanating from floating clusters of speakers that Yang dubs 'sound fruits' is the audio work *Genuine Cloning* 2020, which combines a text recited by a cloned version of the artist's voice with a recording of a real-life event. Yang's script ruminates on a range of subjects and actions that transcend national borders, such as the naming of typhoons – yet another human attempt to control the natural world. This monologue is interspersed with the chirping of birds and camera clicks – the only sounds recorded during a private conversation between the leaders of North Korea and South Korea at their 2018 summit held in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the most heavily fortified border in the world. Like typhoons, the birds reflect nature's indifference to human actions and prompt us to speculate on the content of this historic conversation.

As with the other works in the exhibition, *Genuine Cloning* deftly weaves disparate strands of meaning into a playful yet deeply considered work that embraces fluidity and contradiction and encourages multiple, simultaneous perspectives. Within the context of the National Gallery and its collection, Yang's works propose new approaches to sculpture and the lineages of modernism, and point to a more syncretic, layered and intercultural understanding of the dynamic world that swirls around us.



Sonic Intermediates – Three Differential Equations 2020

powder-coated steel frame, mesh and handles, casters, red brass-, copper- and nickel-plated bells, split rings, plastic twine, broom, zip ties, turbine vent

Sonic Intermediate – Parameters and Unknowns After Hepworth 2020
216 × 125 × 125 cm

Sonic Intermediate – Parameters and Unknowns After Gabo 2020
220 × 145 × 145 cm

Sonic Intermediate – Parameters and Unknowns After Li 2020
215 × 172 × 172 cm

including a floor element in self-adhesive vinyl film
512 × 471 cm

National Gallery of Australia
Kamberri/Canberra
Purchased 2023

Shamans act as intermediaries between the spirit world and the human world, performing rituals and chronicling the lineage of ancestors. In *Sonic Intermediates – Three Differential Equations* Yang pays tribute to some of her artistic predecessors. The work is a sculptural ensemble consisting of three parts, each inspired by a pioneering modernist artist – Naum Gabo, Barbara Hepworth and Li Yuan-chia – who reflect Yang's interest in subjects of movement and migration.

Hepworth moved from London to the artists' colony of St Ives in Cornwall, while Gabo and Li were émigrés from Russia and China respectively. Gabo fled to St Ives in 1939 during the Second World War, and Li settled in Cumbria, northern England, in 1968, where he established an experimental and actively engaged institution, the LYC Museum & Art Gallery. Within each 'portrait' Yang has rendered each artist's life as local, refugee or immigrant, and distilled their practice into an abstract form. She evokes Hepworth's use of the hole through which to view her immediate landscape; Gabo's unconventional use of innovative and technologically advanced materiality; and Li's series of enigmatic photographic self-portraits in which he holds a broom or wooden stick with his face hidden under a blanket.

The anthropomorphic figures are clad in exquisite skins of hundreds of tiny bells as well as furs of plastic twine, a contemporary substitute for traditional weaving materials such as straw. In Korea and elsewhere, bells are an essential accompaniment for ritual-based practices and are used to awaken the deities. Set on casters and a geometric floor vinyl, the *Sonic Intermediates* can be activated by their handles, releasing a subtle rattling soundscape that may summon an encounter with this migratory artist community in the present.





Triple Chalkies 2015

powder-coated steel frame, steel wire
rope, dyed and undyed cotton twine,
brass-, nickel- and copper-plated bells
140 × 160 × 140 cm

National Gallery of Australia
Kamberri/Canberra

Gift of Dick Quan and John McGrath 2020
Donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program

Yang's interest in non-traditional sculptural materials extends from everyday found objects and industrial production to handmade craft practices. In particular, Yang has devoted considerable attention to undervalued and laborious craft traditions such as knitting, crochet, rattan- or straw-weaving, cross stitching and origami folding. These manual techniques, often regarded as the domain of women, children and hobbyists, are typically discounted as methods for folk art-making. Her sculptures translate these peripheral techniques into evocative sculptural methods that reference and honour conceptions of 'folk' and domesticity.

During her three-month residency at Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Scotland, in 2013, the artist studied macramé, a time-consuming textile technique created by knotting cords into intricate patterns that is closely associated with functional décor and DIY craft items such as pot-holders. Macramé appears in this three-part sculpture *Triple Chalkies* in chalky pastel colours. Positioning itself at the centre of contemporary art practice, the macramé collapses hierarchies and conventions inherent in the world of art-making. The labour-intensive creativity that went into the work is made visible through the exposure of its hard frame, which holds the contrasting material of soft cotton cords dyed in pastel blue, brown and yellow. As usual, Yang plays with oppositional notions, using geometric forms as well as decorative embellishments to explore abstraction and ornamentation simultaneously.



Non-Linear and Non-Periodic Dynamics 2020

digital colour print on self-adhesive vinyl film
dimensions variable

National Gallery of Australia
Kamberri/Canberra
Purchased 2023

The selection of local elements was made in consultation with Paul Girrawah House, Ngambri (Walgalu)/Wallaballoo (Ngunnawal)/Pajong (Gundungurra)/Wiradjuri (Erambie) peoples. Featuring Barbara Hepworth's *Two Figures*, 1968, National Capital Authority © Bowness



Yang's wallpaper designs explore 'flatness' as an abstract space that breaks down hierarchies and our current governing perceptual systems of the world. The initial artistic inspiration came from *chukjibeop* (earth shrinking), a metaphysical Taoist practice that, according to legend, enables a fantastic movement in time and space by the folding and unfolding of the land. For Yang, this suggests alternative ways of thinking and elevated levels of perception.

Non-Linear and Non-Periodic Dynamics features motifs of water in turbulent weather conditions, imagery originally prompted by her visit to the wild coastline of Cornwall in south-west England in 2018. The composition draws on Yang's interest in the mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz's concept of the

Lorenz attractor, a set of chaotic solutions to the differential equations he used to predict the weather. An illustration of its butterfly-shaped model, which gave rise to the term 'butterfly effect', also appears in the wallpaper design. In a visually dynamic way, Yang considers Lorenz's chaos theory, which holds that even the smallest change in environmental conditions can have deterministic outcomes yet remain inherently incalculable.

For the presentation of this work at the National Gallery Yang has included motifs of Kurrajong trees, Bogong moths, local water-related elements and a canoe tree, which were incorporated in consultation with Paul Girrawah House, Ngambri (Walgalu)/Wallaballoo (Ngunnawal)/Pajong (Gundungurra)/Wiradjuri (Erambie) peoples.

Genuine Cloning 2020

digital sound file (Typecast-generated AI voice actor service), speakers, 65:01 min loop

Courtesy of the artist

Commissioned by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, sponsored by Hyundai Motor Company, and technically supported by Neosapience, Seoul. Permission to use the live broadcast recording of the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit in the DMZ has been generously granted by the Office of the President, Republic of Korea

The skin and body defines you as a territory and location of a being. For me, the AI voice is intriguing due to the absence of a body.

Yang's method of creating unique combinations skilfully shifts our way of thinking by challenging dualities such as artificial and real, fact and imagination, private and public, and the known and unknown. In her audio piece *Genuine Cloning*, two sound sources are interwoven. Yang worked with Neosapience, a Seoul-based company that creates hyper-realistic voice textures, to clone her own whispering voice to read her script. The second audio element is a partial recording from the historic Inter-Korean Summit held between the leaders of North Korea and South Korea in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on 27 April 2018, in particular the moment when Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in strolled off for a private conversation. The only sounds that reporters could capture, even with high-tech equipment, were ambient birdsong and the occasional clicks of cameras.

The AI monologue meanders across several topics, such as language and voice being fundamental human impulses. While the 'absurd' human urge to name typhoons and cyclones is mocked, as if they could be recognised according to state or ideological divisions, this AI voice also offers astute observations, such as how 'being honest feels dangerous'.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in at the Inter-Korean Summit in Panmunjom (DMZ), South Korea, 27 April 2018
© Inter-Korean Press Corp/Alamy Stock Photo

Biography

Haegue Yang was born in Seoul, South Korea, in 1971. Since the mid 1990s Yang has lived and worked in Seoul and Berlin and currently teaches at her alma mater, the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Her immersive multimedia environments combine diverse materials and cultural traditions with references ranging from scientific phenomena and sociopolitical narratives to art history. Using a range of industrial objects and intensive, craft-based techniques, her works make connections between divergent worlds of contemporary mass production, ancient civilisations and natural phenomena.

Yang regularly exhibits at key international museums and biennales, and her work is represented in institutional and private collections all over the world. She has been the subject of over 60 solo shows and projects, including the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2009); the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2010); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2012); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2018); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2019); National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2020); Tate St Ives (2020); SMK – National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen (2022); Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2023) and S.M.A.K., Ghent (2023).

Her work has also featured in around 170 group exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale (2009), the Gwangju Biennale (2010), Documenta 13, Kassel (2012), the Taipei Biennial (2014), the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT), Brisbane (2015), the Biennale of Sydney (2018) and the Singapore Biennale (2022). In 2024 the Hayward Gallery, London, will present a survey show of Yang's work.



Haegue Yang in front of her work *Angular Evergreen Climber Habitat*, 2022, aluminium venetian blinds, powder-coated aluminium hanging structure and powder-coated wall rails, 268 x 318 x 29 cm, courtesy Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris © photograph: Pauline Assathiany

Program

For bookings, and to see the full range of public programs connected with this exhibition, please visit the National Gallery website: nga.gov.au/whats-on

ACTIVATIONS

Sonic Intermediates – Three Differential Equations will be activated by members of our team each Saturday at 11am, 12pm and 1pm.

ART TALKS

Haegue Yang in conversation with Russell Storer

James Fairfax Theatre and live-streamed
Saturday 27 May 2023, 11am
Free, bookings essential
Duration: 1 hour including Q&A

Haegue Yang and Russell Storer (Head Curator, International Art) will discuss the diverse materials, cultural traditions and historical references that the artist explores in her practice.

Floor talk: Professor Joan Leach

Friday 15 September 2023, 11am
Free, bookings essential
Duration: 45 minutes including Q&A

Professor Joan Leach is Director of the Australian National Centre for Public Awareness of Science at the Australian National University. She will discuss Yang's work in relation to scientific theories of movement and change.

FILM SCREENINGS

***Dear Pyongyang* 2005**

Directed by Yang Yong-hi
Saturday 24 June 2023, 2pm
James Fairfax Theatre
Free, bookings essential

***Death by Hanging* 1968**

Directed by Nagisa Ōshima
Saturday 26 August 2023, 2pm
Arc Cinema, National Film and Sound Archive of Australia
Free, bookings essential

These films have been suggested by Yang and expand on themes of migration and movement explored in the exhibition. Both screenings will include an introduction by the curators. This program is presented in partnership with the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia.



Map

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Sonic Intermediates –
Three Differential
Equations 2020
- 1a

Sonic Intermediate –
Parameters and Unknowns
After Hepworth 2020
- 1b

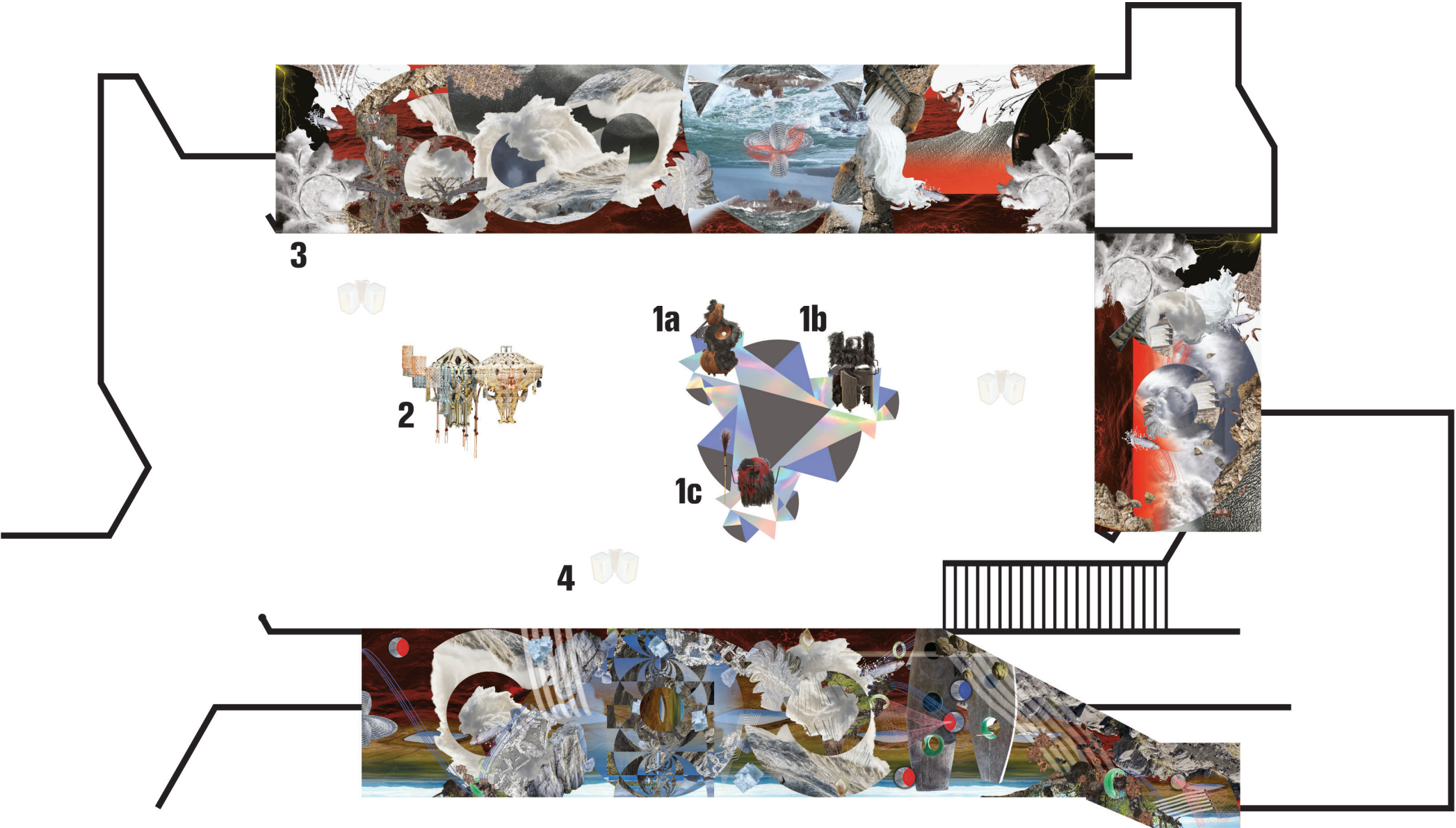
Sonic Intermediate –
Parameters and Unknowns
After Gabo 2020
- 1c

Sonic Intermediate –
Parameters and
Unknowns After Li 2020
- 2

Triple Chalkies 2015
- 3

Non-Linear and Non-
Periodic Dynamics 2020
- 4

Genuine Cloning 2020





The National Gallery acknowledges the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the Kamberri/Canberra region, and recognises their continuous connection to culture, community and Country.

We would like to thank Paul Girrawah House, Ngambri (Walgalu)/Wallaballoo (Ngunnawal)/Pajong (Gundungurra)/Wiradjuri (Erambie) peoples, for sharing his deep knowledge of Country with Haegue Yang, which inspired and informed her selection of the local elements incorporated into the design for *Non-Linear and Non-Periodic Dynamics*. We would also like to thank Haegue Yang, Studios Haegue Yang in Berlin and Seoul, and all the artist's representatives.

Authors: Russell Storer and Beatrice Thompson

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Cover image: Haegue Yang, *Non-Linear and Non-Periodic Dynamics* 2020 (detail)

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