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1411 NEWTON ST. LA, CA 90021
@MURMURS.LA | INFO@MURMURS.LA
WWW.MURMURS.LA

오리엔탈 소스 공장
The Oriental Sauce Factory
Haena Yoo

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In the past two years, we have witnessed extraordinary, unprecedented levels of anxiety fueled by stagnation, hoarding, and racism that spread as the virus did. Ethics seemed to crumble against a backdrop of late-capitalist decay. The urgency of survival was compelled by the precarity of the sociopolitical structure, begging the question "Who will cure and save us?" Haena Yoo's site-specific installation *The Oriental Sauce Factory* symbolically renders the anxieties of a post-pandemic global system as an industrial/medical mechanism that manufactures an elixir infused with an amalgamation of remedies— a special "sauce."

The foundation of *The Oriental Sauce Factory* is informed by Yoo's father's factory in Korea which produces various soy-based sauces that are sold in Asian cuisine restaurants. Yoo incorporates the logic of Marcel Duchamp into the manufacturing process— specifically the tenets of his seminal work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, 1915-23 also called *The Large Glass*. This piece depicts a diagram for an allegorical machine which, when interpreted with Duchamp's notes, can be seen as a pneumatic apparatus of unconsummated sexual desire. Just as the Duchampian Bride is the source of desire, motivating the bachelors with her electromagnetic transmissions of sexuality, The Bride in *The Oriental Sauce Factory* is a reservoir that holds the source of the sauce: a mixture of water and meju.

Meju (메주) is a brick of fermented soybeans that, although not eaten on its own, is a staple in Korean cuisine used as the basis of several condiments such as doenjang (soybean paste), ganjang (soy sauce) and gochujang (chili paste). Meju is made using an intricate traditional process dating back to the 1500s that involves inducing natural fungal fermentation for several months under controlled settings. The meju in this exhibition was handmade by the artist with materials embedded into the soybeans: bones, roots, shells, pages from *The Savage Mind* by Levi Strauss, and articles about Asian hate crimes printed on rice paper. These meju bricks, and the agricultural heritage they represent, belong to the realm of the Bride— soon to be stripped bare by the Bachelors of multinational franchise corporations and the accompanying patriarchy, white privilege, and cheap mass production. Ultimately, what once came from the Bride is diluted into a generic brown gravy and given a name that maps neatly onto the palate of the average Western consumer: Oriental Sauce. Although the word "Oriental" has fallen out of favor as a racial descriptor, the slew of Oriental food products in every grocery store in America are evidence of the unconstrained homogenization resulting from the global movement of capital, information, and population.

Inside the sealed acrylic box of *The Milky Way Table*, the sauce brews and cultivates mold, forming bubbles from the action of lactic acid and bacteria. Viewed from above, the table looks like a chessboard or a map. There is direct contrast between the natural, uncontrolled odors of the decay/fermentation process and the rigid sterility of the box, which protects the viewer from the swamp within, save for trails of vapor that escape around the Bachelors. Rational mechanized control collides with the unbridled natural entropy that is necessary to strengthen the sauce into a panacea distilled from the use values of the different medicines combined. The absurdity of mixing all of these pills and herbs together to create a "magical" sauce interests Yoo. She rejects abstraction in her work, preferring to create specific, operative systems through the method of "bricolage," a term used by Levi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* meaning using bits and pieces or "odds and ends" of what is at hand to create something new. As opposed to abstraction, which deliberately defamiliarizes something recognizable, bricolage inherently reflects difference as the artist takes from what is discarded, overlooked, or surplus in her own life to create her art. In a late-capitalist society, this way of working with the limitations of what is at hand shows the positionality of the maker. For Yoo, this means using a variety of materials from minority cultures, including the Korean community in Los Angeles. *The Oriental Sauce Factory* is made of found materials, wood, rattan, bamboo, glass, medical tubing, cardboard, pills and health supplements from American drugstores, and all kinds of East Asian natural products. When these seemingly random objects are put to use together, it mirrors the subjectivity of being an immigrant, overlooked from a capitalist point of view, a member of a surplus population. Yoo's factory triggers a disruption in an omnipotent structure, exposing the failure of rationality in a morally organized world and making space for the creation of new meaning.

The Oriental Sauce Factory
By Petra Bibeau

The rational mind has mistaken the function of desire with control.
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In *The Oriental Sauce Factory* Haena Yoo uses a process of variation to render the potential of chance into a working form. Using binary systems of manufacture (masculine) and the natural process of fermentation (feminine), Yoo's installation competes between a state of interdependence and dependence, foreshadowing a collision of desire and control and ultimately materializing unpredictability by way of scent, sound, and bacteria growth.

Adopting the tenets of *bricolage*, Yoo confirms the mechanization of applied social order by constructing a "liquid-circulating installation" from various materials. Using the model of her father's soy sauce factory, Yoo presents a material embodiment of how the masculine rational mind has influenced societal structures. Yoo presents the limitations of these rigid constructions as unsustainable formats with a core drive to hasten and restrict outcomes. The organicity of materials used by Yoo utilizes natural structures that defy human-made order through fermentation and chance, and is developed in five parts:

Meju (The Savage Mind)

A brick of dried fermented soybeans that propagates and ferments given time and a favorable environment. Refined by non-industrial production, the finished result cannot be duplicated and is considered complete based on taste or craftsmanship. Yoo's wall sculptures are composed of shredded rice paper featuring headlines from mass media reporting Asian hate crimes during the Covid-19 pandemic and passages from Lévi Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (1962). The rice paper is mixed with various store-bought herbal remedies and soybeans hand-shaped as meju to induce the growth of koji mold, *Aspergillus oryzae*, a fungus used for fermenting.

Bride Machinery

Yoo's installation can be understood as referencing Duchamp's seminal work *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. The Bride in Yoo's *Oriental Sauce Factory* moves beyond Duchamp's vision of passivity by ingesting meju diluted with saltwater through a body composed of found material and creating a vapor that produces decay. Yoo proposes the Bride as a starting point and as a conduit for the meju and saltwater mixture, the basis for the final product. The Bride produces an all-encompassing vapor from the makings of a bricolage construction created in the likeness of Duchamp's original vision, fashioned from vinyl, wood, metal, glass, various found objects, and a DC motor.

The Milky Way Table

Duchamp's malic molds, or 'bachelors', are replicated in *The Milky Way Table*. Cast in aluminum, a cheap and high-availability industrial material, the forms feature logos of recognizable multinational corporations such as Netflix, Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon. Considered contemporary totems, these forms are situated in a plexiglass box, immersed in salt water and become permeated with vapor from the Bride. Within *The Milky Way Table* the process of fermentation continues.

Checkmate

Assembled footage from Yoo's father's factory and advertisements for products as "Oriental" present the lasting legacy of imperialism through modern day capitalism, referencing Queen Elizabeth II renaming Bai Hao, a well-known oolong tea, to 'Oriental Beauty'. The resignation of factory workers preparing products among clips of a chess game suggest variation of performance and strategy when subject to the controls of others.

L'Oriental

The end of the process results in the capture, bottling, and packing of the soy sauce. The negotiation over a natural embodiment of fermentation is controlled through packaging, marketing and distribution, and finally given the cultural construction of "Oriental Sauce" for ease of market classification. The Bride has been stripped by her bachelors, here presenting as multinational corporations, with their desire updated from sex (as posited by Duchamp), to profit and control.

Through the activation of *The Oriental Sauce Factory*, Yoo presents a commentary on the failure of rationality to result in a "morally organized world", while emphasizing the position of people viewed as surplus in a game of global scarcity. As Duchamp's vision commented on a 'desire motor', or a need to constantly engage with the Other, Yoo conceives of an update largely dependent on control over the Other for profit through a mechanized vision of a contemporary world.

Born in South Korea, Haena Yoo works between Los Angeles and Seoul. She received her MFA from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, and her BFA from Ewha Woman's University in Seoul. Yoo makes installations constructed with found materials, video, sound, and smell, exploring themes of labor, identity, and global capitalism. With a tinkering process, she is interested in the urgency created by limiting materials to what is at hand, showing the archeological and socio-political status of the maker. A 2018 recipient of the Rema Hort Mann emerging artist grant, Yoo has had solo exhibitions at P.BIBEAU (Brooklyn), u's (Calgary), and a two person show with Erin Calla Watson at AS IT STANDS (Los Angeles).
