

# Heman Chong on Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries

**This is not a joke. Everything in this piece is real—or at least as real as how I remember it.**

YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES PRESENTS  
**THIS IS NOT A JOKE**  
THEY FLY YOU TO EXOTIC PLACES FOR A WEEK OR SO.  
THEY SET YOU UP IN DECENT LODGING.  
THEY GIVE YOU HARDY MEALS AND HONEST SPENDING MONEY.  
AND THEY WIRE FEES TO YOUR BANK ACCOUNT FOR -- GET THIS --  
SEEING THINGS THAT OTHERS JUST DON'T SEE  
AND THEN DOING THINGS THAT OTHERS JUST DON'T DO.  
AND YOU'RE NEVER WRONG IN WHAT YOU SEE AND DO,  
AS LONG AS YOU JUST BE YOURSELF, YOUR OWN QUIRKY, UNIQUE SELF.  
AND IF YOU'RE LUCKY THEY THINK YOU'RE A GENIUS FOR SEEING AND DOING WHAT YOU SEE AND DO.  
AND IF YOU'RE UNLUCKY, WELL, AT LEAST IT WAS FUN,  
THERE'S RARELY ANY HARD FEELINGS,  
AND YOU CAN ALWAYS BELIEVE YOU'RE A GENIUS --  
NO ONE, ABSOLUTELY NO ONE, CAN PROVE YOU'RE NOT!  
YUP, IT'S A RULE: THE MORE IGNORED YOU ARE,  
THE MORE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BELIEVE THEY'RE THE IGNORAMUSES.  
NOW IF YOU'RE REALLY LUCKY THEY GIVE YOU THIS JOB AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN.  
AND IF YOU'RE EVEN LUCKIER, THEY SEE REAL IDEAS IN WHAT YOU SAW AND DID  
**AND MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF THEM**  
LIKE YOU REALLY UNDERSTOOD WHAT YOU WERE DOING ALL ALONG.  
AND IF YOU'RE AMONG THE LUCKIEST, THEY SEE WHAT YOU SAW AND DID  
AS IMPORTANT FOR ALL MANKIND AND FOR ALL TIME.  
**AND THEY COULD BE ALL WRONG.**  
BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER, BECAUSE IT'S ALL PART OF THE DEAL.  
WHAT'S THE CATCH? THERE IS NO CATCH!  
THEY'VE BEEN DOING IT FOR YEARS!  
WITH NO END IN SIGHT! I KID YOU NOT!  
**UNFUCKING BELIEVABLE.**

#### YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES

*This Is not a Joke*

2010

Silkscreen print, 120 x 80 cm.

Courtesy the artists.

"We don't look at art. In fact, we always say that we hate art," remarked Marc Voge, CIO of Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries. "We don't want to pollute ourselves with that stuff."

"They're sooooo funny!" exclaimed a female collector in her distinguished 40s, dressed up to the nines, as she burst out laughing. "But what would I buy? An internet video? How would that look next to my Haegue Yang?"

Few curators or art critics ever mention the word "Asia" when talking or writing about Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' work, much

less "Korea." "The internet" and "language," however, have a 100-percent appearance rate in all discussions about this Seoul-based duo's online text and music animations.

"I can't believe you guys haven't ever thought about making prints," a curator from Germany remarked. "But why should we?" they asked. "To make money!" the curator exclaimed. "Oh. We haven't thought about that," they mumbled. "We're so stupid."

This is not a joke. The first-edition print they produced is titled *THIS IS NOT A JOKE* (2010). Marc and Young-Hae, if you're reading this, I would like very much to exchange something that I've made (and that you would desire, of course) for an edition of this work. Please email me.

When I did a Google Image search for "Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries," I got a collage of images that read: MY MOM TELLS ME THAT I HAVE TO BE REALISTIC. BE PATIENT. DEMOCRACY IS SLOW AND MESSY, SHE SAYS. I'LL SAY. / IT MEANS "KISS ME A LOT." / HELLO. / BUST DOWN THE DOOR! / YOU BUST DOWN THE DOOR / WHILE I SLEEP / RUSH INTO MY HOME, / DIALECTICAL SEX AND GENDER = HAPPY PEOPLE. / HE'LL GIVE YOU A SMACK UPSIDE THE HEAD JUST FOR ASKING. / I'M SUCKING ON / ART IS FUTILE. / NOT A DAY GOES BY WITHOUT AN E-MAIL FROM SOMEONE ASKING ME IF SHE CAN SEE YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES' RESUME. / THE WEB.

The exterior of their narrow, custom-built three-story home in downtown Seoul is clad in Cor-ten steel. Marc's father—there when I visited—touched the metal with the back of his hand and said, "Bet it's cold in the winter, huh?" When he asked why their music studio on the top level wasn't heated, they shrugged, "We ran out of money."

"Please. No photos of us," Young-Hae, the CEO, said as she gestured to artist Pak Sheung Chuen at Vitamin Creative Space's booth in Art HK 12. This is an image I will always keep with me: artists who work primarily with text requesting a colleague, who also utilizes a fair bit of text in his own work, to not capture an image of them photographically.

This is (also) not a joke. A few years ago someone told me the following story: A biennial curator once screened *Cunnilingus in North Korea* (2004), a web animation by Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, in a meeting with several high-level cultural bigwigs running the biennial, in order to pitch the pair's work to be included in the show. As the video was playing, the curator became increasingly worried that the bigwigs would be offended by the overt use of the word "SEX" in the piece, but decided not to intervene at this point, fearing that they might be accused of censoring the artists' work. When it ended, there was absolute silence in the room. The curator started to fear for her life, and career. Drenched in sweat, she waited patiently for one of the bigwigs to speak.

One of them finally spoke. "It is an artistic video. I like the music. And the story," he remarked. "Unfortunately, I am not in favor of art that makes fun of the leader of a country. I think we should pass on this work."

Un-fucking-believable.