

Very Real Fake Nature in the "Industrial Forest" Installation

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Courtesy ESKYIU

"Industrial Forest" by ESKYIU

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The aluminium yellow bamboo of the Industrial Forest is connected to sensors in the ground.

Imagine a factory building, right next to a busy highway dominated by heavy trucks flouting the speed limit. Within this grim environment, Hong Kong artists have conjured up a bamboo forest on a 50-square-meter balcony. As the setting sun hits the bamboo, the effect is a golden sea of spindly 4-meter-tall stalks reaching to the skies, like gigantic thin insects saluting the sun. The thing is, this little piece of nature is totally artificial.

Marisa Yiu and Eric Schuldenfrei the artist-architect duo of **ESKYIU** studio, designed aluminium filament that imitates yellow bamboo, and used mirrored surfaces to create the illusion of an infinite forest. But their "Industrial Forest" that was unveiled last week is so full of life, Yiu admits she "keeps referring to the bamboo as people."

The 320 stalks of aluminium "bamboo" fill the outdoor terrace of **Spring**, a non-profit art space in Wong Chuk Hang. The neighborhood was once home to a real yellow bamboo forest — "Wong Chuk" means "yellow bamboo" in Cantonese — but this was back in pre-industrial days when it was just a fishing village. Wong Chuk Hang eventually succumbed to development and became a manufacturing hub, filled by high-rise factory buildings with cookie-cutter nondescript structures.

Today, Wong Chuk Hang is in a post-industrial phase where manufacturers have largely moved out of the factory spaces to cheaper property and labor in mainland China. Artists and designers have moved into the warehouses, gradually transforming the area into a creative center. ESKYIU pays homage to the neighborhood's history with their aluminium bamboo, a scene of nature borne out of artifice for a place that lost its natural environment to industry.

"We challenged ourselves to create this experimental terrain to engage in discourse with our environment," says Yiu. "Everything looks kind of real. You don't know if it's fake."



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The aluminium bamboo certainly feels real. Although the pole diameter is considerably scaled down from real bamboo at about one centimetre thick, it is lightweight, hollow, assembled in sections, and bends with the wind. When the filament hits against each other, it creates a sound that mimics the whack of bamboo quite perfectly. If the winds are strong enough, the poles sway and knock against each other, echoing the rustle of actual forests. This sound is jarring against the incredible noise coming from the highway that is right next to "Industrial Forest." As a viewer, you become confused by the contradicting auditory cues: the calming "natural" sound of the fake bamboo, versus the pounding of traffic. Eventually, it all becomes a wall of white noise.

"We wanted it to be very meditative, like a psychological quiet space within this crazy construction and traffic noise. The installation is a way to diffuse that," says Yiu.

The meditative qualities of the work are not only experience on-site, but also by the people driving on the highway, or living and working in the surrounding buildings. Viewing the installation from a distance, the forest looks like a crop of ochre poles, a condensed version of **Walter de Maria's** "The Lightening Fields," which ESKYIU counts as an inspiration. The bolt of orange on the balcony breaks up the otherwise monotonous grey of concrete buildings. It is a playful point of departure for our emotional relationship with the urban environment.

The "Industrial Forest" also feels real as it reacts directly to natural elements. The poles are hooked up to sensors under the floor such that the weight of a spectator's footsteps causes each filament to bend towards the person, as though it is politely kow-towing in welcome. The tip of each pole lights up in the evening in different colors according to pollution levels: a hazy reddish-orange color if the pollution levels are extremely high, white for normal conditions, and a crisp blue for exceptionally clear skies. Powered by a photovoltaic panel, the lights won't turn on at all if the skies were too dark during the day.

The "Industrial Forest" is a permanent installation. Over time, ESKYIU will reconfigure the forest for different audiences and purposes, further exercising their control over this artificial natural world, critiquing and bridging the gap between nature and our man-made environment.


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