

ART

## Enter an Eerie Nowhere Land, Where the Mundane Meets the Mythic

In *Horizontal Vertigo: WangShui*, the Julia Stoschek Collection hosts an exhibition of new works by the New York-based studio known for their explorations of technology, identity, and diaspora.

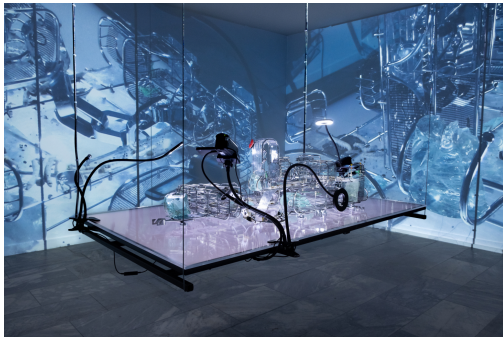
Eliza Levinson    November 22, 2019



WangShui, "From Its Mouth Came a River of High-End Residential Appliances" (2018), installation view, video, 13', color, surround sound, loop (all images courtesy the Julia Stoschek Collection, photo by Alwin Lay)

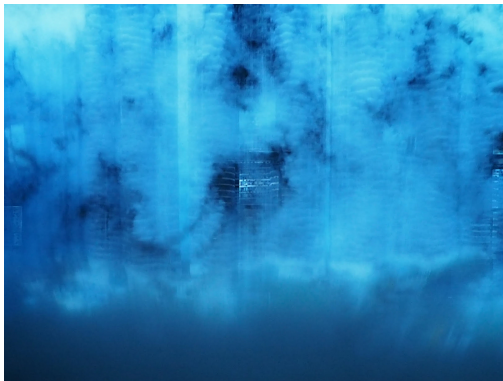
BERLIN — With the latest iteration of *Horizontal Vertigo*, the Julia Stoschek Collection hosts an eerie nowhere-land where mythos meets modernity in an exhibition of works by the New York-based studio [WangShui](#). In their video works and installations, WangShui considers themes of technology, identity, and diaspora, often fusing time-based, architectural, and sculptural practices.

The show is dimly lit and dramatic, bringing together organic elements (such as live silkworms) with futuristic technology. At its heart is the Shen dragon of Chinese lore, an ever-shifting, ephemeral creature transmitted across time. By tying the dragon to elements of the contemporary everyday, WangShui highlights the slipperiness of legend, demonstrating how the mythic — including the futuristic — clashes with the realistic, expressed at a coded, almost clinical remove. Much like a traditional narrative, the show highlights one work per gallery space, snaking dramatically through the Collection to sequential effect.



WangShui, "Gardens of Perfect Exposure" (2018), installation view, mixed-media video installation; assorted chromed bath fixtures, live silkworms, audio loop, roof repair fabric, laminated hair, glass goblets, selfie ring lights, plexiglas, earrings, rehydrated mulberry leaves, silk, magnets, TV, HD camcorders, four-channel video, livestream, color, audio loop (photo by Alwin Lay)

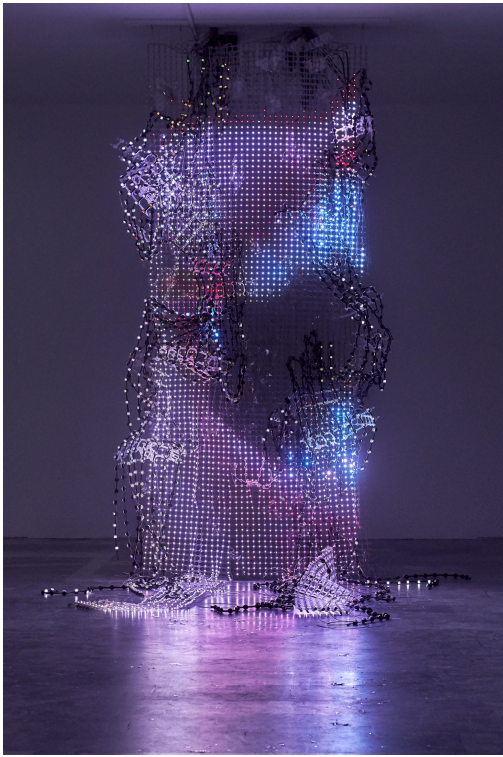
Installed at the entrance of the exhibition, "Gardens of Perfect Exposure" (2017-18) features a central gallery filled with pupating silkworms — which will continue to grow throughout the duration of the exhibition — visible on a suspended, glowing wide-screen TV. The silkworms, which wriggle across an enclosed labyrinth of metallic bath fixtures, are highlighted by circular "selfie lights." Upon closer look, one realizes both the worms and oneself are being surveilled by several DSLR video cameras suspended from various corners, which then project their footage onto the gallery's walls.



WangShui, "From Its Mouth Came a River of High-End Residential Appliances" (2018), production still (detail). (courtesy of the artist)

As an introduction to WangShui's aesthetic, "Gardens" speaks volumes; jarring and unsettling, it leaves viewers with more questions than answers. This is a motif of the show, which unfurls like coded referents until visitors reach its most lucid (or at least traditionally narrative) work, "From Its Mouth Came a River of High-End Residential Appliances" (2017-18), a 13-minute, single-channel HD video that plays on loop. Amid dramatic, swooping shots, a monotone male narrator tells the poetic

story of enlisting a drone operator named Hercules (another mythic character, also displaced). Our disaffected narrator has employed Hercules to fly his 'bots through holes constructed in various skyscrapers bordering the South China Sea. According to our narrator, the holes — much like the passageways between the galleries, intentionally left unadorned by WangShui for this exhibition — were built to allow mythic dragons to pass from the mountains to the ocean, a nod to the mythic that exists within (and in defiance of) modern sterility.



WangShui, "Weak Pearl" (2019),  
Installation view (detail), mixed-media  
video installation; flexible LED mesh,  
mica flakes, three-channel video, 5',  
color, surround sound, loop (photo by  
Alwin Lay)

The highlight of the show is "Weak Pearl" (2019), in which strings of knotted LED lights stream from the ceiling and drip, outstretched, onto the floor. Undulating with ambiguous activity, it is only from the farthest gallery wall that one can decipher an animation of a mollusk, ancient and alive. In the world of WangShui, tendrils of legend, fable, and diasporic memory flit just out of reach, somehow both timeless and ephemeral. Fittingly, then, "Weak Pearl" is mysterious, bright and mesmerizing, but poignantly, its subject is legible only from afar.

Horizontal Vertigo: WangShui continues at the Julia Stoschek Collection in Berlin (Leipziger Straße 60) through December 15. The exhibition is part of Horizontal Vertigo, a year-long program curated by Lisa Long at the collection's locations in Düsseldorf and Berlin.

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