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Cement Greenberg
Tales of the Altersea:
Lap-See Lam
July 10, 2023

Contemporary

Cement Greenberg #7: Suspended

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Lap-See Lam. "Tales of the Altersea," installation view, 2023. 10 channel video projection, 20 min.
Courtesy the artist and Swiss Institute.

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Lap-See Lam. "Tales of the Altersea," installation view, 2023. 10 channel video projection, 20 min. Courtesy the artist and Swiss Institute.

Lap-See Lam: *Tales of the Altersea* at the Swiss Institute

It is hard to stay indifferent to Lap-See Lam's shadow play in the basement of the Swiss Institute, even if you, like I am, are caught up in the particular brand of cynicism that characterizes New Yorkers. Lam presents an immersive video that is consistently rich and engaging for its duration of twenty minutes. In this animated world, characters are floating, as if underwater, while a charismatic vocalist unfolds a tale of two children, twin sisters, who are traveling within troubled territories. The score is both original and beautiful, and so are the figures filling up the four walls and the floor of the space. As much as the installation is captivating, the work fails to speak for itself. The narrative is impossible to follow, although the press release provides some guidance: the work, apparently, is an "invocation of shuttered or sold Chinese restaurants in Europe." While the video is fascinating, and so is the research of the artist, gluing these two parts of the artist's practice in the form of a cause and effect, seems forced. Lastly, there is the Swiss Institute's everlasting unexplainable obsession to tackle the near-impossible task of curating their staircase. It is unclear whether these objects are works of art in their own right, or discursive material. To date, everything I have seen installed on the walls of this staircase looks like ornament.