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Elaine YJ Zheng  
Lap-See Lam: *Tales of the  
Altersea*  
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## New York Lowdown: Must-See Exhibitions Spring 2023

By [Elaine YJ Zheng](#) | New York, 17 May 2023



Lap-See Lam, *Tales of the Altersea* (2023). Exhibition view: *Tales of the Altersea*, Portikus, Frankfurt am Main (11 March–28 May 2023). Courtesy the artist and Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm/Berlin/Mexico City. Photo: Alwin Lay.

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**Lap-See Lam: Tales of the Altersea**  
**Swiss Institute, 38 St. Marks Place**  
**10 May–27 August 2023**

**Expect: a room-spanning video and CGI installation centring on the story of an abandoned Chinese restaurant inside a three-storey ship that once sailed from Shanghai to Europe.**

Calling on her Swedish and Cantonese heritage, Lap-See Lam explores notions of identity and culture through the experiences of the Chinese diaspora in Sweden. The artist's first solo exhibition in the United States begins with her 3D documentation of the interiors of abandoned Chinese restaurants in the 2010s, including her family's own establishment.

Resulting works such as *Mother Tongue* (2018) feature three generations of women discussing their working experiences in such restaurants, while *Phantom Banquet* (2019), commissioned by Performa 19, borrows from hospitality traditions of Swedish-Chinese restaurants to examine how environments can shape identity.

The titular work *Tales of the Altersea* (2023) continues Lam's inquiry into Chinoiserie in Sweden and Europe, more broadly. The eight-screen video installation centres on the story of Sea Palace, a now-abandoned restaurant ship that sailed from Shanghai to Europe in the 1990s.

Bankrupt after one year, the dining establishment was later reconfigured into a haunted house for children in Stockholm. Its trajectory mirrors the appeal of Sinophone culture and traditions to outsiders and the corresponding erasure and disappearance within its diasporas.

The exhibition features public programmes and events in New York and Frankfurt, where an iteration of the exhibition is being presented simultaneously at Portikus, including a culinary event and a synchronised concert, connecting the two trade centres and suggesting art can perhaps offer a way forward when traditional categories rupture.