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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in August and Early September

The New York Times
Jillian Steinhauer
Lap-See Lam: *Tales of the
Altersea*
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EAST VILLAGE

Lap-See Lam

Through Aug. 27. Swiss Institute, 38 St. Marks Place, Manhattan; 212-925-2035, [swissinstitute.net](https://www.swissinstitute.net).



Lap-See Lam's "Tales of the Altersea," 2023, 10-channel video projection. Credit...via Swiss Institute; Photo by
Daniel Pérez

In the 1990s, a Swedish businessman, Johan Wang, opened a Chinese restaurant that was also a three-story ship, replete with dragon head and tail. The Sea Palace sailed from Shanghai to Europe, docking in various cities, but ended up shuttered in Gothenburg, Sweden. Recently, the ship was moved to Stockholm and repurposed as a haunted house.

If this sounds like a contemporary ghost story about capitalism and orientalism, it is — which also makes it the perfect starting point for [Lap-See Lam](#)'s "Tales of the Altersea," her [first U.S. solo show](#). Starting in 2014, Lam 3-D scanned the interiors of several Chinese restaurants in her home country of Sweden, including Sea Palace and the one founded by her grandmother, who immigrated from Hong Kong.

The glitchy ruins of Sea Palace are just barely recognizable in "Tales of the Altersea" (2023), the 10-channel video at the heart of her exhibition. Lam turns the ghost story into a fable involving twins and characters from Chinese mythology, who swim through a murky ocean to the sounds of rhyming narration and haunting music. The work unfolds as a digital shadow play projected on the walls and floor of the Swiss Institute's basement. It's a transportive melding of old and new stories and technologies, with what sometimes feel like too many moving parts. But just let the dazzling video wash over you. The details are less important than the outline they create: of being trapped in the phantoms of history, until you find a way to break free. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*