

EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS OF OTHER WORLDS

Frieze Art Fair, London, October 2023

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Frieze London Art Fair is the main annual gathering in the UK of the art world, where galleries and collectors from all over the globe descend upon a marquee situated in Regents Park to discover who or what the next big thing is. The dominant medium is painting, with very little film projection or live performance. The main exhibition is accompanied by a vibrant mix of spectacular sculptures in the park outside. Many artworks exhibited reference the Monstrous, Magic, and even Phantasmagoria, which suggests the popular themes of early magic lantern shows are still haunting our collective consciousness.



'Synaptic Visions of Dead Time' by Ranbir Kaleka

'Synaptic Visions of Dead Time' by artist Ranbir Kaleka stood out as a curious mixture of dystopian ruin sculpture and video projection which attracted a lot of attention from passing visitors. The overall structure is a strange fusion of brutalist architecture and *memento mori*. A giant skull protrudes from the roof, below are five gothic archways containing embedded digital videos which play a series of looped narratives that suggest deeper corridors and hidden rooms beyond the surface of the screen. The unusual scale and positioning of the projections echoes a Victorian bioscope device. In making the viewer peer into miniature worlds, the artist subverts reality, leading us to a parallel uncanny universe. The actors within these dramas are engaged in bizarre dream-like tasks, whether it is wading waist-deep through a river carrying a chicken, or conjuring up a magical white horse with a hammer. The protagonists seem trapped and powerless to escape their Sisyphean struggles. The artwork's strength lies in that it does not offer

simple answers to the unease of the human condition – only the momentary beauty of a flock of birds or the sound of a gong punctuate this hauntingly enigmatic work.

The Vadehra Art Gallery based in New Delhi, who exhibit the work, wrote: "Kaleka's larger practice recognizes the trajectory of the moving image across political histories; this particular work acquires greater personal significance as a visual artist dealing with the tensions of fraught images within what Michel Foucault called the 'author function', or the artist's ability to perform a kind of presence in their own work."



'Tales of the Altersea (Julie)' by Lap-See Lam

On the Berlin Gallery Nordenhake stand was a kinetic sculpture entitled 'Tales of the Altersea (Julie)' by artist Lap-See Lam who is due to represent the Nordic countries at the Venice Biennale in 2024. The work is a slow-moving curious long shape, made of brass, paint, neon lights and electric motors, which suggested a winged beast or human dragon. Although the scale was much bigger, there were strong connections with magic lantern images which present shadow figures. The simple juddery movements, the disproportioned figure with exaggerated features and comical appendages all echo the world of the magic lantern and shadow puppetry.

In a short film Lap-See explains that this sculpture is a fragment of a much larger installation. Julie is a character in a VR (virtual reality) immersive film which explores the idea of cultural heritage and generational loss. Although we are only seeing a glimpse of the more complex narrative, the artist cleverly combines simple cinematic devices with digital technology, to create a magical female monster and powerful re-imagining of ancient mythical characters. The gallery press release states: "In these works, Lam delves into almost magical imaginations of Chinoiserie, defined by imperialist trading, while reflecting on the reality of migration to both claim ownership of and complicate the idea of cultural heritage – a duality that characterises the artist's mythical installations." To watch the artist speak about her work go to: nordenhake.com/artists/lap-see-lam.