



Cook, Greg. "This Weekend Only, Giant Inflatable 'Worm-Like' Things Will Overrun Worcester Museum." *90.9 wbur*. July 20 2017. <http://www.wbur.org/artery/2017/07/20/inflatable-art>

This Weekend Only, Giant Inflatable 'Worm-Like' Things Will Overrun Worcester Museum

July 20, 2017

• [Greg Cook](#)



Shih Chieh Huang describes his curious inflatable art as “intestinal shapes or worm-like shapes.” He constructs the plastic tube balloons from a skin of common painter’s plastic drop cloths that he knots together and then inflates with stacks of household box fans to stretch as much as 400 feet.

For a special art exhibition this weekend, they’ll slither over the edges of the arcade along the second floor of Worcester Art Museum’s Renaissance Court and down onto the main floor where visitors can walk among them.

“I’m going to have to shrink the length. As it comes down, it starts to curl up in the space,” Huang tells me. “I still want to give viewers space to walk through.”

The installation, which the Taiwan-born, New York-based artist calls [“Organic Concept”](#), runs from 6 p.m. Thursday, July 20, through the end of museum hours on Sunday, July 23.

“These are materials that are very common,” Huang says. “Everyone can take an ordinary object and find an alternative use for it. They don’t have to use it the way it was meant to be used.”

“Organic Concept” is just another example of the prominence of inflatables in the fine art world these days.



Amanda Parer’s “Intrude” at The Lawn on D. (Greg Cook/WBUR)

Australian artist [Amanda Parer](#)'s giant, light-up, inflated bunnies and English group [Architects of Air](#)'s giant, blown-up technicolor castles filled the Seaport's Lawn On D in 2015.

“[Fenway Deity](#),” a giant inflatable necklace with a psychedelic flower medallion created by New York landscape architect Ken Smith, hung across the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’s facade during the summer of 2015. (It had a funny echo of the giant inflatable lock and chain that in warm weather graces the exterior of [Fortress Storage warehouse](#) and is a landmark along Route 93 in Boston’s Dorchester neighborhood.)

And last year the William Benton Museum of Art at the University of Connecticut in Storrs presented “[Blow Up](#),” a roundup of giant inflatable bunnies, elephants, cars and Buddhas.

All of this reflects the fine art world’s devotion to size and spectacle in recent decades. Inflatable sculptures achieve these goals while being more affordable to fabricate, more portable (perfect for artist-nomads on the international festival circuit), and more crowd-pleasing as they embrace beauty, wonder and delight.

You could trace this current fascination back to Otto Piene, of Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Center for Advanced Visual Studies, who died in 2014. His “Sky Art” projects included a giant inflated arch of tubes that formed an “[Olympic Rainbow](#)” over the closing ceremonies of the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany.

Photos of Piene’s project — including crews trying it out over Boston’s Charles River before heading to Europe — are featured in the exhibition “[The New Inflatable Moment](#)” at the Boston Society of Architects’ Space through Sept. 3. Curators Mary E. Hale and Katarzyna Balug posit that the renewed interest in inflatables is evidence that “utopian thought is re-emerging today in architecture and art.”



At BSA Space, you can walk into Mary E. Hale and Katarzyna Balug's inflatable "The Moment." (Courtesy of BSA Space)

The BSA show explores the history of inflatables as art and architecture — from early hot-air balloons to the present day — through signs and photos plus a handful of 3-D examples and models, like a robot hand activated by inflating or deflating.

Ideas range from 1970s inflatable office buildings to 2015 inflatable habitats for astronauts actually visiting Mars. Most of "The New Inflatable Moment" has a utopian, space-age optimism that new technologies can fix everything. It's a notion shadowed from our vantage point, since we know one of the unintended consequences of this bright-eyed thinking is pollution that has fueled massive changes for the planet.

The exhibit mentions that the art collective Ant Farm's 1970 "Clean Air Pod" at the University of California at Berkeley warned about the dangers of pollution by inviting people into a tent of (supposedly) cleaner air. But most of the designs remain blithely enamored by plastics and other synthetics.

At the Worcester Art Museum, Huang shares this fascination — but he comes at plastics more from the big box store consumer products end. This weekend's temporary installation is part of his exhibition “[Reusable Universes](#)” at the museum through Nov. 12. He aims to animate plastic storage bins, plastic bags and other inanimate objects. In the past, he's made trash bags seem to breathe. And he's created blinking, light-up machines with arms that inflate, deflate and wave like curious undersea creatures.



Shih Chieh Huang's “Organic Concept” in a previous iteration. (Courtesy of Worcester Art Museum)

As he put it in a [2014 TED Talk](#), “I'd like to share with you how ordinary things can become something magical and wondrous.”

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WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

Sheehan, Nancy. “‘Reusable Universes’ at Worcester Art Museum features kinetic sculpture.” *Telegram*. July 1 2017.

<http://www.telegram.com/entertainmentlife/20170701/reusable-universes-at-worcester-art-museum-features-kinetic-sculpture>

‘Reusable Universes’ at Worcester Art Museum features kinetic sculpture





By Nancy Sheehan, Correspondent

Posted Jul 1, 2017 at 8:30 PM Updated Jul 3, 2017 at 5:57 AM

WORCESTER — The dictum “Do not touch the art” is a familiar one at exhibitions here and there. Signage at a new show at Worcester Art Museum, however, might as well read: “The art may reach out and touch you.”

“Reusable Universes” is artist Shih Chieh Huang’s latest immersive environment, a large-scale installation that visitors will find very moving — as in wafting, lifting, blinking, inflating, collapsing, dancing, posing, resting, reviving and riveting.

The installation’s components, some of which resemble oversized sea creatures, run on motion sensors salvaged by the artist from garage door openers. If you pass near an idle piece, don’t be surprised if it suddenly springs to life, sending a plastic tentacle reaching toward you as embedded LED lights begin rhythmically twinkling.

The kinetic installation is a wonderland of visual delights fusing Huang’s varied interests of science, technology, art and the natural world. The pieces draw on everyday manufactured materials such as the plastic sheets painters use to protect furniture and floors from spatters, common computer cooling fans, discarded plastic bottles and trash bags. The show opened June 24 and runs through Nov. 12.

“Reusable Universes” is a mesmerizing kaleidoscope of movement and color fueled by the computer fans gently inflating pieces for a dancing, animated few minutes before allowing them to fall flat again. But these are not the herky-jerky motions of inflatables like one sees outside of car dealerships. Amazingly, Huang has managed to imbue his creations with the same ballet-like movements that actual sea creatures evince as they swim effortlessly through the oceans.

It took painstaking experimentation and focused observation to capture that natural grace. In 2007 Huang was among the first cohort of artist fellows at the Smithsonian Institution, just as it started its artist residency program. The artist fellows were asked to choose areas of interest, and scientists from those fields were made available to them.

“I was able to look closely at samples of these biological organisms in the ocean and to see how they move and that really enhanced my work,” Huang said.

But how to create those carefully observed movements? Huang uses precisely programmed computers to achieve the desired effect, a skill the Taiwan-born,

New York-based artist learned by secretly slipping into a computer class when he was a student at the School of Visual Arts in New York in the 1990s.

Sitting quietly in the back, Huang went unnoticed by the teacher until near the end of the semester when the teacher finally figured out his name wasn't on the class roll. Huang explained that he had really wanted to learn about computer engineering but hadn't been allowed to take the course. Back then, the school's fine arts division and its new-media computer arts school were entirely separate and cross-enrollment was not allowed, WAM's assistant curator of Asian art, Vivian Li, said.

"But once the teacher saw how passionate and dedicated he was, he allowed him to continue the next semester just sitting in," she said.

Huang says he is deeply interested in "so many things — science, biology, color, space, the universe and all the natural things around." Those interests could have found expression through science, so why did he choose art?

"Art gives the most freedom," he said. "If I expressed it another way, there might be a lot more limitations. Art is just a space where I can really try anything out."

In the science world, for example, there can be absolutely no living, breathing trash bags, but in Huang's world of art they exist and even thrive. Inspiration for a piece in the WAM show first came years ago when he was asked to do an installation in a park. At a fork in the park's trails, he saw some trash bags piled up and just lying there, lifeless.

"I thought, 'What if I put a fan in one of these bags so it started to breathe?'" he said. "I had it on a timer so people walking in the morning would see these bags that you throw away but now they're coming alive."

The WAM piece that most directly relates to that long-ago one in the park features a cluster of many small plastic bags — actually tied-off corners cut from trash bags — arranged symmetrically and, like other objects in the show, suspended from the ceiling. The bags expand as they are filled with air, then collapse as if they are breathing.

"I was thinking of a single-cell organism that becomes more complex when they grow up," Huang said. "What happens when a trash bag grows up?" Well, of course, it becomes multicelled as well — at least in Huang's art world of no limits.

It's an interdisciplinary world view curator Li had wanted to bring to WAM since she first saw Huang's work during an open-studio tour event in New York in 2015. "I came to his studio and I thought 'Wow this is very different,'" she said. "And I just knew immediately that we should bring him to the museum."

It wasn't a hard sell. "Once you look at his artwork, it's not that hard to convince people to have the show at the museum," she said.

Related Event

Public Performance: Organic Concept

6 p.m. July 20

The public is invited to watch and participate in Shih Chieh Huang's popular "**Organic Concept**," an infinitely scalable sculpture made from rolls of painter's plastic and box fans. The installation will be created as an interactive public performance in the Renaissance Court. From 5:30 to 8 p.m. light refreshments and a cash bar will be available. From July 21 through **July 23** "**Organic Concept**" will be installed for public viewing in the Renaissance Court. The event is free with museum admission.

MASS LIVE

Hanson, Melissa. "Shih Chieh Huang's worm-like art installation taking over Worcester Art Museum." *MassLive*. July 21 2017.

http://www.masslive.com/news/worcester/index.ssf/2017/07/a_worm-like_art_installation_i.html

Shih Chieh Huang's worm-like art installation taking over Worcester Art Museum

Updated on July 21, 2017 at 9:24 AM

Posted on July 21, 2017 at 8:19 AM



Organic Concept, an art installation by Shih Chieh Huang, took over the Worcester Art Museum Renaissance Court. (Worcester Art Museum)

By **Melissa Hanson**

mhanson@masslive.com

You'll want to check out the worm-like art installation that's snaking its way through the Worcester Art Museum before it's gone.

"Organic Concept" is a sculpture made from rolls of painter's plastic and box fans by Taiwan-born and New York-based artist Shih Chieh Huang. This weekend only, you can check out the installation as it twists across the museum's Renaissance Court.

From Friday to Sunday the public can view Organic Concept. It is free with museum admission.

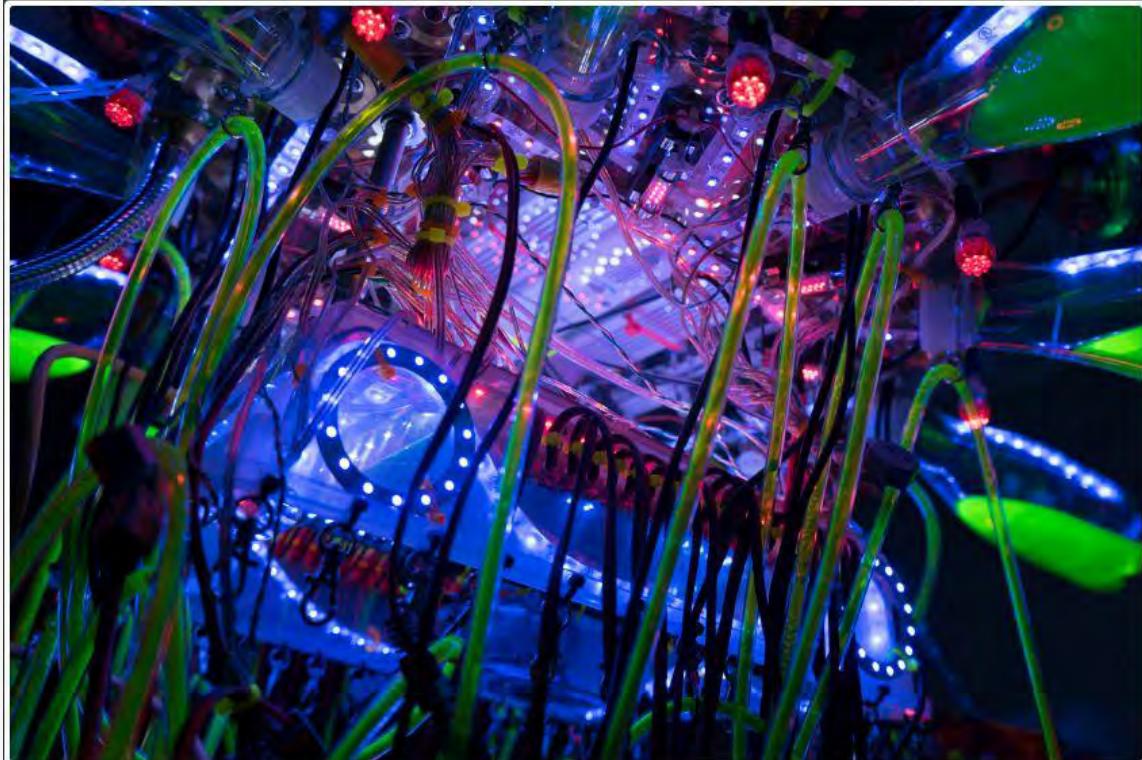
Fan's of Huang's work can visit the museum through Nov. 12 to see his larger installation, "Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang."

That collection is a large-scale installation of Huang's improvisational style. It features mass-produced computer cooling fans, LED lights, and plastics.

"This installation, which ingeniously and seamlessly bridges art and technology, resonates with our city's rich legacy of innovation and invention," Jon L. Seydl, director of curatorial affairs, said in a news release.

Shih Chieh Huang's ‘Reusable Universes’ at Worcester Art Museum

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | JULY 21, 2017

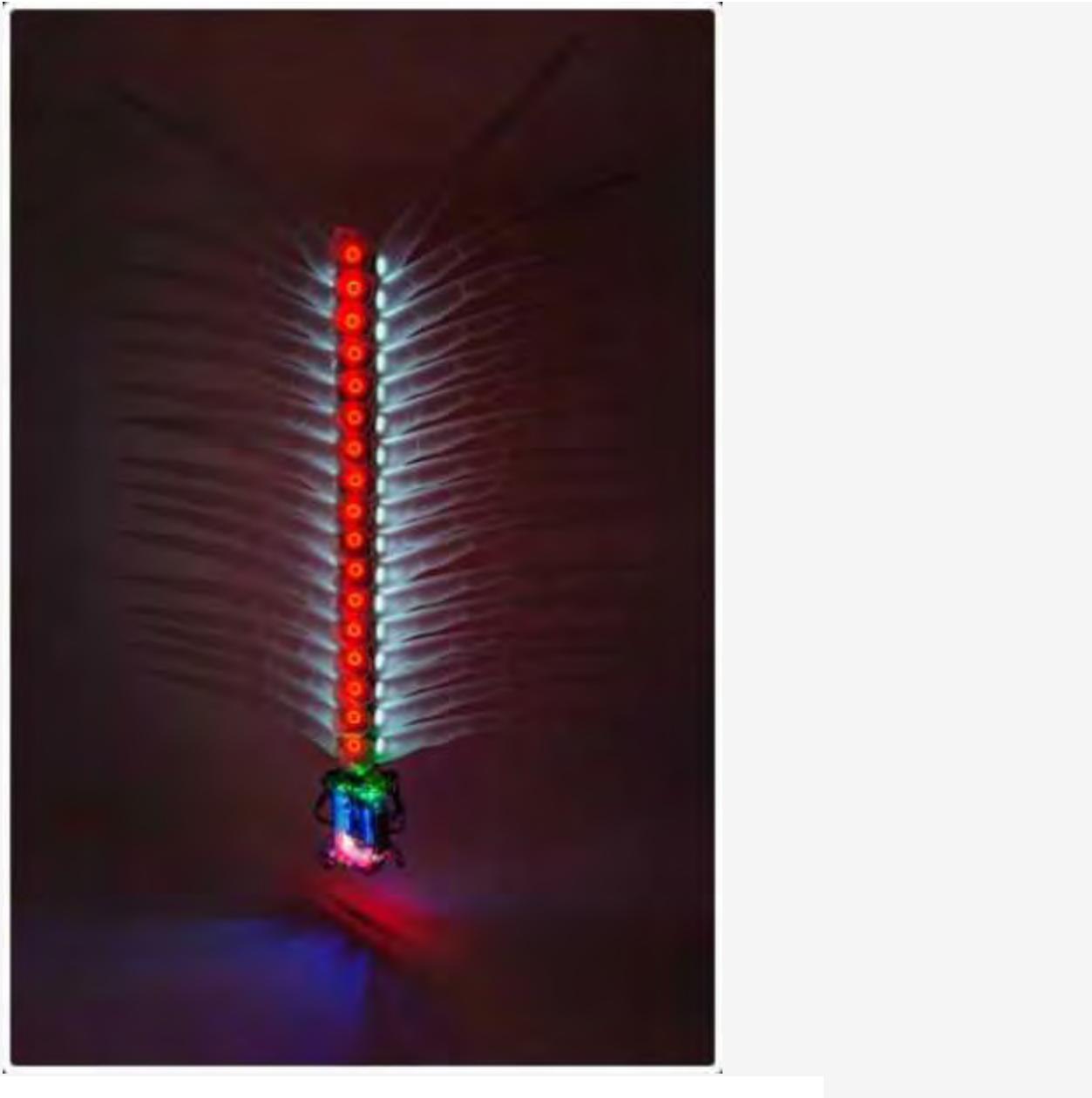


Shih Chieh Huang, T-24-L, 2017, 8 x 13 x 9 feet, Mixed media, photo: Megan Paetzhold
(Courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York)

Staff. “Shih Chieh Huang’s ‘Reusable Universes’ at Worcester Art Museum.” *Blouinartinfo*. July 21 2017. <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/2375586/shih-chieh-huang-s-reusable-universes-at-worcester-art-museum>



Shih Chieh Huang, T-24-L, 2017, 8 x 13 x 9 feet, Mixed media, photo: Megan Paetzhold
Courtesy of the Artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

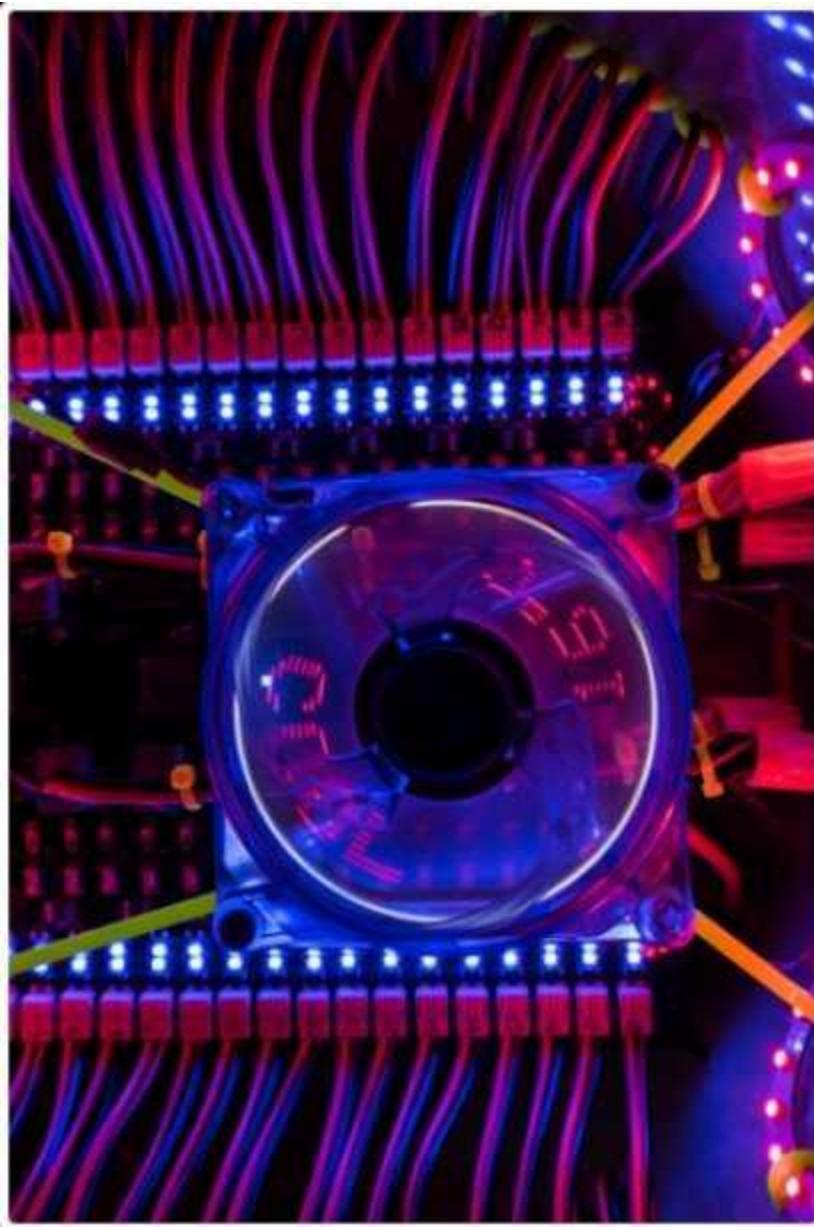


Shih Chieh Huang, VT-34-BTB (red angel eye), 2017, 12 x 13 x 3 feet,
mixed media, photo: Megan Paetzhold

Courtesy of the Artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Shih Chieh Huang, VT-36, 2017, 10 x 10 x 12 feet, mixed media, photo: Megan Paetzhold
Courtesy of the Artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



Shih Chieh Huang, T-24-L, 2017, 8 x 13 x 9 feet, Mixed media, photo: Megan Paetzhold
(Courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York)

-
- VENUES
- Worcester Art Museum**

“Reusable Universes” an exhibition of works by Taiwan-born, New York-based artist Shih Chieh Huang is on view at Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts.

The exhibition display includes an immersive environmental large- scale installation by the artist wherein he uses industrial materials such as mass-produced computer cooling fans, LED lights, and plastic. The show combines Huang's fascination with technology, organic forms, and materials of everyday life to transform ordinary objects into engaging and captivating complex light and kinetic sculptures. For "Reusable Universes" the artist created a sculptural installation consisting of over one hundred various-sized moving elements. The sculptures explore Huang's engagement with emotional responses everyday materials elicit from the movement of a thin, windblown piece of plastic to the slow blinking of a bright light. Shih Chieh Huang (b.1975) has had solo exhibitions at the Greater Reston Arts Center, Virginia (2016), Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, The Armory Show, New York (2016), Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco California (2013), Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC (2011), Virgil de Voldere Gallery, New York (2010), and Beall Center for Art + Technology, UCI, California (2009) among others. The artist has received several awards, honors, and grants including New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship **TED Fellow (2014)**, **Creative Capital (2009)**, **The Oscar Signorini Prize**, D'ars Foundation, Milan, Italy (2008), and Rockefeller Foundation New Media Arts Fellowship, Technical Assistance Grant (2007).

"Reusable Universes" runs from June 24 through November 12, 2017, at Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St, Worcester, MA 01609, USA.

For details visit: <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/galleryguide-venues/285148/museum-overview>



Artist Shih Chieh Huang on Using New Technology to Bring Trash to Life

For his new Worcester Art Museum show, the artist transforms plastic bags and computer fans into living, breathing art.

By: Sarah Cascone

July 31, 2017

Cascone, Sarah. "Artist Shih Chieh Huang on Using New Technology to Bring Trash to Life." *Artnet*.

July 31 2017.

<https://news.artnet.com/exhibition/s/shih-chieh-huang-recycled-universe-origin-story-1018187>



Shih Chieh Huang. Courtesy the artist.

Shih Chieh Huang creates art from unlikely sources: garbage bags, computer fans, Christmas light faders. His motorized sculptures—delicate tentacles made out of plastic bags that light up as they inflate and deflate—take on a life of their own. They float like giant bioluminescent sea creatures from an age that is at once prehistoric and futuristic.

"One recurring concept in my work is animating these inanimate objects, bringing life to every day materials," the Taiwan-born, New York-based artist told artnet News.

For his latest exhibition, "Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang," on view at the Worcester Art Museum through November 12, Huang created a kinetic sculptural installation of more than 100 elements—his largest to date. It is nothing less than otherworldly.

I first encountered Huang's work at the 2016 Armory Show, where crowds gathered around his glowing *Disphotic Zone*, which resembled a giant robotic jellyfish. Later that year, at Bushwick Open Studios, I wandered into his massive, heavily foot-trafficked space at 17-17 Troutman, which felt like some kind of strange biology lab.



"Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang" at the Worcester Art Museum, installation view. Courtesy of Shih Chieh Huang.

ADVERTISING

The feeling is different at the museum: The darkened room transports you suddenly to the depths of the ocean, or the far reaches of outer space. It is quiet, peaceful, and reflective.

For this edition of "Origin Story," which explores the backstories of individual works of art, Huang takes us through the evolution of his work and the process of putting together the immersive installation, *Reusable Universes*, at the Worcester Art Museum.



Work in Shih Chieh Huang's studio. Courtesy of Shih Chieh Huang.

You've developed a unique type of motorized sculpture featuring plastic bags. How long have you been making work in this vein?

It goes way back. The earliest I remember, I was in college, in 1995 or '96, and I bought a mattress that came in a big bag. It was summertime in San Diego, and I wanted to make a cooler space. I used a box fan to inflate the mattress bag with air, and I sat inside.

I was going to use it my working space. Then I thought, this space itself is kind of interesting. I started experimenting with plastic bags of different thicknesses, using different kind of fans. I was using those plastics you get at Home Depot when you're painting to cover up the furniture. I would cut them and seal it into different shapes.

I started to use thinner and thinner plastics. They become more organic in their feel and the movement becomes more soft. That kind of started the process, just experimenting with these plastics and fan materials.

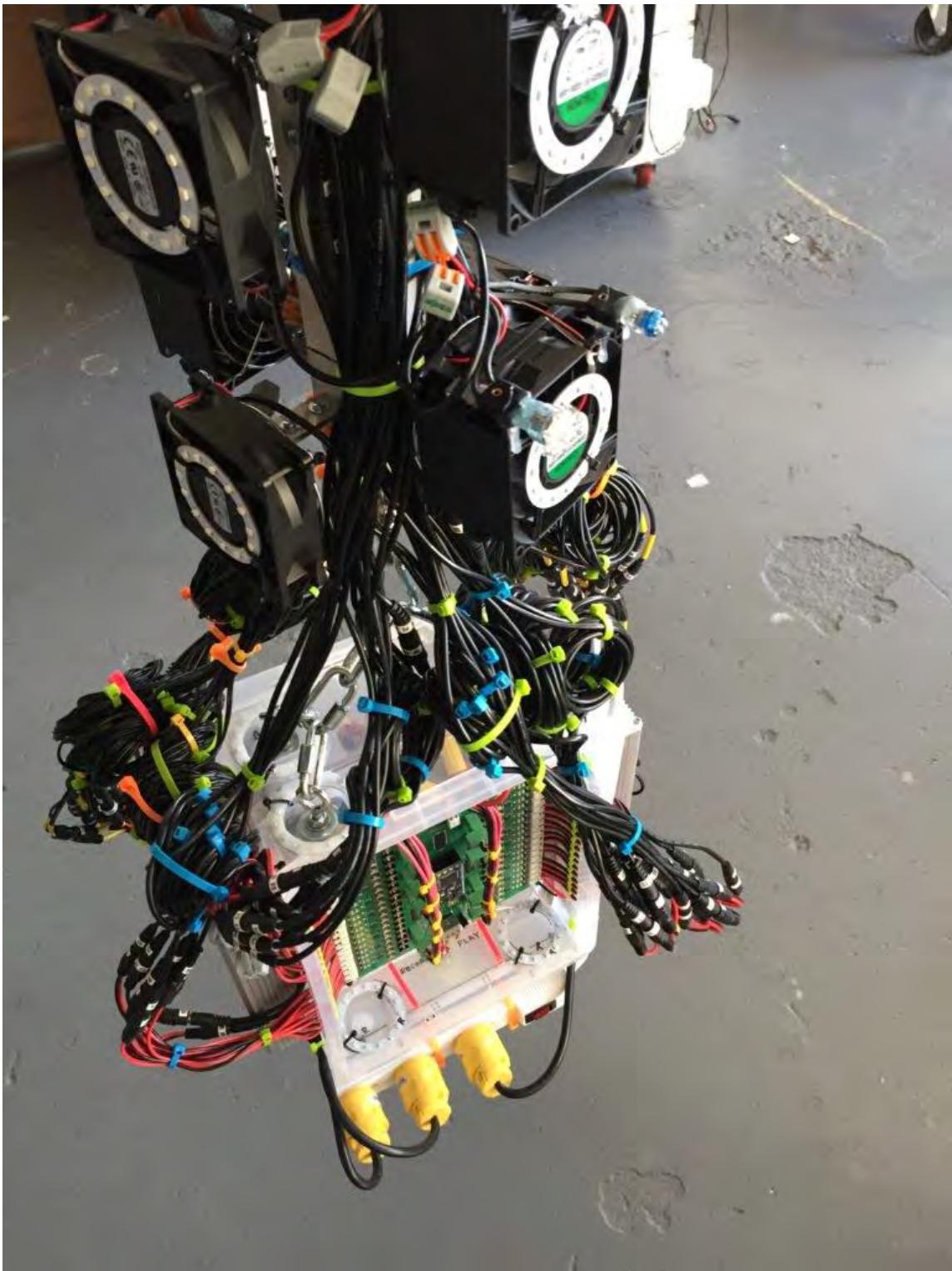


"Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang" at the Worcester Art Museum, installation view. Courtesy of Sarah Cascone.

How did you start animating your sculptures?

At first, I was using basic stuff, like Christmas light faders, a dual two-channel outlet that lets you plug in two different color lights. It alternates the channels to change the color.

I wanted to learn some physical computing, so I snuck into a college class and learned programming. I was able to use the programming method BASIC Stamp to start animating my work. That allowed for more variation of the speed and the rhythm, but I wanted to have more complexity and control of the movement. I was struggling to develop a new control board system for several years. Everything got very, very complicated.



A work from Shih Chieh Huang's "Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang" in progress. Courtesy of Shih Chieh Huang.

Then I found an app that is used for concerts and theater lighting. It was able to communicate with the board that I had been building, so I didn't have to write code any more. I can visually see how everything

is controlled; each tentacle, each bag. That really changed how I was able to choreograph these movements for the Worcester show.



Shih Chieh Huang in his studio. Courtesy of Shih Chieh Huang.

How did you design the installation for the Worcester Art Museum, and did you face any challenges in bringing your vision for the show to life?

Sometimes a museum has certain regulations about what you able to do with the space. Here, we were able to darken the ceiling, which was very high. There were two beams on the ceiling where I wasn't allowed to hang things. I had to work around that, avoiding the tracking lights and the alarm systems. There was a lot of back and forth in the planning process.

I wanted to do something very tall so the viewer would really respond to the height of the structure when they're standing next to it, so I started making these vertical pieces. Then I had to rebuild a lot of them to make sure I could ship everything and still have the crate fit through the museum's entrances. I redesigned some pieces so I could disassemble the control board system from the body.

One piece has liquid, and I was a little bit hesitant do that because the show is four months long and liquid does evaporate. So I did some modifications, and it should be able to run this long without a refilling—but I'll find out.



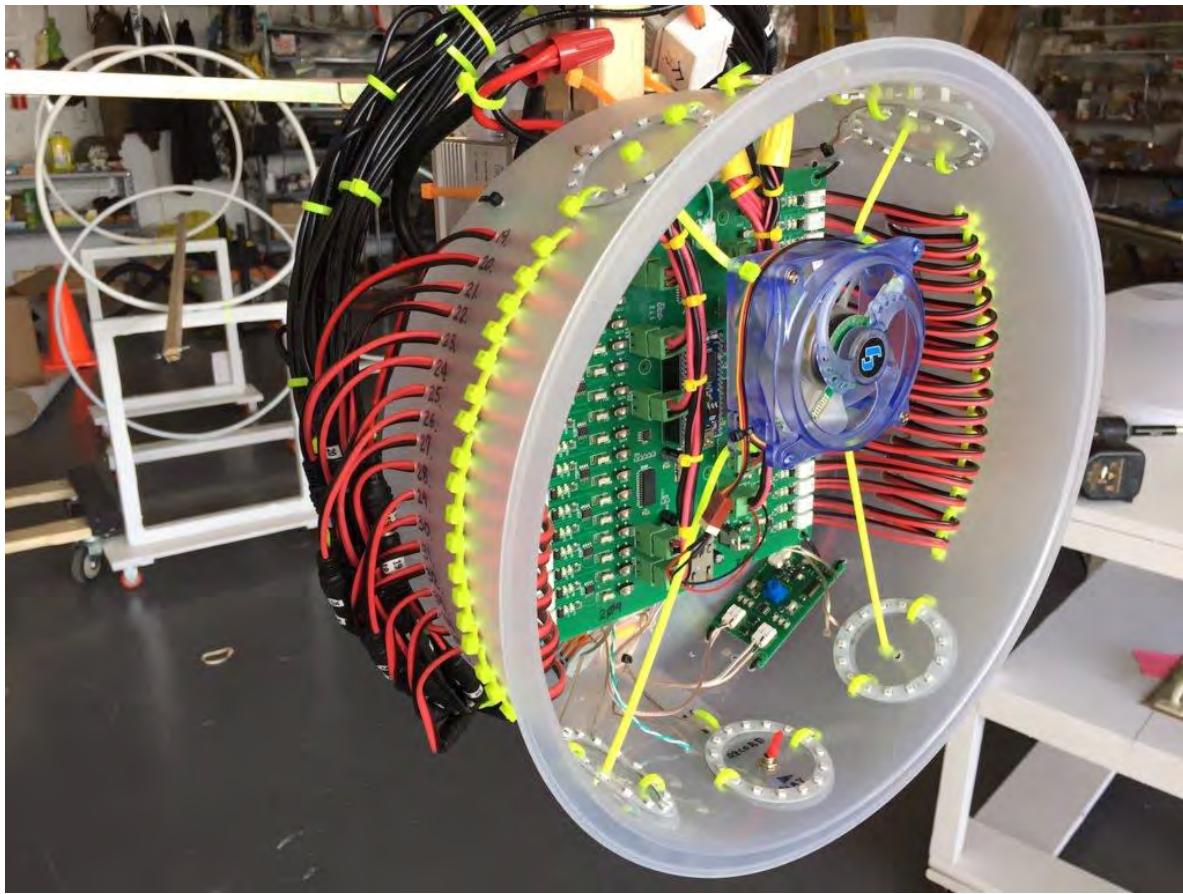
“Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang” at the Worcester Art Museum, installation view. Courtesy of Shih Chieh Huang.

What was the inspiration for *Reusable Universes*?

[As I worked on “Reusable Universes”], I was watching a lot of these galaxy Milky Way-type of documentaries. In space, a lot of star clusters are joined together. I started thinking about if you clustered the sculptures together, you’d walk into this dark space and it would be almost like this creature, this structure, that rises out of the depths.

When you first look at it, you’re like, “Is that a creature?” And then as you get closer you realize it’s plastic bags and computer fans. So it becomes more of an experience of moving through the gallery.

Sometimes when I look at these pieces, I just see trash bags and fans, controlled in a certain way so that they’re moving; it’s very straightforward. But sometimes, I think that’s a cell, heart, a lung, a sea creature. I don’t want to tell the viewer how they should be looking.



A work from Shih Chieh Huang's "Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang" in progress. Courtesy of Shih Chieh Huang.

What is the significance of using these every day objects and transforming them so dramatically? Is your work a rumination on how our world has become more technologically advanced? A way to recuse things that have been overlooked?

I use these materials because I find them very familiar, very friendly. I collect a lot of these materials when I am traveling. In my studio there's a wall of the stuff I collect from different dollar stores. I feel like I relate to those objects a little more.

I was invited to do a project in upstate New York, and I remember walking through these trails and seeing the garbage left behind by hikers. I thought it would be interesting to put cooling fans into these bags and have them breathe. I set it on a timer so that as people were walking by, they would see these pile of garbage in the woods, and one of the bags would just come alive and start breathing.

I thought that was really funny—[the idea] that people had thrown these bags away and now they had come alive, and had kind of taken over the world. And then I started thinking, What happens when these bags grow up. Do they become more complex things?



"Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang" at the Worcester Art Museum, installation view. Courtesy of Shih Chieh Huang.

I guess I'm not very conscious of thinking about recycling. I think more about repurposing, using up a material. If I'm thirsty I buy a bottle, and I drink the water and now I have the bottle. If I use that bottle, then it's more [like] recycling.

But sometimes I'll see a bottle and I like the shape of it, and I'll get that bottle and drink the liquid because I want to use that bottle. I do notice though, the prettier the bottle, the worst the drink tastes. They spent a lot of time designing that bottle because the drink inside is not very tasty!

"Origin Story" is a column in which we examine the backstory of an individual work of art.

"Reusable Universes: Shih Chieh Huang" is on view at the Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury Street, Worcester, Massachusetts, June 24–November 12, 2017.

The Washington Post

Bits and pieces from the dollar store create an artistic universe at Reston gallery

By Mark Jenkins October 12



In “Synthetic Transformations,” bright LEDs flash and transparent plastic tentacles gesture. It creates what looks like a floating realm of phosphorescent fish and cybernetic octopuses. (Shih Chieh Huang)

Jenkins, Mark. “Bits and pieces from the dollar store create an artistic universe at Reston gallery.” *The Washington Post*, October 12 2016.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/museums/bits-and-pieces-from-the-dollar-store-create-an-artistic-universe-at-reston-gallery/2016/10/12/f7dfbad8-8cb6-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eed4_story.html

The many windows of the Greater Reston Arts Center's gallery have been blacked out, and the interior is as dim as the ocean's lower depths. Bright red and green LEDs flash and transparent plastic tentacles gesture in the darkness, as if "Synthetic Transformations" were a floating realm of phosphorescent fish and cybernetic octopuses.

To creator Shih Chieh Huang, however, the low-light installation also evokes something else: a Taipei night market.

Huang's family emigrated from Taiwan to Southern California when he was 12, about 30 years ago, and the artist now lives in New York. But he says he remembers those neon-lighted markets as a place to buy cheap toys and electronic gizmos of the sort he repurposes. He started cobbling together such purchases, with no idea how they worked.

He recalls that he learned the difference between AC and DC by plugging incompatible devices into each other and causing an explosion. "I break a lot of things," Huang said in a recent interview. "The things you see here are the successes of all those failures."

Today, Huang buys his raw ingredients at dollar stores, Home Depot and Bed, Bath and Beyond. His LEDs are meant for automobile and motorcycle lights, and the pumps that make some of his concoctions move come from medical supply stores. Plastic bags are carefully chosen for their thickness, because thinner membranes seem more organic.

He says he likes commonplace items because they're "more personal."

Huang also has frequented spots that are more exclusive than suburban strip malls. He spent several months studying

bioluminescent ocean creatures at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. "I was looking for anything that glowed," he said.

Although Huang uses over-the-counter materials, he rarely comments directly on their commercial origins. One exception is a machine that cleverly recirculates green-tinted fluid, using bottles marked with the Smartwater logo. In this universe, even water can have artificial intelligence.



In a 2013 piece, Huang worked with Venetian glass masters to modify a Renaissance-style chandelier with household electronics. (Shih Chieh Huang)

Some of Huang's inventions use computers and video screens, as well as motion sensors so they react to visitors' presence. When there are no visitors in the darkened space, the machines go to sleep.

That makes Huang's little cosmos much more humancentric than the real one outside. No needs to worry whether a falling tree will make a noise if no one is there to hear it. If no one is watching Huang's world, there's nothing to watch.

The declining prices of LEDs and processors allow the artist to keep expanding his electronic menagerie and to construct devices that would have been too expensive 20 years ago, when Huang realized he was an artist rather than a **guy who was “just making stuff.”**

The shrinking size of electronic components, along with Huang's move into a tiny New York studio, pushed him to make his improvised devices more compact and contained — “more creaturelike,” in his words. Spread out in the Reston gallery's main room, the devices bob like organisms in primordial soup.

To Huang, the human body is a machine, as is nature. Using video, he incorporates bits of humanity into his inventions: an image of his navel, symbolic of birth and corporeal connection, or sets of eyes he calls **“extracted” from the faces that contain them.**

Perhaps because he works with so many mass-produced items, Huang considers a video eye just another universal part to be swapped in or out. When people ask him why he uses specifically Asian eyes, he replies, **“I see them as eyes, not Asian eyes.”**

One piece features a video of Huang's eyes, and there's something eerie about them. That's because they're the same eye, doubled, rather

his actual set of two. Such trickery wouldn't be so disturbing if the objects were bottles, lights or microprocessors. But people are highly attuned — too much so, perhaps — to small deviations and incongruities in human appearance.

It seems we're not quite ready to become cyborgs with interchangeable parts, replaceable at the dollar store. The human body may be just another machine, but humans still perceive themselves as different. Even in an increasingly synthetic universe, there's an intense attachment to what we have been taught is natural.

IF YOU GO
Synthetic Transformations

Greater Reston Arts Center, 12001 Market St., Reston. 703-471-9242. restonarts.org.

Dates: Through Nov. 19.

Admission: Free.



OCULA REPORT

Top 5 Booths at The Armory Show 2016

Brienne Walsh New York 11 March 2016

Walsh, Brienne. "Top 5 Booths at The Armory Show 2016." *Ocula*, March 11 2016.
<https://ocula.com/magazine/reports/top-5-booths-at-the-armory-show-2016/>



Image: Installation view, Kapwani Kiwanga at Galerie Jerome Poggi and Galerie Tanja Wagner. Courtesy Galerie Tanja Wagner.

Art fairs, like The Armory Show, get a bad rap for being poor places to actually see art, and there's good reason for it. Understandably, galleries are focused on sales—TEFAF Art Market Report 2015 found that art fairs drive 40% of annual gallery revenue—and as a result, dealers tend to present a mish-mash of available works by their top selling artists rather than attempting to establish a curatorial perspective. There is also the issue of the sheer volume of works displayed—at The Armory Show 2016, 205 galleries from 36 countries presented booths. It would be impossible to see it all, let alone appreciate it all.

The booths that stood out at The Armory Show 2016, which ran from 3 to 6 March, tended to either focus in depth on a single artist, or to present works in mediums not usually seen

at an art fair, where photographs, paintings and works on paper reign supreme. Below we round up our top five booths at The Armory Show 2016.

Shih Chieh Huang at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

If for no reason other than that it was really weird, dealers and visitors alike seemed to flock to, and even to hold meetings in, the dark box that was Ronald Feldman Fine Arts' booth. It contained *Disphotic Zone* (2016), an immersive installation created by Taiwanese artist Shih Chieh Huang. The booth was dominated by a large, chandelier-like cluster hanging from the ceiling which resembled a gigantic jellyfish, and lit the space in washes of neon colors. Created from plastic bags shaped like tentacles, discarded Evian water bottles, and colored lights, the sculpture inflated and deflated as if it were a marine creature floating through a sea of air.

As its name implies, the installation was meant to recreate the disphotic zone in the ocean, which is the area 650 feet beneath the surface where sunlight barely reaches, therefore making photosynthesis impossible. Instead, the murky waters are lit by bioluminescent objects, which Shih Chieh Huang recreated in his works, albeit with quotidian rather than organic materials. Along with the jellyfish chandelier, there was also an eighteen-foot metal rack from which hung spinning Evian plastic bottles containing glowing water, which looked like sculptures of crustaceans made by children, and a wall of circuit breakers that served the function of controlling the special effects in the box. They resembled sea anemones.

The installation represented something that booths at art fairs so rarely are—fun. If only to evoke the sort of child-like sense of wonder one feels at a natural history museum, it was worth it to linger for more than a few seconds.

Mario Pfeifer at KOW

Crowds also gathered around the booth hosted by Berlin gallery KOW, which displayed a double-channel video installation by German artist Mario Pfeifer. Alternating between close-up images of machines at work on an assembly line at a factory, and close up images of a group of black men rapping, the work resembled a music video created by a rap producer who had recently read Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. In fact, the footage mashed up the original music video for the song *Blacktivist* by the Brooklyn-based rap group the Flatbush ZOMBIES, which was released on September 11, 2015, and since has received

over 2.3 million hits on YouTube, and imagery Pfeifer shot at a 3-D gun manufacturing workshop in Austin, Texas, which aims to allow private citizens to create their own unregistered automatic weapons. The sound to the video was made available by gallery director Raphael Oberhuber, who handed out wireless headphones.

Even without the audio accompaniment, the message in the video was easy to read. Lyrics like '**You get a billion endorsements, and you give nothing back/I have nothing**,' were juxtaposed against texts describing the suit of a gun manufacturer against the United States government. The rappers flashed gold grilles and reenacted ISIS videos in between shots of guns slowly emerging from the assembly line. All of this was cut with sequences of police violence shot by body cameras. It read as an indictment of pop culture many fronts—**of the ‘new slavery’ of black males beholden to material goods as depicted in music videos, of the fetishisation of weapons by the gun industry, of the omnipresence of violence in media, and of the brutality of policing in America.**

Many booths presented works by black artists that commented on contemporary culture. Somehow, the video at KOW seemed to be the only one that was relevant. It confronted racism, police brutality, and the gun industry in a direct, unapologetic manner standing out from the more subtly charged—and subdued—works in the rest of the fair.



Image: Mario Pfeifer at KOW. Courtesy KOW.

Ruby Onyinyechi Amanze at Mariane Ibrahim Gallery

Which is not to say that subtlety didn't have its own beauty. In the Armory Focus section, which focused this year on artists working with an 'African perspective', a notable booth of nine large-scale works on paper by Ruby Onyinyechi Amanze immediately drew the eye with flashes of vibrant colors on compositions marked by expanses of blank space. Presented by Seattle-based Mariane Ibrahim gallery, the blank space in the works were themselves a sort of respite from the onslaught of noisy imagery one has to walk through to get to the Armory Focus section, which was located at the back of the fair.

Some background on the artist is necessary to access the symbolism in the compositions, which resemble collages created in the immediate aftermath of a lucid dream. Amanze was born in Nigeria in 1982, and moved soon after to the United Kingdom, where she spent 13 years before ending up in the United States. She feels her identity is thus unfixed, unattached to any one place. The figures in her work suggest an identity she has imagined for herself, one in which skin tones are not black or white, but rather, a mish-mash of patterns. This identity is not without problems—most of the figures Amanze draws are either deformed, disembodied, or in danger of floating into voids represented by large black squares and clouds of blurred ink.

10 Litres of Air [The Divers II] (2016), a 6 x 6 foot canvas created from graphite, ink, photo transfers, fluorescent acrylic and colored pencils, depicts a series of bodies, their skin either fluorescent yellow or marked by paisley pattern, slipping through the arms of a male figure bearing a leopard's head into a deep black void in the center of the composition. *I Sent You To Survey the World, and When You Did Not Return, I Came* (2016) repeats the theme of divers, only this time, they are seemingly being rescued by a sphinx-like figure floating across the void, leaving a trail of potted plants in her wake. The plants are the sign of life in a realm of nothingness—or the traces of domesticity shed in the quest for an identity. Either way, one gets the sense that in viewing the works, an intimate insight into the inner thoughts of Amaze's is potentially being presented.

Kapwani Kiwanga at Galerie Jerome Poggi and Galerie Tanja Wagner

Ontario-born, Paris-based artist Kapwani Kiwanga was the 2016 Commissioned Artist of the Armory, which meant that her work was everywhere at the fair: featured on the cover of the fair's catalogue, presented in *The Secretary's Suite*, installed in a dedicated booth on Pier 92 showing a single channel video installation, and sold in a limited edition screen

print whose proceeds benefited the Museum of Modern Art.



Image: Kapwani Kiwanga, *The Secretary's Suite*, 2016. Mixed-media installation, 23:00 min. Courtesy Galerie Tanja Wagner.

That didn't take away from the impact of a presentation of her work in the Armory Focus section of the fair, in a booth by Paris-based Galerie Jerome Poggi, and Berlin-based Galerie Tanja Wagner. Admittedly, some of the power came in the display, which read like a dedicated solo exhibition in a sea of mega galleries flexing their muscles.

The booth focused on sisal, a species of agave native to southern Mexico, and grown in countries such as Brazil, China, and East Africa, that is traditionally used in the production of ropes, paper, cloth, and carpets. Recently, it has also been produced on a larger scale for use in the building industry as plaster reinforcement, and in the car industry for plastic products. By displaying sisal in its natural form in the context of an exhibition, Kiwanga elevated the commonly used and cheap material, which in its basic form looks like hair, into a tool with which to create valuable sculptures.

She didn't have to do much to transform the material. The kinky blonde fibers hung in large masses on metal appendages and between lengths of wire, as if they were sheared wool left to dry in the sun after being washed off, or wigs carefully put out of harms way by a group of women swimming in some invisible dimension beyond the fair. On the floor was a plinth upon which was placed documents that explained the history of sisal's

industrialisation; it also read as a nod to Kapwani's own research into the matter, as well as her training as an anthropologist at McGill University in Montreal.

Based on your frame of reference, the works told a story without having to do much of anything—on visual evidence alone, they read as both materials derived from Greek mythology, or symbols of some dark, oppressive history of enforced labor. In their implied—but open—narrative, they begged more than just a passing glance.



Image: Kapwani Kiwanga, *White gold II*, 2016. Waxed steel, sisal fiber. Approx. 175 x 170 cm. Courtesy Galerie Tanja Wagner.

Ryan Mrozowski and Julia Bland at On Stellar Rays

Although there was nothing in either the works or the setting that made such a comparison likely, the dual presentation of works by Ryan Mrozowski and Julia Bland by New York-based gallery On Stellar Rays read something like a cloister in a medieval convent. *Untitled (Orange)* (2016) by Mrozowski, a figurative painting of verdant green leaves and glowing oranges, was the fragrant fruit tree in the center courtyard. *Swan's Island* (2016) by Bland, a woven tapestry of canvas, silk, wool, linen thread, wax, fabric dye and oil paint, resembled a stained glass tableau behind the altar of a chapel. *Untitled (dot)* (2016) by Mrozowski, an inlaid plywood and stain composition of white dots on a black background, a representation of the night sky as yet unpolluted by the industrial revolution.

Reading so much into the works might be a mistake, especially something so romantic, but there was something beautiful about the raw simplicity and craft in the presentations by young artists in a tiny booth tucked into a deep corner of the fair. In such a setting, one **can't take for granted the moments when art work actually evokes anything beyond name recognition.** —[O]



Image: Julia Bland, *Swan's Island*, 2016. Canvas, silk, wool, linen thread, wax, fabric dye, and oil paint. 100 x 77 inches. Courtesy On Stellar Rays.

HYPERALLERGIC

Finding Jesus, “YOUR MOM,” and Other Surprises at the 2016 Armory Show

Benjamin Sutton March 2, 2016

Sutton, Benjamin. “Finding Jesus, “YOUR MOM,” and Other Surprises at the 2016 Armory Show.”

Hyperallergic, March 2 2016.
<http://hyperallergic.com/280124/finding-jesus-your-mom-and-other-surprises-at-the-2016-armory-show/>



The entrance to the Armory Show (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

The 2016 edition of the Armory Show art fair opens to the public tomorrow, but already during today’s preview Piers 92 and 94 were crawling with collectors, curators, and critics. On the latter pier, devoted

to contemporary art, the usual smattering of US and international galleries was holding court with the usual array of high-end goods, from the token Anish Kapoor selfie vessel (“Alice – Double Circle,” 2014, in the Lisson Gallery booth) and the compulsory Yayoi Kusama pumpkin sculpture (at the David Zwirner booth) to the requisite wall-filling Kehinde Wiley painting (three, in fact, the largest being “Equestrian Portrait of Philip III,” 2016, in the Sean Kelly booth).



Kehinde Wiley’s “Equestrian Portrait of Philip III” (2016) in the Sean Kelly booth at the 2016 Armory Show (click to enlarge)

The aforementioned showpieces, in fact, are among the first works visitors see upon coming through the fair’s main entrance. After that, as ever, venturing down the Armory Show’s interminable aisles offers the promise of pleasant surprises amid numbing visual overstimulation.

(...)

A few booths away, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts has given over its entire space to “Disphotic Zone,” a magical installation by **Shih Chieh Huang**. Glowing bottles line the walls of the dark, enclosed space, at the center of which a large jellyfish-like sculpture with blinking innards and limbs of clear plastic hangs, swells, and shimmers. Whether foreshadowing a harmonious melding of marine life with

manmade devices or offering a glimpse of the surreal cyborgs that will come to wipe us out, the installation makes novel and theatrical use of materials, ensuring that it's one of the fair's most memorable works.



(excerpt from longer article)



Martin, Lucy. "The Armory Show Gallery Picks: Final Selection." *Elephant*, date unknown, 2016. <http://elephantmag.com/armory-gallery-picks-day-one/>

The Armory Show Gallery Picks: Final Selection

Text by Lucy Martin

The three galleries that caught our attention at The Armory Show this week all have one thing in common, a bold and highly playful use of colour. Whether showing groups of artists who clash in the just the right way, or curating solo shows of work by artists with a renowned love for all that is flashy, these galleries know how to shout above the crowd.

GRIMM Gallery, Amsterdam

GRIMM's artists have been selected eclectically; peering through Dustin Yellin's vibrant glass sculptures, filled with repeated collages, Dana Lixenberg's black and white portrait series, *Imperial Courts* can be seen. Nick Van Woert's *Among The Sierra Nevada Mountains* — with an extensive list of materials that includes cat litter, concrete mix and Muscle Milk chocolate lean muscle protein powder — adds a further burst of colour.

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

In Ronald Feldman's darkened booth, hangs Shih Chieh Huang's latest creation. His use of mundane, household appliances is anything but everyday; looking not too dissimilar to a deep-sea creature from David Attenborough's Planet Earth, *T-26* is a kinetic, almost alien form. A process of deconstruction, re-scrambling and a re-construction can be witnessed through the combination of movement and light, essential to bringing the amalgamation, resembling a spider, octopus and angler fish, to life.

Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin

Galerie Guido W Baudach's space is floored with large, bright pink tiles, that are laid in grid formation, creating a powerful effect with the gold-laden works of Swiss artist Yves Scherer, who is enjoying a solo show at the booth. A nude sculpture of Emma Watson sits

at the centres of the booth, alongside a water tank sculpture laid on a fur rug (a pair of tracksuit legs and bright socks appearing from the water), and various wall hung works.

The Armory Show



DANA LIXENBERG Wilteysha, 1993 Imperial Courts 1993-2015 Gelatine silver print 50 x 40 cm Edition of 5 + 1 AP



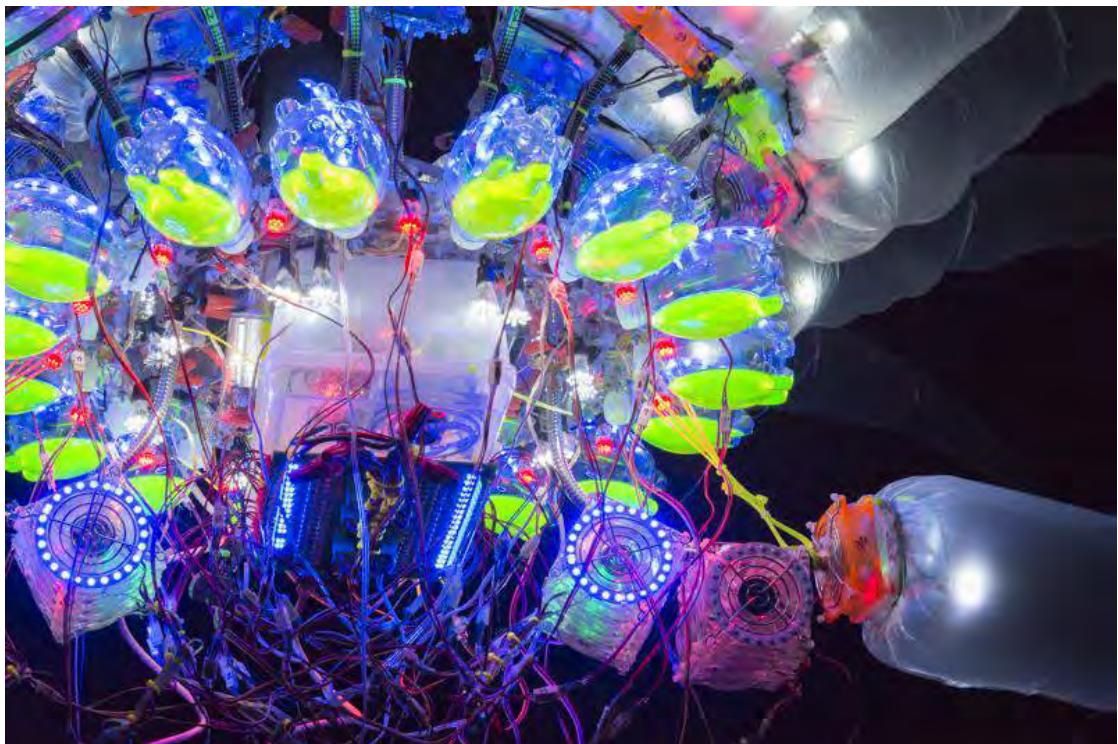
NICK VAN WOERT Among The Sierra Nevada Mountains, Albert Bierstadt 1868 2014 Kelsyus Deluxe Floating Lounger, Dove Deep Moisture Nourishing Body Wash, Gatorade G Series Frost Glacier Freeze, Fresh Step Cat Litter, Westpac Materials Hopper-Tex ceiling texture, Rapid Set Stucco Mix, Sakrete Blacktop Patch, Sakrete concrete mix, Muscle Milk chocolate lean muscle protein powder, Granite rock taken from the site of the Donner Party with Donner Party Keepsake Coin, Cat's Pride 100% recycled paper cat litter, Sun triple clean laundry detergent, Nutrition53 Lean1 chocolate powder, Amazing silica crystal cat litter, Twinlab Vanilla Rush 100% whey fuel protein powder, Dove Men Care clean comfort 1/4 deodorant, Nature's Own potassium cubes, Westpac Materials Fast Set Lite 5 setting compound, Tang Orange drink mix, Country Time Lemonade drink mix, Lake Tahoe stickers, Lake Tahoe hat with Lake Tahoe Star Wars parody T- Shirt with Beach ball, American Flag with pole, Chainsaw Bear sculpture, Mom's shovel, old rusty beer cans, Lake Tahoe bike map with Lake Tahoe tourist map, White fence post, Rusty roadside post, Concrete rocks, Assorted aluminum beer and soda cans, Pine Cones 203.2 x 121.9 x 121.9 cm | 80 x 48 x 48 inches



Dustin Yellin Untitled 2015 Glass, Collage, Acrylic Three pieces of size: 59 x 42.5 x 59 cm | 23.25 x 16.75 x 23.25 inches



GRIMM Gallery installation view



Ronald Feldman, T-26, 2014, mixed media, 10 x 10 x 10 feet (when fully extended) Photo: Casey Dorobek. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.



Ronald Feldman, T-26, 2014, mixed media, 10 x 10 x 10 feet (when fully extended) Photo: Casey Dorobek. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.



Staff. "CAA at 2016 the Armory Show." College Art Association, March 10 2016. <http://www.collegeart.org/news/2016/03/10/caa-at-2016-the-armory-show/>

CAA AT 2016 THE ARMORY SHOW

posted by CAA



Last week marked [The Armory Show's](#) annual takeover of New York City, bringing galleries and artists from all over the globe to Piers 92 and 94 on the banks of the Hudson River from March 3 to 6. Packed with exhibitors, artworks, and art enthusiasts, The Armory Show offered extensive visual offerings, alongside special projects and programming. CAA staff visited The Armory, taking in many of the noteworthy displays and activities on site.

An interactive installation hosted by [Artsy](#) stood at the entrance to The Armory. The booth was covered by the artist Douglas Coupland's *Slogans for the 21st Century*, which also adorned tote bags distributed to visitors. Statements such as "I miss my pre-internet brain," "You and your selfie are merging," and "I can feel the money leaving my body" offered wry commentary on the intersection of art, commerce, and technology at a site where these issues merged in a particularly potent way.

Also at the Artsy booth was *Deep Face: Communicate with your future self*, a photo booth that created "de-recognition" portraits of visitors. The photo—emailed to participants in a four-frame GIF format—features a black-and-white portrait overlaid with multicolored shapes. Coupland's deliberate marking of faces aims to disrupt increasingly common facial recognition technologies, which add another layer of complexity to our relationship to the digital age.

Technology and art also merged in many of the artworks on display. The artist [Shih Chieh Huang](#) transformed the Ronald Feldman Fine Arts booth into a psychedelic under-the-seascape. In the darkened booth, an electronic jellyfish-like creature moved its tentacles and flashed its light in rhythmic patterns. Made from plastic bags, plastic bottles, highlighters, and other everyday objects, *Disphotic Zone* merges the artist's studies of bioluminescent creatures with childhood memories and an interest in the mutability of perception.

More traditional artistic methods of painting and sculpture were also on view at The Armory. Especially dazzling was Barkley L. Hendricks' *Photo Bloke*(2016) on display at the Jack Shainman Gallery booth, a large-scale oil and acrylic painting of a man in an electric pink suit and white sneakers standing before a similarly pink background. Adam Henry's minimal, rainbow-hued canvases at the Brussels-based Meessen de Clercq's booth were a delight to witness.

Other highlights included Sisley Xafa's sculpture *Wyatt and Sky* (2016), a life-sized mannequin in a cowboy hat lying face-down on the floor of Blain Southern's booth with balloons tied tightly around his arms, legs, and torso, and the



well-curated installation of works by Lygia Clark, Irma Blank, and Nobuo Sekie at Alison Jacques Gallery. Kapwani Kiwanga's sculptures made out of steel and sisal fibers were intriguingly tactile.

This year's fair also featured a focus on design, tasking designers to create site-specific works that were on displays in Piers 92 and 94. Sung Jang's MOBI (2015), installed in the entrances to the stairwells connecting the two piers, completely transformed the usually mundane experience of moving between the two areas. *In 20 Steps* (2015–6) by Studio Drift, a moving installation made from glass tubes, wire, and steel hung suspended over a large lounge area like a breathing exoskeleton.

Beyond the art viewing and booth hopping, The Armory also plans forums, panels, and conversations for its annual visitors. This year's events included a section dedicated to *Focus: African Perspectives—Spotlighting Artistic Practices of Global Contemporaries*. Curated by Julia Grosse and Yvette Mutumba, *Focus: African Perspectives* included galleries from Africa, the work of African and African Diaspora artists, and a two-day symposium that brought together artists, gallerists, curators, and scholars for conversations. Panelists included El Anatsui, Kapwani Kiwanga, Kimberli Gant, Patrick Mudekereza, and others.



Alongside *Focus: African Perspectives* was Open Forum, a series of talks on modern and contemporary art, featuring curators, gallerists, artists, writers, and more. The range of topics covered by these panels included Andy Warhol, the role of design in contemporary art, and the future of art.

Especially lively was a conversation between Jerry Saltz, the senior art critic at *New York Magazine* and a prolific social media user, and Benjamin Genocchio, the executive director of The Armory Show. In "Like, Swipe and Double Tap: Visual Criticism in the Digital Age," Saltz and Genocchio discussed the power of social media and the ways in which it has changed the evolving field of art criticism as well as the art world at large. Saltz took care to underscore the importance of owning your own critical language, especially in an era when the traditional system of criticism has been disrupted.

Photo Captions



Sislej Xhafa, *Wyatt and Sky*, 2016, mannequin, helium balloons (artwork © Sislej Xhafa)

Barkley L. Hendricks, detail of *Photo Bloke*, 2016, oil and acrylic on linen, 72 x 48 in. (artwork © Barkley L. Hendricks)

Sung Jang, installation view of *MOBI*, 2015, Pier 92 and 94 stairwell entrances (artwork © Sung Jang)

Installation view of Alison Jacques Gallery's Booth at The Armory, 2016

ART SY

Gotthardt, Alexxa. "The 20 Best Booths at The Armory Show." Artsy, March 3 2016.
<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-the-20-best-booths-at-the-armory-show>

The 20 Best Booths at The Armory Show

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY ALEXXA GOTTHARDT
MAR 3RD, 2016 3:10 PM

Navigating The Armory Show's two long piers, spanning 208,000 square feet and showcasing 205 exhibitors (no wonder your feet hurt, right?), can be a dizzying process. Below, we've pounded the pavement for you, parsing out the 20 booths—from established galleries like London's Victoria Miro to risk-taking newcomers like Brazil's SIM Galeria—that you shouldn't miss on your tour around the fair's 2016 edition.

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

PIER 94, BOOTH 844

WITH WORKS BY SHIH CHIEH HUANG



Installation view of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts's booth at The Armory Show, 2016. Photo by Adam Reich for Artsy.

WHY YOU SHOULD STOP

Housed in one of the fair's few black-box booths, Shih Chieh Huang's fantastical installation—in which an octopus-like creature, crafted from whirring and blinking electronics, kryptonite-colored goo, and plastic bags, waves comically—and sometimes suggestively. It's an installation that poignantly confuses the wonder inspired by mysterious creatures and deep space with the mesmerizing effects of technology.

(excerpt)



WIRED CULTURE / EDI

Franklin, Oliver. "Deep-sea robots."
Wired UK, October 2014: 81-82.

PLAX

Movements are
pre-programmed using
microcontrollers



PHOTOGRAPHY: JORDAN HOLLENDER

Deep-sea robots

Taiwanese artist Shih Chieh Huang makes glowing robot sea creatures from everyday objects. The result: surreal sculptures that shimmer and pulse like jellyfish. To create each piece, Huang, 39, collects items, from discarded furniture to plastic bags and cheap sensors, in his Brooklyn studio. "I've always worked with household objects," says Huang, a TED



Fellow. "My favourite thing is going to 99-cent stores [around the world]. The things you find are always different." Computer cooling fans combined with plastic bags become billowing tentacles; Tupperware is transformed into an exoskeleton; highlighter ink dissolved in water becomes luminous body fluid. To make his creations react, Huang hacks together garage-door sensors, guitar tuners and light sensors, all connected to a basic microcontroller.

Trained at New York's School of Visual Arts, Huang credits his talent for electronics to the skills he learnt as a child in Taiwan. "When I first moved to the US, I was making a lot of extra-credit projects for school because my English wasn't very good," he recalls. "For science class, I would take apart

a remote-controlled car and try to build an [animated] molecule using the motors." Interested in bioluminescent wildlife, he completed a fellowship at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington to study deep-sea creatures; the resulting work was displayed at TED2014 in Vancouver.

He is now finalising a new series of works to debut early next year, including his first foray into wearable sculptures. "All of the objects I use could do more than they are made to," says Huang. "Everything has more than one function. I want people to keep their imaginations open." [OF messymix.com](http://messymix.com)

Huang draws inspiration from deep-sea creatures' evolutionary adaptations



APOCALYPSE WHEN?

Lost co-creator Damon Lindelof's new Sky Atlantic drama *The Leftovers* takes place three years after a Rapture-like event has taken two per cent of the population. As WIRED shows, the end isn't always as nigh as you might think. Stephen Kelly



Shih Chieh Huang Turns Trash Into Animatronic Sea Creatures

By Zach Sokol — Mar 31 2014



There's an infamous scene in *American Beauty* where video voyeur Ricky says the most beautiful thing he ever filmed was a plastic bag dancing in the wind. Installation artist and TED 2014 Fellow, Shih Chieh Huang, takes that logic and evolves it to the nth degree as he dissects seemingly worthless objects (plastic bags, old toys, computer parts) and rebuilds them into surreal "living" organisms with a bioluminescent flair.

Huang told The Creators Project that his work is inspired by the question, "What happens when a bag grows up?" and we may now have the answer. His immersive installations often look like a mixture between a junkyard and the deepest ocean floors, as machines resembling octopuses and angler fish swell and dance as if they were real. The evolutionary processes of oceans, single cell organisms, and land larva deeply inform his work, and the artist even completed a fellowship at the Smithsonian Museum Of Natural History to further his understanding of bioluminescent ocean life.

His interests in natural ecosystems and lifeforms eventually become large-scale, illuminated environments filled with wheezing plastic bags and animatronic creatures that would blow Jacques Cou-

-teau's mind. We are beyond stoked to watch his recent TED Talk in Vancouver when it goes up online.

The Creators Project was captivated with his creative repurposing of what seems like "junk," and spoke with Huang about his frequent use of toilet water regulators (the plastic floating thing inside the toilet water tank), and why animating trash can be so beautiful.

The Creators Project: How would you describe your art to someone who's totally unfamiliar?

Shih Chieh Huang: Seductive illuminated creatures made from common household materials, inspired by science and biology.

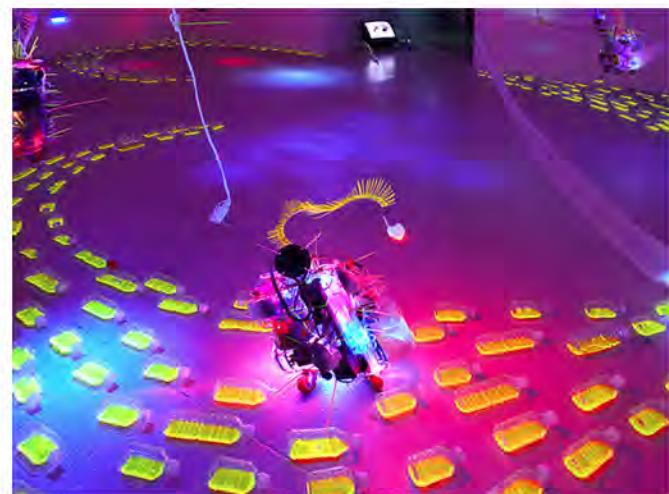
I watched one interview with you where you said your work is inspired by the question, "What happens when a bag grows up?" Can you elaborate on that? I think it's a beautiful idea but maybe you could explain it further in regards to the source of inspiration for your work?

The concept of "What happens when a bag grows up?" is inspired by looking at the developing stages of single cell organisms and developing process of ocean or land larva. While walking in the woods in a sculpture park one day looking for a site for a commissioned project, I came across an area where there was a pile of garbage bags left by a passerby. I decided to put computer cooling fans inside one of the garbage bag and set it on a timer, so when people pass by they would see one of the garbage bag breathing (inflating and deflating) as if the pile of garbage bag have mutated and begin to take on life of their own in the woods. This was the starting point of many creatures I made later on.

I started thinking that the single breathing bag was like a single cell organism, and what happens when a bag grows up? Does it become more complex? Does it start growing water bottles? Glow? Emit light? Do bags communicate with each other? Seduce each other? And how?

When you were a kid, did you make art out of found objects? What was the first project you created that reflects the type of work you're making today? What is the most unexpected object you've ever used in an installation?

When I was a kid I spent most of the time taking things apart and try to put them back together. I was curious to see how things work. Sometimes I would take apart my brother's toys and try to put them back together before he came home, but there were always some mystery parts left over, and I wasn't sure where they were supposed to go, or I had to do some modification.



I made many random things growing up, but I don't quite remember the very first project I created. One thing I do remember is all the different projects I made when I first immigrated to the US. I was terrible with exams and book reports so I was always doing extra credit projects to make up points in all the classes. I didn't have many resources for the materials so I would always use things around the house to make the projects: Modifying the motor from a remote control car to make an animated atom structure for science class; funky looking floppy, moving whales for english class (*Moby Dick*, related), and many more...

One of the unexpected objects I've used in my project is the toilet water regulator (the plastic floating thing inside the toilet water tank). My mom always asked me to fix and adjust things when I was growing up, so it is always on my mind when I think about methods of regulating water. I used it as a water sensor to activate a water pump and pump glowing liquid (highlighter pen ink, plus water) around in an installation.

I heard you once say that the look of each piece is determined by its function and that as you keep building, the aesthetics keep growing. Does that mean you do not sketch blueprints before working? Do the final installations ever reflect your initial idea?

Yes, each work's aesthetic does grow with its functional needs, but I do make rough sketches and drawings before and during the process. The sketches often don't look anything like the final result, but they help me visualize some of the circuitry and wire connections/layout. And sometimes they are just the fantasy/inspirational thoughts behind the concept.

The drawings also help me foresee some possible technical problems I might face during the making process. But even with the drawing, many technical challenges still occur in the process. I also make drawings and sketches after the work is finished. Often this is because the work is then put together with many other works in a larger installation and modification and program arrangements are needed—especially when I'm working with other people who are helping with installation. It helps them visualize the final result.





Can you tell me about some of the technology you use to bring your work to fruition? Other than sensors and fans, what other tech do you use?

Other than the sensors and fans, the "brain" in the control systems are Basic Stamp2 [a microcontroller with a small BASIC interpreter] and more recently DMX control systems [commonly used for stage/light controllers]. The DMX control system has more channels and its program can be stored on a micro SD card, flexible in size.

This system allows me to not only program sequences of movements/functions for display and playback, it can also be controlled live through iPhone, iPad or other mobile devices (with a downloaded app) via dedicated wifi signal. This gives me flexibility on how the work can be displayed and/or with performers with live "puppeteering" of the creatures. Both could be done as individual work or combined with large scale installation.

A lot of people note that your work reminds them of deep sea life. Does this aquatic interpretation stem from any place in particular?

I did an artist research fellowship at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum, working with marine biologists and looking at bioluminescent organism in the ocean. I was inspired by many of the creatures found in the deep ocean and the life forms that live around the region where light can no longer reach, called the "Twilight Zone." It's a very cool place, many strange things!

I do need to clarify that I'm not trying to recreate these sea creatures. One of the concepts I learned and was fascinated by is that many of the bioluminescent creatures did not grow "new" light organs. The light organs are often modified/evolved from a pre-existing organ, like a mutated dorsal fin infected by bioluminescent bacteria (ex. lanternfish). The idea of taking existing objects, merging them and making something new and magical is wonderful.

Your installations are immersive worlds, of sorts. How did you translate this to a TED speech that was verbal focused? Did you include photos, videos, or did you actually bring parts of your installation on stage?

My work is visually based and its not easy to describe with words. During the TED fellow talk I presented video of my working process, documentation and I brought one creature to the stage so audience can get a sense of the work I do.

If you could create any installation without financial or spatial restrictions, what would you like to build?

It would be a catalyst to speed up the evolutionary process of many creatures and the expansion of their environments. An environment without borders, and a diverse community with different creatures evolved in ways that they would have more developed brains, sensory perception of their environment, sound, body, and mating functions. They would interact, adapt, and integrate with human bodies both mentally and physically.

What upcoming work do you have on deck?

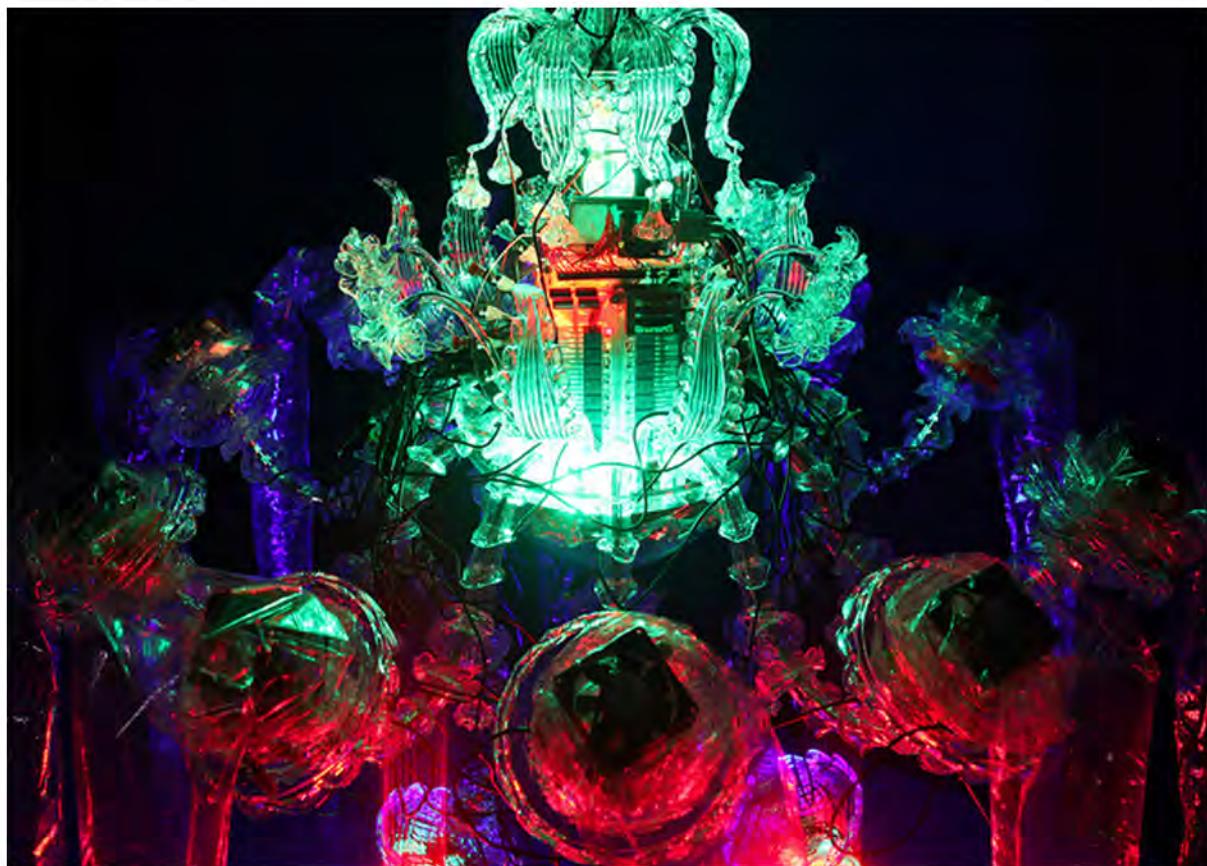
I'm currently working on a grant project with funding help from Creative Capital. There are few group exhibitions that just opened this week and another next week in Japan and Australia.

Images via <http://www.ted.com/profiles/2231807/fellow>

See more of Shih Chieh Huang's work on his website: www.messymix.com

And visit TED for more information on his recent talk in Vancouver.

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Herriman, Kate. "Charged: Shih Chieh Huang." Cool Hunting, April 17, 2014. <http://www.coohunting.com/culture/charged-shih-chieh-huang>

Charged: Shih Chieh Huang

A discussion with the 2014 TED Fellow and sculptor on his work that blends technology and sculpture - Kate Herriman, 17 April 2014



Since Marcel Duchamp and his bicycle wheel (and urinal), countless artists have included daily objects into their work. There may only be one, though, who uses them to create bioluminescent "living" organisms. Taiwanese-American artist Shih Chieh Huang's unique approach to sculpture stems from his fascination with the intersection of technology and the natural world. A recently minted 2014 TED Fellow best known for his large-scale public installations, Huang's dynamic work brings the viewer into a fantastical world where trash bags, plastic toys and computer parts become "living" creatures that breathe, spin, fly and light up the darkness.

Huang's animatronic sculptures display both his mechanical prowess as well as his ability to straddle the line between aesthetician and engineer. While working with marine biologists as an artist fellow at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in 2007, Huang was inspired by bioluminescent organisms from the deep sea—those shape-shifting beauties that illuminate the oceans' Twilight Zone-like regions. The artist was struck by the commonalities between the animals' mutative evolutions and his own creative process.

With his latest installation at the Amsterdam Light Festival earlier this winter, Huang traded a gallery and its white walls for a network of trees. Floating between the branches, his whimsical structures looked even more life-like; further collapsing the boundaries between nature, art and tech. Here, the artist discusses the evolution of his work, what it's like developing brains for his sculptures and how art can seduce.



Technology plays a crucial part in creating your art. Do you see it as a tool or as a medium onto itself?

I see technology as a medium like red or blue paint a painter would use in their painting. My work focuses on taking common ordinary materials, including software and apps, and transforming them into magical experiences. I don't view these materials as technology; they are these common things we use today, easy to access and obtain and most importantly they are personal and sometimes intimate.

When beginning a new piece, where does the inspiration come from?

Inspiration comes from many different unexpected places. Sometimes walking around on the street or in the woods. For instance, while walking in the woods one day, I came across an area where there was a pile of garbage bags left by a passerby. I decided to put computer cooling fans inside one of the garbage bag and set it on a timer, so when people pass by, they would see one of the garbage bags breathing—inflate and deflate—as if the pile of garbage bags mutated and began to take on a life of their own in the woods. This was the starting point of many creatures I made later on. I start by thinking of the single breathing bag, like a single-cell organism. What happens when a bag grows up? [Does it] become more complex?



You often use found objects in your work. With the movement towards sustainable design, how do you see your art fitting into these larger ideas?

My work does fit into the idea of sustainable design in some ways, but it also doesn't fit in some ways. I see my work undergoing some evolutionary selection process at this moment. The works do eliminate some negative environmental impact, and they are respectful of environmental and social differences at this moment, but what is still unknown is if the works generate long-term relationships between user and object.

What are you working on now?

I am creating a more evolved "brain" for my creatures, which is inspired by biology. Technically, this new system gives the work more functionality, and at the same time allows me to not only program sequences of movements for display, but it can also be controlled live through an iPhone, iPad or other mobile devices. These more evolved creatures will be part of a new project, an interactive visual and sound environment where seduction becomes a form of play and exploration.

Are there any innovations or new technologies that you are particularly excited about right now?

I am really excited that many technologies are becoming more affordable, abundant and accessible. More and more varieties are appearing, in mobile devices, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, apps, visual programming and probably more will pop out after this interview. That's how exciting it is!

Lead image courtesy of Janus van den Eijnden, all other images courtesy of Shih Chieh Huang



Ko, Hanae. "'Synthetic Seduction,' Shih Chieh Huang." *ArtAsiaPacific*, 2013.

"SYNTHETIC SEDUCTION" SHIH CHIEH HUANG

WEB EXCLUSIVE BY HANAE KO
YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS



SHIH CHIEH HUANG, installation view of "Synthetic Seduction" at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. Photo by Phocasso/J.W. White. Courtesy YBCA.

Peering into a dark room on the second level of San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, visitors were met with a seemingly random array of junk-like objects, hanging from the ceiling and placed on the floor. Stepping closer, the objets d'art came to life, emitting a mélange of neon colors and mechanic sounds, enchanting the space with their audiovisual eccentricity. The eclectic ensemble was part of "Synthetic Seduction," the solo exhibition of Taiwanese artist Shih Chieh Huang. Featuring bright sculptural works, the show explored the mechanism of bioluminescence—the production of light by living organisms—as seen in deep-sea creatures such as jellyfish and squid.

The main installation was EX-DD-06 (2006), which comprises assemblages of plastic bags, bottles and fly swatters, as well as lights, fans, motion sensors and computer motherboards. Each cluster hung from the ceiling like a cyborg jellyfish; three large ones dominated the exhibition space, but smaller ones were scattered throughout the room. One of the larger elements, which has big, translucent tentacles spilling forth, hung above a floor contraption that resembles a giant sea anemone. The floor piece, which also features sprouting tentacles, houses a mechanical apparatus that operated the installation, and is surrounded by a series of plastic-bag-wrapped light fixtures. The many lights constantly changed colors—pink, green, purple, yellow, blue—and the bags inflate and deflate as if alive.

One of the other two large clusters, which hung on opposite sides of the central element, houses a small video screen implanted between its tentacles and displaying a grotesque pair of human eyes. Garishly made-up with neon yellow and pink eyeliner, the eyes are inverted and crossed, giving the impression of derangement. When approached, they awake, blinking and shifting as the rest of the installation lights up and produces a whirring sound. Such watchful eyes are disturbing at first, yet one cannot help but be intrigued by the eerie, anthropomorphic quality that they lend to the mechanical installation.



SHIH CHIEH HUANG, installation view of "Synthetic Seduction" at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. Photo by Phocasso/J.W. White. Courtesy YBCA.



SHIH CHIEH HUANG, installation view of "Synthetic Seduction" at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. Photo by Phocasso/J.W. White. Courtesy YBCA.

Less inspiring was a separate video piece played in fast-forward, which documented the making of EX-DD-06 by Huang and his assistants in his studio. Here, it is revealed that the aforementioned pair of eyes is Huang's own, and the artist explains the technical manipulation he used to create the uncanny effect. Though this behind-the-scenes glimpse is illuminating, ultimately the exposition of the works' mechanisms and "tricks" undermines the installation's sense of mystery.

Numerous sketches of EX-DD-06 also accompanied the exhibition, unframed and pasted directly on the wall. Some of these cryptic digital renderings and blueprints, as well as drawings scanned from Huang's sketchbooks, are technical and near-scientific, while others are humorous, lurid and fantastical. The hand-drawn sketches range from whimsical jellyfish and frogfish to futuristic hybrid sea-monsters and graphic renderings of human genitalia. These drawings provide a fascinating look into the conceptualization of Huang's phantasmagoria.

Bioluminescence is utilized by certain marine organisms to hunt for prey and defend against predators, as well as to attract reproductive mates. In "Synthetic Seduction," Huang, staying true to his cited inspiration, employed similar means to attract the visitor's attention. His playful and hypnotic mechanical installations, which resemble creatures floating in the deep sea, effectively "seduced" viewers to engage with, and reflect on, his interpretation of a unique evolutionary phenomenon.

Synthetic Seduction was on view at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts from March 1–July 7, 2013.