

“The Altersea Opera: A Captivating Journey of Myth at the Nordic Pavilion”

As the misty tendrils of imagination unfurl over the vast ocean, a captivating narrative emerges from the Nordic Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Here, artist Lap-See Lam invites us to traverse realms both real and fantastical aboard the spectral dragon ship of The Altersea Opera.

At the heart of Lam’s creation lies a tale of existential exploration, a poignant quest for belonging amidst the currents of displacement. The protagonist, a creature of both water and land, invokes the sea goddess Ma-Zhou, inadvertently summoning a dragon ship that transcends the boundaries of time and space. This enigmatic vessel becomes the vessel for a journey imbued with myth, magic, and the ever-present yearning for home.

Photo: Mattias Lindbäck/Moderna Museet

Conceived by Lap-See Lam and brought to life through a collaboration with curator Asrin Haidari and artist Kholod Hawash, The Altersea Opera unfolds as a multi-modal

installation, a symphony of visual and auditory wonder. Composer Tze Yeung Ho's ethereal score, blending Baroque ornamentation with diverse instruments, sets the tone for the voyage, punctuated by haunting lullabies and poetic verses echoing the artists' multilingual backgrounds.

As visitors step into the Nordic Pavilion, they are enveloped by the essence of a dragon ship, inspired by the Floating Restaurant Sea Palace – a majestic vessel with a storied past, now resting in a remote boatyard in the Stockholm Archipelago. It is here that Lap-See Lam's exploration of generational loss and cultural displacement takes shape, weaving together threads of mythology, history, and personal narratives.

Central to the Pavilion's narrative is the figure of Lo Ting, a mythological being caught between worlds, half-fish, half-man, longing for a home that exists only in memory. Through a richly layered film shot aboard the Sea Palace, Lam reimagines Lo Ting's journey, navigating through landscapes both physical and metaphorical, in search of Fragrant Harbor – a place transformed beyond recognition.

Echoing Lam's evocative storytelling are Kholod Hawash's textile works, delicate embroideries that speak volumes through intricate motifs and symbols drawn from folk tales and archaeological landscapes. Each stitch, each thread, becomes a testament to the resilience of memory and the power of cultural heritage to transcend borders and time.

The Altersea Opera is more than an installation; it is a testament to the collaborative spirit of artistic innovation. Initiated by Moderna Museet in collaboration with the Office for Contemporary Art Norway and the Finnish National Gallery Kiasma, it exemplifies the power of cross-cultural dialogue and exchange in the realm of contemporary art.

As the dragon ship of The Altersea Opera sets sail within the hallowed halls of the Nordic Pavilion, it beckons us to embark

on a voyage of self-discovery, navigating the depths of imagination and the vast expanse of the human experience. In this ethereal journey, we find solace in the shared narratives of longing, belonging, and the timeless quest for safe harbor amidst the ever-shifting tides of existence.

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