



## **This Artist is Designing a Queer Bathhouse and Art Spa in Chinatown** **By Osman Can Yerebakan— February 28, 2018**



Jon Wang. Photo by Jordan Strafer

Jon Wang's new endeavor joins his art-filled Airbnb spot.

The secluded aura of the spa has long been important to queer communities in search of solidarity, intimacy, and autonomy. With this in mind, New York-based artist Jon Wang and “hospitality experience expert” Sean Roland are about to launch a 6,000-square-foot facility in Manhattan’s Chinatown that they’re billing as a “queer bathhouse and art spa.” The project’s name, SHUI, echoes Feng Shui, a metaphysical system drained of its essence through merciless cooption by Western consumerism.

The club actually marks the second leg of the duo’s venture into queer solidarity through alternative hospitality: ZEZE Hotel, advertised as an Airbnb spot where guests are surrounded by art and design by the likes of Wu Tsang, Raúl de Nieves, and Maryam Hoseini, is a renovated house in Hudson, New York that has proved to be a destination not only among the creative queer community local to this scenic upstate town, but also curious groups who schlep there from the city.

Now Wang and Roland, who are also life partners, are preparing to further their investigation into the transient and migratory aspects of queer encounters within a carefully designed environment, crossing the boundaries of art, relaxation, and intimacy through—steam.

“Making different types of content for [the project], such as business proposals, architectural renderings, and short film ‘commercials’ has been a way for me to think through the politics of queer world building,” Wang explained to GARAGE. “SHUI is about creating a wellness space that is both utilitarian and highly specific. The right to wellness is often class-based and also gender-based, and queer, non-binary, and trans people like myself don’t tend to have wellness spaces where they can feel safe and comfortable. We’re trying to create that.”

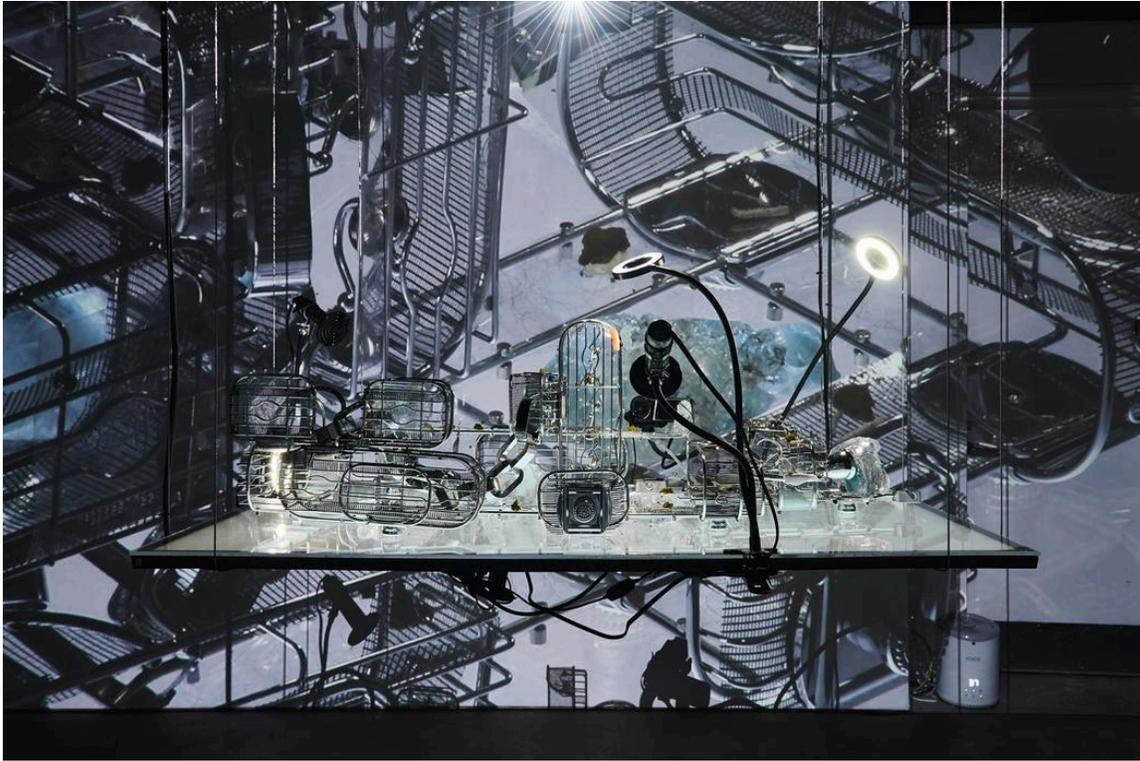


Still from Jon Wang, *Ylang Ylang*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist

**Similar notions of transformation and renewal are at play in Wang’s mixed-media installation *Gardens of Perfect Exposure*, which is now on view in the group show *In Practice: Another Echo*, on view at SculptureCenter.**

Evoking bathers at a spa, silkworms populate a structure built by the artist from shower caddies, laminated hair (collected from his own bathroom), lights, earrings, and dried mulberry leaves arranged on Plexiglas. Suspended from the ceiling and lit by a monitor, the intricate assembly is accompanied by live stream of the insects’ everyday routines that’s projected onto the surrounding walls. Once the installation’s footage begins to feature the audience, the atmosphere of the work shifts from intimate to oppressive.

At SculptureCenter, Wang raised the humidity of the space to create a temperature hospitable for the silkworms. “I’m interested in that moment when your skin meets the new climate,” he explained, “Creating that space within a larger space is political to me.” And the silkworm provides a metaphor for queer self-invention; after cocooning itself with silk for protection, the caterpillar morphs into a silk moth and leaves its coat behind.



Jon Wang, Gardens of Perfect Exposure, 2018. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Kyle Knodell

Silk also figures in the West's exploitation and fetishization of the East; poignantly, the installation's title refers to China's now-destroyed Gardens of Perfect Brightness, which were built in the 18th century and looted by the British and French during the Second Opium War. **"The piece speaks to the struggle for cultural material, and to an individual's quest for agency and sanctuary within the often oppressive and disorienting public spaces that are a part of one's everyday experience,"** noted exhibition curator Allie Tepper. **"It alludes to the paradoxes queer spaces and bodies face in today's highly mediated world."**

Wang started working with silkworms during the summer of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando; observing and filming their lifecycle become a meditative process as he constructed a miniature ecosystem to experiment with rejuvenation, voyeurism, and humidity. Soon, we'll see how the idea translates to human scale.

SHUI will open in late 2018. In Practice: Another Echo is on view at SculptureCenter through April 2.