

# ArtAsiaPacific

## Berlin: Shuang Li

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### **Shuang Li: nobody's home**

Peres Projects

“Nobody’s home,” Shuang Li’s second solo exhibition at Peres Projects, was centered on the events that surrounded Li’s first presentation at the gallery. Titled “I Want to Sleep More but by Your Side,” the earlier show opened in February 2020. Within weeks, Germany underwent its first Covid-19 lockdown and Li’s native China effectively closed its borders. Having traveled to Berlin to install and celebrate her exhibition, Li was shut out of her home country, and has remained so for more than two years. “Nobody’s home” comprises new works that reflect on distance and connection in the pandemic age. While some pieces extend the artist’s ongoing examination of digital spaces and technologies, others address ideas of belonging, placelessness, and time lost, and depart from Li’s early practice with their nostalgic, personal undertones.

Wall-mounted sculptures magnify and make visible infrastructures of connectivity. *Heartshaped glass room* and *Southern Belle* (both 2022) resemble scaled-up data chips or sim-card sockets with heart and bow

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shapes and an iridescent finish. Elsewhere, two-meter-tall fiberglass objects titled *Will it fill our thoughts with endless night time sky* (2022) and *Heartbeats Pound Softer* (2022) reimagine undersea internet cables. Seemingly flowing and floating like strands of hair, the pearlescent cords are adorned with cutesy barrettes shaped like apples, hearts, and stars. “During the pandemic and trauma that came with it, I started to find, more than ever, comfort and refuge in soft and round-edged shapes,” Li explained over email.

Where these reimagined technological tools point to lines of communication across distances, two seashell sculptures, respectively painted in candy-tones of pruple and blue-green, evoke a more melancholic longing for home. Imagined as safe shelters for supersized molluscs, the works also recall the transportive practice of holding a shell to one’s ear to hear the ocean. One is titled *Thank you for the venom* (2022), after a track by the rock band My Chemical Romance, hinting at the emotional undercurrents of Li’s pandemic experience.

Beside infiltrating work titles, music appeared in “nobody’s home” via the contribution of Li’s collaborator, music producer Eli Osheyack’s song “Still” backed the exhibition’s centerpiece and sole video, *How Come an Image* (2022), which was projected on a circular, translucent LED screen that was suspended from the ceiling, evoking a portal. In the contemporary take on flipbook animations fingers scroll through dreamy images of cartoon characters and Li’s internet cable-tresses as if on a tablet or phone. A text by Li runs along the bottom of the video, asking viewers whether they would do things differently if they could go back to the pre-pandemic days of December 2019. Li’s images gradually break apart, appearing as cherry blossoms in the wind, or pixels of a disintegrated whole. Despite the virtual proximity that internet cables, microchips, and even seashells afford, the work centers on what digital technologies cannot compensate, and what the pandemic ultimately cost: time.

Contrasting with the shimmery surfaces and hi-tech motifs of the presentation’s sculptural objects – not to mention the show’s pristine setting – the gallery’s back walls were clad with jagged plywood. Of the curatorial decision, Li explained that the wood evokes the construction of not a physical home, but a conceptual one, bolstering the exhibition’s sense of longing.

“Nobody’s home” offered a less discernible narrative than Li’s previous shows, including her 2020 Peres Projects debut, which revolved around a fictional, online romance between a French mother and a Chinese manufacturer of the *gilets jaunes* emblematic of the 2018 anti-government uprisings in France. Nor are the works overtly sociopolitical like the 2015 performance, *Marry Me for Chinese Citizenship*, which took place in New York’s Times Square and challenged assumptions surrounding immigration, nationality, and race. Rather, the displays are material reflections of our intimate relationships with technology, and its possibilities and shortcomings, which get amplified when one is far from home.

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