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## **Goddamned Shanghai**

*featuring the artists of the island6 collective*

*"It took more than one man to change my name to Shanghai Lily."*

- Marlene Dietrich in "*Shanghai Express*" (1932)

To the missionaries who stumbled green-faced and wobble-kneed off the bumboats in 1930s Shanghai, the city must have seemed a hellhole utterly damned beyond salvation. The heaving, pulsing city was reigned over by twin regents – abundance and abjection. Ritzy restaurants, smoky opium dens, rich fabrics and dazzling jewels in jazz clubs existed alongside the plywood frames of filthy Chinese whorehouses, cramped tenements of squatters, and a thriving underworld. Shanghai's economic boom attracted not just big money-spenders and their big money-spending ways, but also an army of ne'er-do-wells profiteering from any scraps of opportunities they could scrounge up. Apart from that, political clashes between the left and right parties, as well as the encroaching threat from the Japanese, created a city on edge and an atmosphere of living-in-the-now.

From all these grew an identity that has remained iconic even till this day. No other era could conjure up an equivalent image of glamour, wealth, grit, crime, squalor and uncertainty as Shanghai in the 1930s. Where streets of small stores now crowd, the thick-heeled soles of the Green Gang's leader, Du Yuesheng 杜月笙, once trod heavily. The island6 art collective is smitten by the heady vibrance of the time and inspired to recreate its unique, bold beauty.

From the usual motifs that have become synonymous with the era, like opium beds, Charleston dances and *qipaos* with thigh-high slits, the island6 art collective reinterprets 1930s Shanghai with their signature touch, fusing disparate elements into an original, harmonious whole. Thus, the LED animated glamor-puss of *Make My Skin Crawl* reclines on a paper cut opium bed, blowing smoke revisioned as electronic diodes that chase each other across a rice paper background. The sensuous jazz-bunny wiggles her pert, computerized bottom in *Gracie's Gal*. Neon signs light up old photographs of the ol'Bund, unrecognizable by anyone standing there today. Alluring beauties in *Paramount Peaches*, reminiscent of the enigmatic screen goddess Zhou Xuan 周璇, whirl across the diptych screen, their ageless grace immortalized by thousands of flashing, colored electronic



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dots. Antique furniture picked up from the trash piles of bull-dozed *shikumen* estates are given a new life not just with varnish and paint, but also with interactive LCD screens that are triggered by motion sensors, capturing within their scratched surfaces a sultry siren's image. And in addition to electronic art, the collective has also forayed into sculptural pieces, infusing the strong, static artworks with the humor and irreverence characteristic of László Hudec's distinctive Art Deco style, evocative of the lingering evenings spent at the Park Hotel.

Through this, island6 seeks to bring back to our collective consciousness one thing that is frequently forgotten in the wake of the sensational opulence of the 1930s – that this was a significant time of communication, experimentation and driving passion. Through blending different multimedia techniques, the collective recreates a metaphorical Garden Bridge, reflecting the meeting of East and West in the same way the historical bridge linked the Chinese and international settlements. island6 has captured within antique-style paravents and frames the frozen figures of a time past, who stare out at us with a palpable desire, strength and beauty in a city damned by gods but embraced by waves of denizens.

*Dates:* From December 10th 2011 to January 29th 2012

*Vernissage:* December 10th 2011, 7-10 P.M

*Venue:* island6 Arts Center (2/F, Bldg 6, 50 Moganshan Rd, Shanghai)

*Artists:* island6 art collective (Liu Dao 六岛)

*Curators:* Jack Mur, Genine Loo Ching Ling 吕晶琳

*Curatorial Research:* Katharina Droste

*Art Direction:* Thomas Charvériat, Tanguy Laurent 多问

*Coordination:* Yeung Sin Ching 杨倩菁, Gaelle Cohen, Camille Jaganathen, Anaïs Brun, Joel Barker