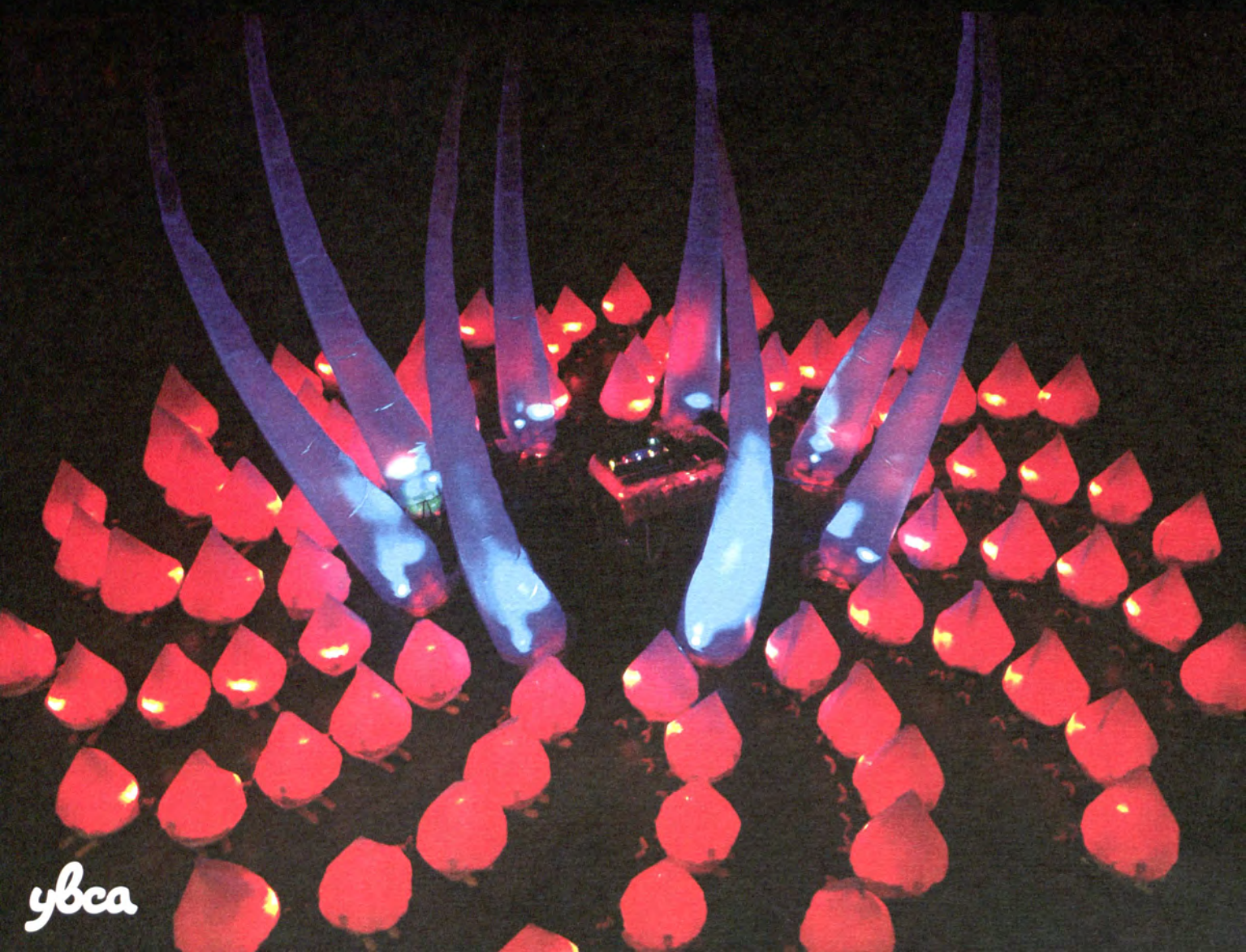
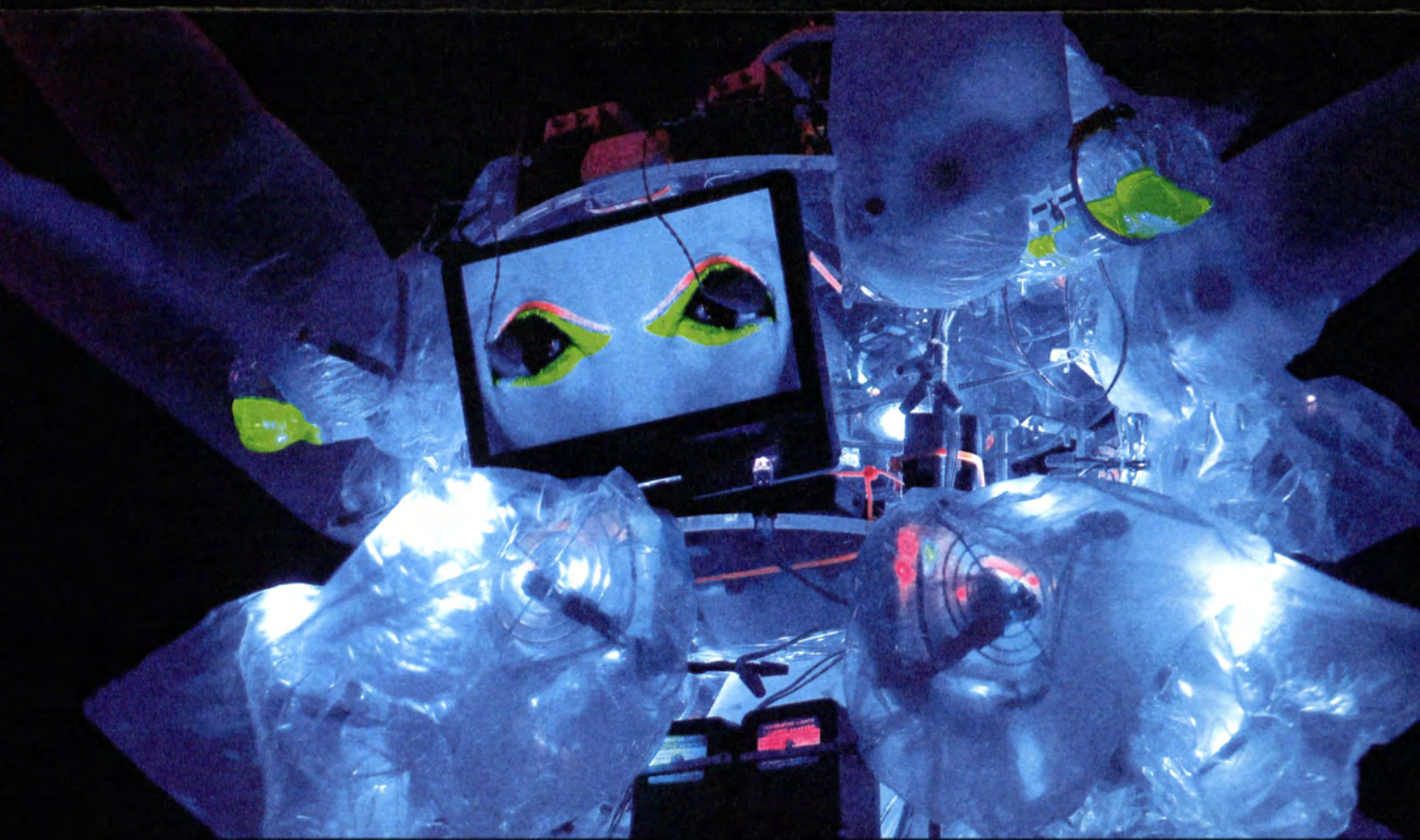


| March 1–June 30, 2013 |

SHIH CHIEH HUANG:  
SYNTHETIC SEDUCTION

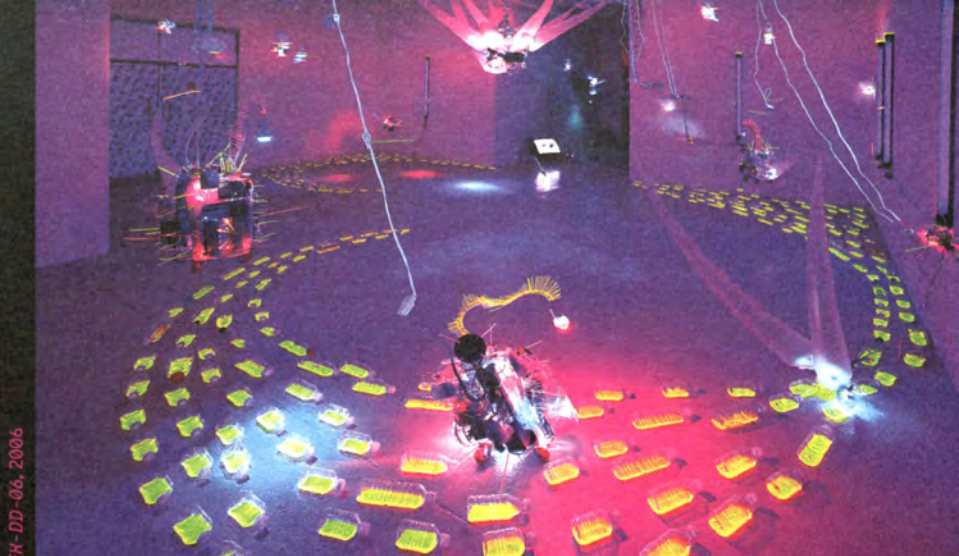




Shih Chieh Huang's sculptural installations are vivid environments punctuated by fluorescent objects that create dramatic constellations within a darkened setting. Huang's illuminated containers and inventive kinetic sculptures evoke a sense of wonder and play, whether they are hanging from the ceiling or arranged across the floor. This notion of amusement is most evident in *AE-11* (2011) in which the exhibition space is transformed into a shooting range and viewers are invited to take aim at moving targets—suspended plastic bottles filled with a neon liquid—using a paintball gun. Other works by the artist, while not as explicitly interactive, encourage the audience's active participation.

The artist's invitation for the viewer to engage with his room installations is apparent upon entering the gallery. It is the presence of bodies that activates the space, bringing to life Huang's otherworldly mise-en-scene. Machines begin whirring, video screens turn on, the sound of objects inflating and deflating fill the room. A control box which animates everything is planted right in the middle of the wall, glowing and readily visible. Electrical cords connected to power supplies crisscross the space. There is no subterfuge, no intention to theatricalize while hiding behind curtains. This is a highly mechanized, constructed environment and the prominent display of the technical sources behind it all is a way to affirm that and to announce their centrality amidst the spectacle.

Huang's labor-intensive installations are a fusion of technological gadgetry and mundane materials—plastic bags, bottles, and other sundry items—which are recognizable in their workaday form. Similar to the patent exposure of the control box, there is no move made to disguise them or their former utility. The use of such mass-produced, commonplace objects, sourced from dollar stores and similar outlets, do not confer an environmentalist message, nor is it concerned with waste and



EP-2, 2010

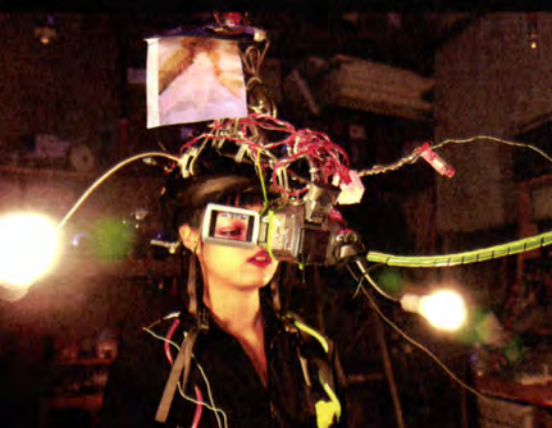
## SHIH CHIEH HUANG: SYNTHETIC SEDUCTION

PAUSE || Practice and Exchange

consumption. Rather, it connects art to the everyday. Despite this association with the ordinary, however, Huang still manages to invent a world altogether fantastical. Using computer parts, LED lights, plastic goods, and highlighters, he creates mechanisms which are then programmed to move. With the slight force of computer cooling fans, air is pushed through bags that raise and lower like limbs, suggesting the spark of existence. A myriad of these creatures, whimsical in their low-tech stylization, populate the space.

As with the incongruous pairing of electronics and dollar store finds, so we find the contradictory marriage of a machine aesthetic with an organic impulse. Huang's creations are akin to biological specimens in a laboratory. In fact his work *EP-2* (2010) stages the routine in a mock lab where technicians extract the souls of individuals and transfer them to machines. In the simpler sculpture *Organic Concept*, first created in 2001 and still presented today, expansive plastic sheeting is shaped into a tube and filled with air. Resembling an enormous worm or giant viscera, it dominates offices, shopping malls, city streets, parks, and galleries where it is displayed. In its size and form it resembles Tim Hawkinson's *Überorgan* (2000), an almost three-hundred-foot long sculpture partially consisting of inflated cylindrical objects suggestive of internal organs.

Huang is an heir to Hawkinson's mode of DIY artmaking, in which found objects are merged with machinery to create idiosyncratic works that meditate on the mechanical and the body. Where Hawkinson is concerned mainly with the human body, Huang finds inspiration in the anatomy of



EP-2, 2010



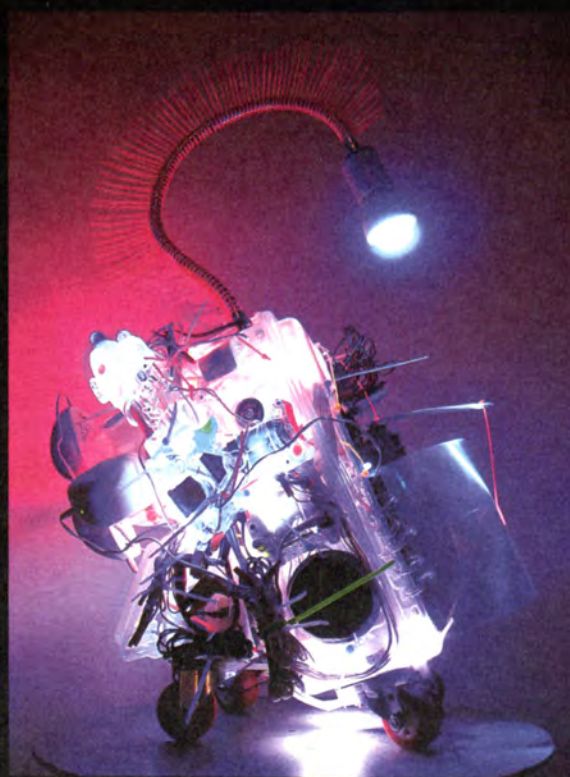
Organic Concept, 2006

animals. In 2007 during a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, in which he conducted research at the National Museum of Natural History, Huang became interested in the evolutionary adaptations of animals, especially those of deep sea creatures. This affinity for marine biology is translated to the titles of his works, *Cubozoa-L-09* and *Counterillumination*, which are a type of jellyfish and a form of camouflage used by ocean dwellers, respectively. Other titles, however, retain the stamp of technology, such as *AE-11* and *EP-2*, which suggest serial numbers and are a shorthand for Aggressive Experience and Eye Process.

Eyes often make appearances in Huang's work. The artist's interest in the eye stems from his research of the Cambrian explosion, approximately 530 million years ago, which heralded the rapid diversification of organisms, and where the development of the primitive eye emerged as an adaptation for survival. Close-ups of blinking orbs show up on television monitors within the installations, and even control their environment through a modified motion sensor system. This framing of the eye within a TV display is also a significant feature of Bay Area artist Alan Rath's digital video sculptures. These body parts, along with mouths and hands, occupy small screens attached to robotic structures. The inclusion of eyes in both artists' work injects a distinctly human and natural element into an electronic realm.

Another adaptation, which Huang has explored in his recent work is bioluminescence, an evolutionary trait used to hunt prey, defend against predators, and attract mates. Mimicking the depths of the dark ocean floor, Huang's installations abound with iridescent, tentacled creations. His exhibition at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts explores this characteristic particularly in the areas of seduction and reproduction, which is alluded to in the radiant eyeliner ringing the primeval pair of eyes that stare out from a video screen. This humorous element is in keeping with Huang's consistent desire to create works that engender a sense of playful awe.

Thien Lam,  
Visual Arts Curatorial Assistant



RTI-delay-#9, 2007

### ARTIST BIO

Taiwanese-born Shih Chieh Huang has exhibited his sculptures and installations at the Experimenta Biennial of Media Art, Melbourne; Busan Biennale, South Korea; Aichi Triennale, Japan; 52nd Venice Biennale, Taiwan Pavilion; Zero1 Biennial, San Jose; Biennale Cuvée, Linz, Austria; ARC Biennial of Art, Brisbane, Australia; New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; and Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai. He has had solo exhibitions at Smithsonian Institute National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC; Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art; Beall Center for Art + Technology, Irvine, CA; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei. Huang's awards include an Artist Research Fellowship from the Smithsonian Institution, a Creative Capital Grant, a Rockefeller Foundation New Media Arts Fellowship, a Joan Mitchell Foundation Sculpture Award, two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships, and residencies at Art Omi, Skowhegan, and The Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation. Huang lives and works in New York.

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