



# SLIPPERY CONTOURS

[A. J. Samuels](#)

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This fluxing, like white noise that she once described to me as the sound of the universe, is always philosophical and usually scientific. Wang embraces science and philosophy through what seems to be a poetic yet Buddhist frame. Originally from China, the artist came to America with her father, a world-renowned scientist, who was headhunted for an MIT research position. She is now based in LA.



Another consistent part of her practice is her use of autobiography as a way to make things both personal yet foreign; intimate, but at the same time quite impenetrable, as all families are. The paradox like the state-change are re-occurring modes in Wang's emerging art practice – but unlike her Western philosophical counterparts her work is light, so much so that it almost disappears, becomes invisible, unnoticeable, ghost-like even. Her recent exhibition, [Slippery Contours](#), at [Galleri Detroit](#), Stockholm, was designed to be seen without artificial light. Closing at sunset each day, the work faded into insubstance at dusk.

From my naive understanding of Eastern philosophies this becoming-invisible might correspond with notions of nothingness, or perhaps the emptiness that Zen celebrates. One floating sculpture comes to mind or rather drifts into my consciousness. Wang's *whew*, 2013, which is a clear plastic cube filled with helium. It hangs mid-air, floating on chance in the gallery breeze. At once *whew* is a speech bubble, a thought space to be filled, and a whimsical dematerialization of minimalist sculpture that somehow continues the theatrics of right angles (this time, though slightly bulbous, perhaps as more comedy than post-war tragedy). *whew* of course means breath, and points to the origin of man as *whew-Man*.

This is what unsettles me: not so much her objects, which tend to shimmer, but rather the cyborgian implications of her practice as a whole. As a child of an MIT scientist Wang seems to embrace science and technology in its utopian promise. Although utopian may be the wrong word here: she brings optimism to science through combining spirituality with technology. Clearly she has faith in both Eastern inspired modes of being as well as big science as a life-philosophy. So the cyborgian notion of woman-machine also isn't quite accurate; rather, technology in Wang's world augments the spirit and not the body. This refreshingly contradicts the representational tendency of so much science fiction.

As frightening as the idea of technology-augmented spirituality may be, this is also what I find exciting about the work; especially since the artist holds back the potentially prescriptive dogma that attends both science and spirituality. Instead she makes descriptive prototypes for a future that are idiosyncratically and un-indulgently hers.

A. J. Samuels is a writer and walker based in LA.

Alice Wang, *Whew*, 2013.

Alice Wang, *Untitled*, 2013.