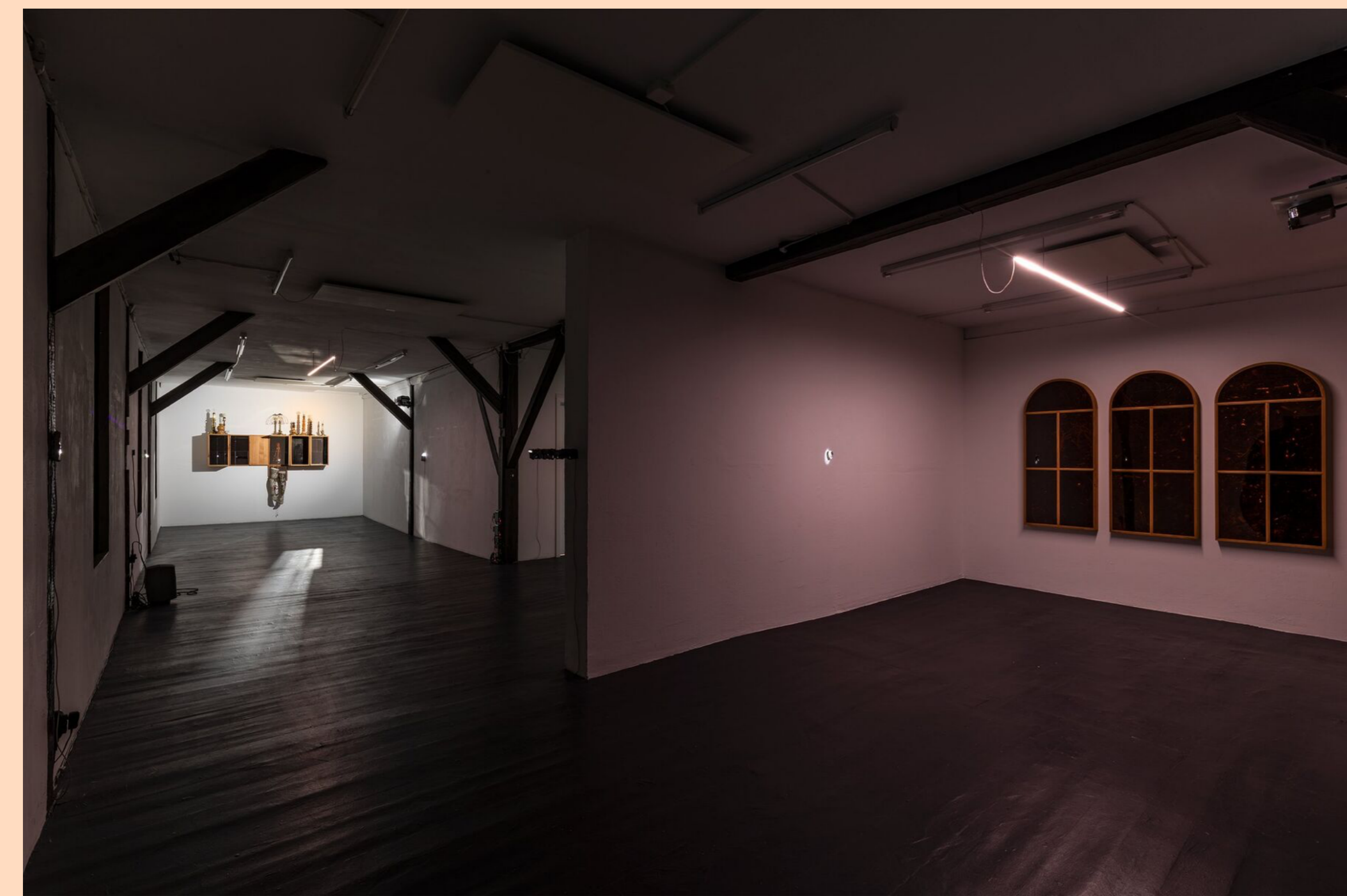


Reading Rämistrasse #133: Leila Peacock on Hunter Longe and Paulo Wirz at Last Tango



The New Technostics

The sound of a fire crackles, it takes your eyes a minute to adjust to the low light. You could be on the set of a sci-fi film... the shaft down to a deserted mine leading to an abandoned portal... the dimly lit hallway of an ancient spacecraft. Last Tango's interior, already far from the semblance of a standard white cube, is transformed into a necromantic cave. A site of unspecified rituals. Anyone with the mind to start a new religion would be wise to take notes from the strategies employed here.

Hunter Longe is a petrophile: minerals listed in his sculptures include granite, vivianite, selenite, strandfieldite, calcite and a meteorite fragment. Some collected on walks through the alps, some brought back from his childhood home in the Sierras, some purchased from mineral dealers; his expertise and enthusiasm for each of his specimens straddles that strange divide within the world of mineralogy between earth science and esoteric healing practices.

Each iteration in the ongoing series *Relics of an Evaporated Sea* contains fragments of selenite, crystals that formed when the Alpine Tethys Ocean evaporated over 200 million years ago and whose metaphysical benefits are believed to include helping access one's intuition. Longe often sets these fragments in fossil-like forms that he casts in river beds from found packaging. What is a fossil after all but an impression left by the disappearance of organic matter, a present absence, a negative positive, a cast? These works, like many of Longe's, are lit with flickering LED lights, playing into 19th century spectacles of Spiritualism, where the advent of electric light became a medium for making contact with the spirit world. Longe harnesses the quirks of technology in a similar way to create *Offrande*: the sound of a crackling fire is generated by a solar panel that converts the frequency of a flickering LED into electricity that is played as sound that is then turned back into light patterns, in a synaesthetic sleight-of-hand that enables us to both see sound and hear light. *Immolation* contains a mask-like chunk of slag from a Neolithic site in Goldbichl, Austria. Used as a site of sacrificial burning for a thousand years, the bones of the animals killed have fused with the rock to create a new species of mineral, collapsing the breach between the inorganic and the organic. This revenant made from the souls of long-dead goats is (re)animated with a ghostly projection of smoke that casts deep shadows around the stone, conjuring a Krampus-mask grimace.

Paulo Wirz has a long-held interest in rituals around death and what has come down to us from pre-modern shamanism. His work plays on the technologies of faiths and how we invest ordinary objects with religious charisma. He grew up in a house in Brazil that sat at the juncture of a catholic graveyard and a vacant lot scattered with the remnants of afro-brazilian Macumba rituals. Many of his works explore how simple domestic objects can become enchanted, either through living religious practices, or through the traces of ancient spiritual practices that lurk in all of our superstitious tics.



Hunter Longe & Paulo Wirz, Last Tango, 2023, Installationsansicht
Foto: Kilian Bannwart

Arcabouço (Skeleton) is based on the standard proportions of the moving box (30x30x60 cm), a volume that recurs repeatedly in Wirz's work as an allusion to those objects of personal significance that we chose to carry with us through life. Here they are opened out to create a triptych of mirror-lined volumes on which stand an array of household lamps, and from which hang a pair of human-sized legs riddled with candles, an engorged votive offering, like some half-dismantled libidinous Christ. In the window-shaped work *Janelas* a similar assortment of household objects are buried beneath panes of blood-coloured glass, a view of something internal and disordered, like those dark thoughts and shadowy urges that swim beneath our civilised veneer, threatening to overwhelm us like unchecked bloom. *Semelhantes*, meaning 'equals', is formed from two tower-like structures beautifully crafted from cherry wood that recall the aesthetics of Brazilian brutalism, but could also be columbariums for cremains of the dead, or taken from a server farm on the planet Arrakis. From the top you can look down into a vertiginous mise-en-abyme of mirrors criss-crossed with strings of beads that transport you into meditative atomic infinitude.

These are vanitas works in the vein of new materialism, invoking the inevitability of change, but also concerned with co-constructive intra-actions between meaning and matter. For both artists this finds its expression in the idea of a relic, either as time-forged vestiges of mysterious geological processes, or hand-forged objects invested with a symbolic sentence. Post-internet and pre-modern, both artists deal with an idea of technology at its most primeval, where the line between practical and spiritual practices becomes blurred, capturing the urge for transcendence that has always permeated human technological development. Our technology becomes us, as we become our technology.

Hunter Longe & Paulo Wirz, 15 September–11 November 2023, [Last Tango](#), Sihlquai 274

Disclaimer: Leila Peacock exhibited at Last Tango in the summer of 2023, but was not involved in the conception, realisation or promotion of the exhibition reviewed here.

Reading Rämistrasse

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