

ARCHITECTURES OF LIGHT

The Drone Photography of REUBEN WU

Tuesday, October 15, 2019, at 7 p.m.
Joyce J. Cammilleri Hall
University of Southern California

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- ◉ **REUBEN WU** is a visual artist and music producer from Liverpool.
- ◉ He is a co-founder of the British electronic band Ladytron.
- ◉ **GEOFF MANAUGH** is the author of *A Burglar's Guide to the City* and creator of the blog BLDGBLOG, which explores topics related to architecture and the built environment.

DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY

Drones—or flying, unmanned aircraft—have opened up a world of new image possibilities. As technological developments make drones ever more affordable, we have access to a proliferation of images that were not possible before. Aerial photography actually precedes drones—there have been airborne cameras for hundreds of years, starting in the mid-nineteenth-century with cameras launched into the air via balloons.

The first modern-style drones emerged in the 1980s, when they were designed for surveillance purposes and used primarily by militaries. It's only in the last few years that drones have become affordable and accessible to the general public, and that is changing both our photographic vistas and

the actual sky through which the unmanned objects fly with ever-increasing frequency and ubiquity.

Visual artist and music producer Reuben Wu uses drones to light natural landscapes in ways that have never been seen before.

DRONE: an unmanned aircraft or ship guided by remote control or onboard computers

ROMANTIC PAINTING

Reuben Wu cites both Romanticism and vintage sci-fi as aesthetic influences. Romanticism was an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European artistic and intellectual movement that emphasized imagination, emotion, and the senses. It was a reaction against the emphasis on reason of the preceding era of Enlightenment. Where Enlightenment thought was rational and orderly, Romantic thought and art celebrated the wild and the unpredictable. Romantic paintings often depicted Nature in its raw, uncontrollable, even terrifying wildness—think shipwrecks and storms. Inspired by the French Revolution, Romantic painters also depicted current events to highlight injustices.

ON NONHUMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Theorist Joanna Zylińska has put forth a new philosophy of “nonhuman photography.” Going beyond simply theorizing about photographs created without a human actor, Zylińska argues that even photographs produced by humans have a nonhuman element, especially as technical and cultural algorithms increasingly shape our image-making devices as well as our viewing practices.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Do you see the influence of Romantic painting in Wu’s photographs? Why do you think this tradition might resonate with artists—or viewers—today?
- What about the sci-fi influence?
- Reuben Wu has said he is “driven by . . . a desire to explore new places as if they were an unknown territory.” What influences or implications do you perceive in that desire?
- Wu has said he thinks about his images as being “beyond geographical borders . . . free from time itself; a documentation of planetary history.” Are you able to read the work that way, or do you feel attached to the specific places they represent? Or both?
- Many technologies are first developed and deployed for military purposes, and later make their way to consumers, artists, and others. What are the reasons and implications of this trajectory?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Reuben Wu on Instagram
[@itsreuben](#)
- Dronestagram
[www.dronestagr.am](#)
- The Annenberg Center for Photography
[annenbergphotospace.org](#)

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

STACY R. WILLIAMS of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about drone art. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. journal articles and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](#).

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Ecer, Ayperi Karabuda. *Dronesapces: the New Aerial Photography from Dronestagram*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2017.
Architecture and Fine Arts Library: **TR810 .D76 2017**



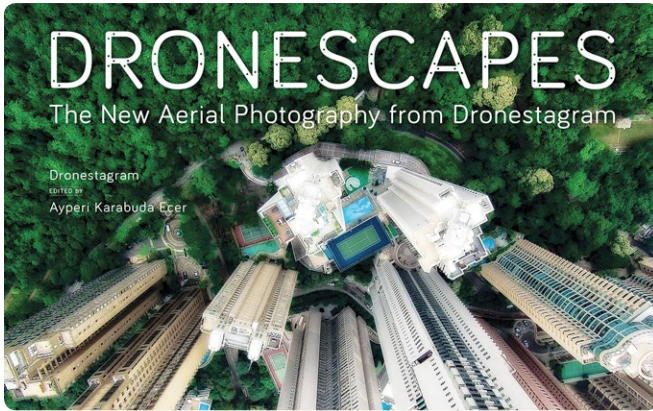
Reuben Wu



Image: Reuben Wu, Aeroglyphs Series



Image: Reuben Wu, Lux Noctis Series



- ◉ Jacob, John P., Luke Skrebowski, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, and Kate Crawford. *Trevor Paglen: Sites Unseen*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2018.
 Architecture and Fine Arts Library: **N6537.P22 A4 2018**
- ◉ Vigour, John. *Drone Art: Low Altitude Landscapes*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia School of Architecture, 2014.
 Architecture and Fine Arts Library: **TR660 .V54 2014**
- ◉ Zylinska, Joanna. *Nonhuman Photography*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017.
 Architecture and Fine Arts Library: **TR183 .Z95 2017**

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

- ◉ Abaffy, Luke, and Tom Sawyer. "How Drones Are Reformatting Photography." *ENR* 275, no. 18 (January 11, 2016).
- ◉ Baldrige, Aimee. "Fire in the Sky: The Emerging World of Drone Lighting." *Photo District News* 36, no. 9 (September 2016): 42-44.
- ◉ Thomas, Hugh. "Quantitative Analysis of Two Low-Cost Aerial Photography Platforms: A Case Study of the Site of Zagora, Andros, Greece." *Journal of Field Archaeology* 41, no. 6 (November 1, 2016): 660-670.

RECOMMENDED DATABASES

Arts & Humanities

This database features hundreds of titles covering Art, Architecture, Design, History, Philosophy, Music, Literature, Theatre, and Cultural Studies.

Artstor

Provides access to over a million high quality images of art and photography, with descriptions and provenance. Also includes images in the fields of anthropology and architecture.

ProQuest Central

Serves as the central resource for researchers at all levels. Covers more than 160 subjects areas and is one of the largest aggregated databases of content that includes scholarly journals, trade publications, magazines, books, newspapers, reports, and videos.

