



Where We Were Not Asked

2025

Curating Exhibitions of Chinese Feminist Artists

Curator: Yilin Cong



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Intro

In contemporary Chinese society, what does ‘home’ really mean to women? Is it a warm place of belonging, or an inescapable structural discipline? When women step out of the home and into the workplace and public spaces, do they truly have the freedom to express themselves and develop? The exhibition ‘What We Were Not Asked’ invites you to enter the space with these questions and find your answers through viewing and experience.

This exhibition stems from our ongoing focus on women's experiences in everyday life: seemingly mundane household chores, emotional care, workplace discrimination and silence, which are still trivialised, ignored or suppressed today. As Merlin (2019) has pointed out, ‘contextual feminism’ in contemporary Chinese art avoids imposing Western paradigms, instead emphasising a localised understanding of gender relations, particularly in the ‘politicisation and genderisation of everyday objects.’ Some works incorporate elements of everyday life, such as soft toys, cribs, and underwear, not to create a ‘warm’ or ‘soft’ atmosphere, but to



respond to a structural experience embedded in everyday life: the unspoken labour, the quietly transmitted gender norms, and the experiences and emotions that are swallowed up by the family space without leaving a trace. Against this theoretical backdrop, this exhibition is not merely a presentation of ‘feminist themes,’ but rather a re-examination of domestic spaces, gendered labour, and care practices.

The six Chinese female artists participating in the exhibition (including one of Chinese descent) use media such as textile installations, soft sculptures, body performance, and participatory objects to explore the tension between private space and social structures. These works do not attempt to construct a single ‘female experience,’ but rather reveal the ambiguity, intersectionality, and intergenerational transmission of female identity in post-socialist reality.

The original living room and bedroom of the exhibition space have been transformed into a re-enactment of family roles, while a study simulates an office atmosphere, presenting the situation of women in the workplace. The exhibition structure adopts a ‘non-linear/thematic exhibition method.’ with no fixed route. You are free to wander, linger, and engage with the space, the works, and your memories in your way.



We do not set a viewing order, but invite you to enter the theme at your own pace.

‘What We Were Not Asked’ does not exist to provide answers, but rather to construct a temporary space where neglected experiences can be seen and collectively considered. We believe that this exhibition can be a way to open up the conversation—in the silences, in the cracks, in the places that are not asked about—and slowly begin to speak.

The exhibition is divided into two themed areas and a lecture room. The lecture room has a message wall, and each area has posters with the text and signs of the themed areas to facilitate your visit. We sincerely hope that you will write your stories or impressions on the message wall in the lecture room after your visit!

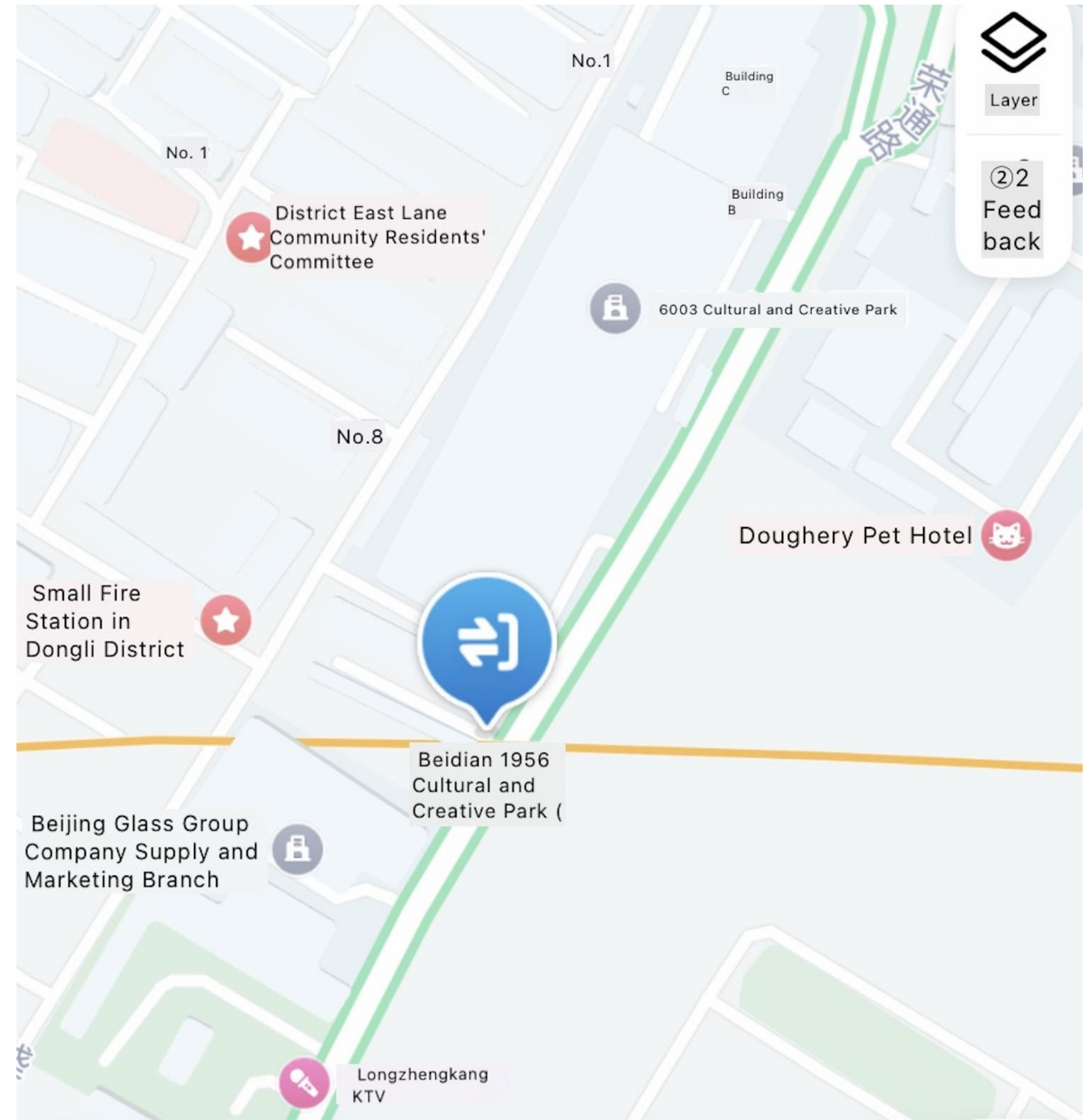
-- Curator's comments

references:

Merlin, Monica. “Gender (still) matters in Chinese contemporary art.” *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 6.1 (2019): 5–15

Site

The exhibition was selected from the Beijing One Inch Art Studio located in the 1956 Cultural and Creative Park in Beiran, Daxing District, Beijing. The venue is an independent art space in a business park. The operator has a licence to hold exhibitions and commercial activities. The venue is usually rented out to film stars for photo shoots or themed exhibitions, so there is no need to re-examine the venue's government permits, fire safety and other issues. It is laid out like an ordinary residence, including a living room bedroom and bathroom, and an office area, which is ideal for the needs of that exhibition. The family-themed works are divided into two rooms, the living room and the bedroom. The living room houses Chen Sijia's “ Matree, Patree ”, whose works symbolise the struggle against patriarchy; Zhang Yue's “ Invisible Chore List ” shows the time and frequency of women's time spent on various household chores. Wang Weijue's felt series “ She and Her ” hangs on the living room wall, echoing the other works and reminding the viewer that we need to speak out against these neglects and injustices; Zhang San's series is placed in the bedroom, creating a private space for women, and the works embody the confusion of motherhood and marriage. The workplace-themed works include Ji Xiayu's “ Crime Scene ” and Zhang Yisu's “ Starting from Cucumber ”, which will be placed in the office area, and together they demonstrate the invisible discrimination that women face in the workplace.



Address: Beijing Glass Trade Centre Limited, Shibalidian, Chaoyang District, Beijing (East District Road), China.

If housework is paid, how much do women pay for it

In Beijing, how much housework do men and women do in an average year.

unit (of measure) Hours	babysitting	grocery shopping	prepare a meal	wash	other	sum of all
males	141.8	113.8	120.3	45.1	56.0	477.0
females	135.7	185.5	231.1	119.0	128.3	799.6

Converted to the 2020 minimum wage of 12.64 ¥ per hour in Beijing, the average remuneration for men and women for domestic work is

females

10107 ¥

males

6029 ¥

Over the course of a year, women work at least as much extra labour as men

10107 ¥

- 6029 ¥

= 4078 ¥

Full-time mother's all-inclusive housework, women paid at least one year's worth of housework

10107 ¥

+ 6029 ¥

= 16136 ¥

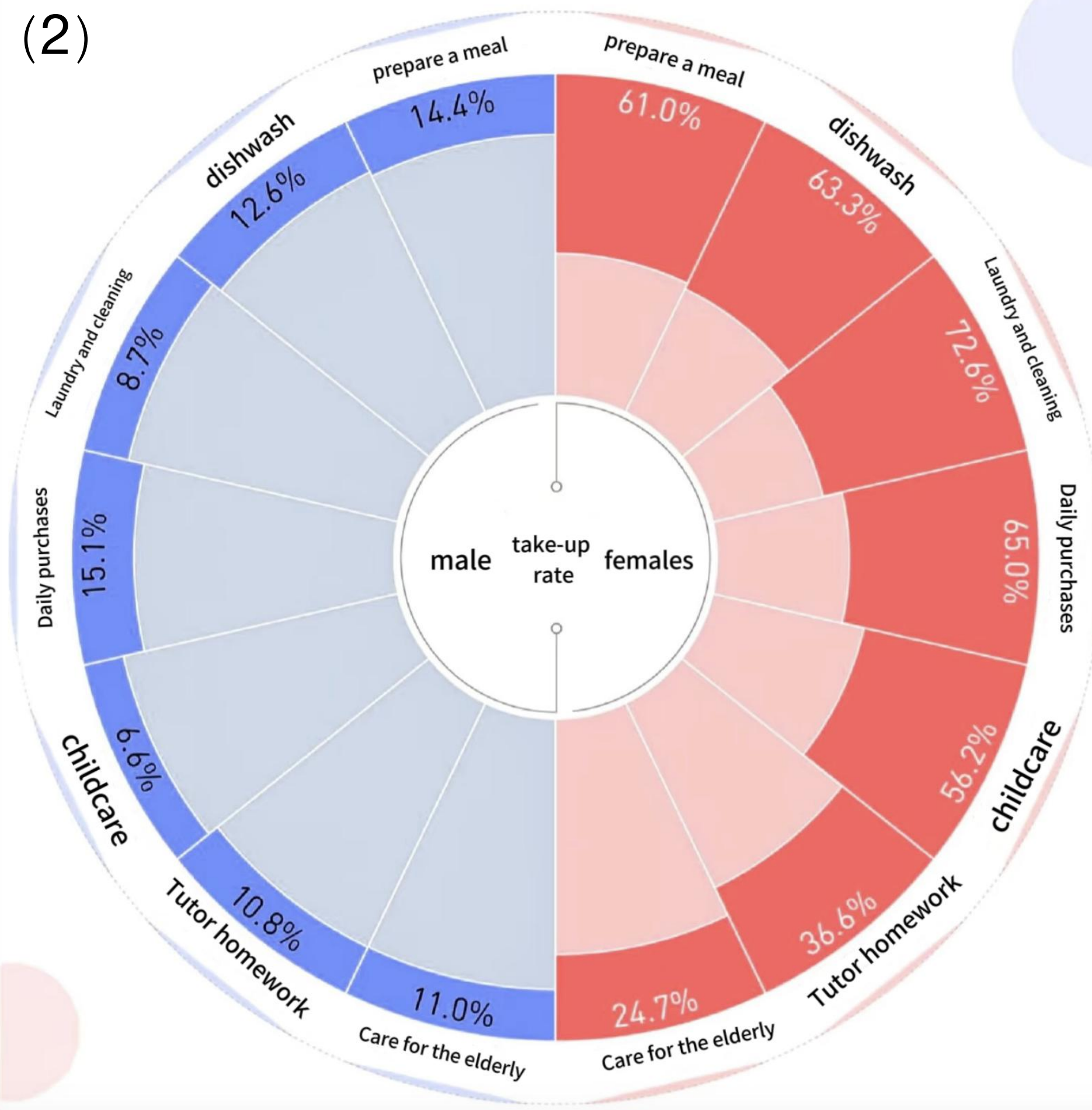
(1)

Family Section Text:

Before visiting, you can review the following data. Data (1) shows the additional time women would have to work if household chores were paid. Data (2) shows the gender distribution of household chores among non-agricultural workers aged 18–65 in urban areas of China who have employment and labour income. According to the results of the fourth China Women's Social Status Survey conducted jointly by the All-China Women's Federation and the National

Bureau of Statistics in 2020, women still spend twice as much time on household chores as men. Among children under three years old, only 2% are cared for by institutions, while 63.7% are cared for by their mothers. Perhaps people only see the recent decline in marriage registration numbers and birth rates over the past decade, with an increasing number of women unwilling to marry or have children. However, behind the pursuit of a happy and harmonious family lie women's greater selfless contributions and constraints, as well as their greater compromises. Through the works of the four artists in the family section, you can reflect on whether you have overlooked these inequalities and the stereotypes imposed on women in daily life.

(2)





a: Sijia Chen

Matree, Patre, 2025, mixed media, Pipe cleaner, metal bar.

This is a participatory art piece. You can pick up a twistie and wrap it around the tree.

Traditional Chinese family structures are typically patriarchal, centred around male lineage and reinforcing patriarchal inheritance. This work critiques the traditional patriarchal family inheritance system and invites viewers to intervene and subvert it.

The main structure of the work is a metal tree trunk, symbolising the male-centred family structure and how the traditional family system reinforces the continuity of the male bloodline. In contrast, the twisted branches represent intervention, challenge, and reformation of this system. These colourful branches are not static but an evolving organism that grows with each audience intervention. Audience members are invited to pick up a twistable rod, add it to the tree, twist it, and reshape it. The new branches represent each individual's identity,

full of vitality and diversity, not belonging to any root system but created and defined by themselves. Through interaction with this tree, the audience becomes part of an ongoing transformation, questioning the meaning of shared belonging and contemplating who will shape future family relationships.

The artwork is placed in the centre of the living room. Its appearance resembles a landscape plant that might be found in many households, but it also symbolises the patriarchal system that is difficult to shake in most families. However, if more and more people speak out and contribute their efforts, equality will eventually be achieved.

Artist: Chen Sijia, China
Education: Fuzhou University, Bachelor's degree in Environmental Design
University of Edinburgh, Master's degree in Contemporary Art Practice
Art form: Installation, sculpture
Art style and creative themes:
My work focuses mainly on feminism, exploring topics such as power and identity and expressing them through satire or criticism. At the same time, my work often encourages audience interaction, with the audience interaction becoming part of the work, expressing some serious topics in a relaxed and interesting way.

Image source: Inverleith House in Edinburgh's Botanic Garden exhibition. Photo: Yilin Cong.



b: Weijue Wang
Said, 2023, Felt art

This wall made of red wool felt uses the same artistic language to depict fragments of expressions from different female figures; they appear shocked, angry, and in pain. The artist explains that she felt the indifference of others towards what was happening and extended this indifference to the current situation of women who are forced to remain silent.

Therefore, she created the image of a girl with her mouth open, screaming. All the women in the work have hollow lips, as if voicing the unspoken cries of women against rigid gender roles, reflecting the health and emotional struggles women face at the centre of family and society. The wool, presented through embroidery techniques, gives the work a delicate and soft texture resembling skin, yet it is actually marked with traces of violence from the creation process, akin to a



gentle yet silent cry.

This piece is hung on the wall of the south living room, echoing the other works, symbolising a cry against various injustices.

Artist: Weijue Wang, Born in 1993 in Nanjing, China, Currently based in Nanjing, professional artist.

Education: she received her B.A. from St. John's College of Arts and Sciences in 2015 and her M.F.A. in Pure Art from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2017.

Major solo exhibitions:

2018 A Room of One's Own, Tao Gu Park, Nanjing, China

Major group exhibitions:

2019 One Ton Project, Hengfu Art Centre, Shanghai,

Image source: Art021 Shanghai Exhibition Centre, Booth: E1-13, Photo: Weijue Wang.





c: Yue Zhang
Invisible Chore List, 2024,
Installation art, printed paper

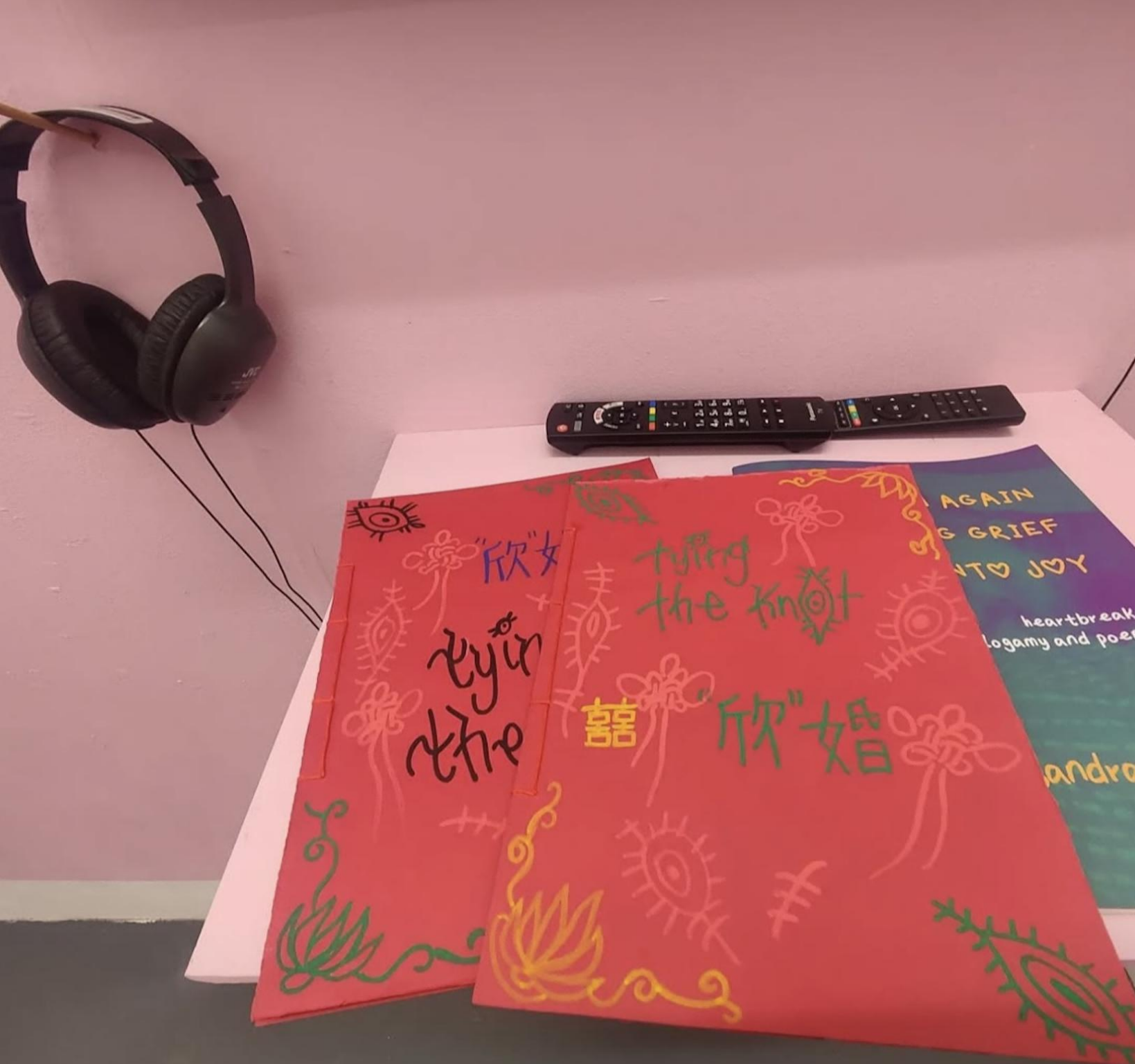
This installation art piece uses printed paper to depict the countless invisible household chores we overlook in our daily lives. It records the names of these chores, such as washing dishes, cleaning utensils, and disposing of expired food, as well as their locations, such as the kitchen, living room, and bedroom. It also documents the frequency with which these tasks are performed each week. However, women who complete these tedious and seemingly meaningless invisible household chores not only fail to receive recognition but are often labelled as ‘overly sentimental’. The artist believes that maintaining a household should be a shared responsibility among all family members. While mothers or wives may voluntarily take on these tasks out of their understanding of family and love, this should not be used as an excuse to burden them.



Artist: Zhang Yue, China.
Education: Bachelor's degree in
Visual Communication Design from
Sichuan Fine Arts Institute
Major exhibitions:
2024 Sichuan Fine Arts Institute
Visual Communication Design
Department Graduation Exhibition

Kunming Hai Le World Co-branded
Invisible Household Chores List
Exhibition

Image source: Graduation Exhibition of the Department of
Visual Communication, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. Photo:
Official platform of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute.



(1)

d: San Zhang, (1): *Tying the knot*, 2023, sologamy wedding performance and exhibition, documented on digital video, 11 minutes 19 seconds.

This performance art video depicts the process of an artist marrying herself. The artist created this artwork to rebel against her family's traditional views on marriage. She sewed a doll as a stand-in, dressed it in a wedding dress, and had it marry in her place. The artist states, 'My family does not accept me as a queer individual and rejected my former partner. Despite living abroad, they still hold these traditional expectations of me.' The artist's family traditions reflect those of most Chinese families, such as the expectation that women should marry and have children at an appropriate age. This work reflects the artist's fear and confusion regarding traditional Chinese marriage concepts.

(2): *One baby in each arm*, 2023, Felt and mixed media, embroidery

This artwork is the artist's exploration of the fear associated with motherhood, pregnancy, and childbirth. The artist says, 'My mother and grandmother often told me, "One day, we want to hold one of your children in each of our arms." So I created four infants, which became increasingly twisted and grotesque.' We all know the physical toll that childbirth takes on women, but once a child is born, the responsibility of caring for them seems to fall overwhelmingly on the mother, and women are often labelled with the title of 'motherhood.' This is why many young women are increasingly afraid of marriage and childbirth.



(2)



Artist: San Zhang, Spanish-Chinese
Multidisciplinary artist with a background in painting, illustration and film-making with experience in independent curating and gallery collaboration.

Education:

Contemporary Art Practice MA, University of Edinburgh

September 2024- September 2025

Fine Art BA (Hons), University of Dundee

September 2020- June 2023

Graduated with First Classification Degree.

Image source: University of Dundee Fine Art Bachelor's Degree Exhibition, Photo: San Zhang.

Career Section text:

Have you ever been sidelined at work, asked about your marital plans during interviews, or felt unseen despite working tirelessly? Have you remained silent in the face of workplace harassment?

Despite growing awareness and participation, Chinese women continue to face invisible ceilings and structural inequalities in their careers. According to the China Women's Career Development Report 2023, women are still significantly underrepresented in high-income industries and leadership roles, with only 19.4% entering high-income sectors (Caixin, 2023). McKinsey's The New Half of the Sky highlights how women, though equally represented at entry level, make up just 22% of middle and senior management, revealing a glass ceiling from the start (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

Social expectations around motherhood and implicit biases against “childless women” further limit opportunities. In this section, through performance and installation, two artists confront the exhaustion, frustration, and resistance women carry into the workplace.



Image source: 2024 Nanjing University of the Arts Art Design Graduation Exhibition, Photo: Xiayu Ji.

e: Xiayu Ji, *Crime Scene*, 2023, Enamel, purple copper, underwear

‘It was just a light touch.’ “Just think of it as someone accidentally bumping into you.” “How could something so insignificant leave such a deep psychological impact?” “...”

The artist said, ‘When I try to talk about sexual harassment with older people, I always hear unexpected responses. It seems that in some people's eyes, sexual harassment isn't a big deal, and even talking about it seems overly sentimental. Sexual harassment doesn't leave any visible physical scars, but that doesn't mean it's an issue that can be ignored. How to visualise the harm caused by sexual harassment, and how to convey women's resistance and attitude towards it, is something I've been thinking about. Even today, many women still experience sexual harassment in society and the workplace.’ As the artist mentioned, there may be many women with similar experiences who are afraid to speak out or choose to endure, hoping the problem will disappear on its own. But it won't. We need more women to speak out bravely.

Artist: Xiayu Ji, China.

Education: September 2017 – June 2021 Bachelor of Fine Arts in Applied Arts, Nanjing University of the Arts

September 2022 – September 2023 Master of Arts in Jewellery and Related Product Design, Birmingham City University

September 2021 – June 2024 Master of Arts in Art Design, Nanjing University of the Arts

Major Exhibitions: 2023 ‘Fossils into Gold’ International Contemporary Jewellery and Metal Art Triennial Exhibition and International Touring Exhibition, Shanghai

2023 VONMO 3rd ‘Soul in Motion’ International Contemporary Jewellery Art Exhibition, Beijing



f: Yisu Zhang, *Start with the cucumber*, 2023, performance art

This is a performance art piece. The artist sits quietly in a partitioned space, slicing cucumbers. The walls of the partition are covered with cucumber slices she has cut each day, and she continues until she completes her daily quota. The artist poses a series of questions to provoke audience reflection: ‘Have you ever experienced body anxiety? Do you think sticking cucumber slices on the wall can really make you beautiful? Do you like your job? Do you think this job can fulfil your value?’ Have you ever experienced gender discrimination in the workplace? Are you tired of a repetitive lifestyle? Do you want to speak up for yourself?’ and so on.

The artist said, ‘This work is based on my relationship with cucumbers as a woman. It reveals the issues that have long troubled me but remain unresolved: the dilemma of self-worth, endless anxiety about appearance, lack of attention in the workplace, a cycle that is difficult to break, and futile persistence...’ The artist simulated a nine-to-five work scenario and the anxiety, resistance, and powerlessness that women feel when facing their future careers. Women are undervalued in the workplace, and they strongly reject this repetitive work. This can be seen as a reflection of the gender discrimination women often face in the workplace, including promotion barriers and being assigned marginal tasks.

Artist: Yisu Zhang, China

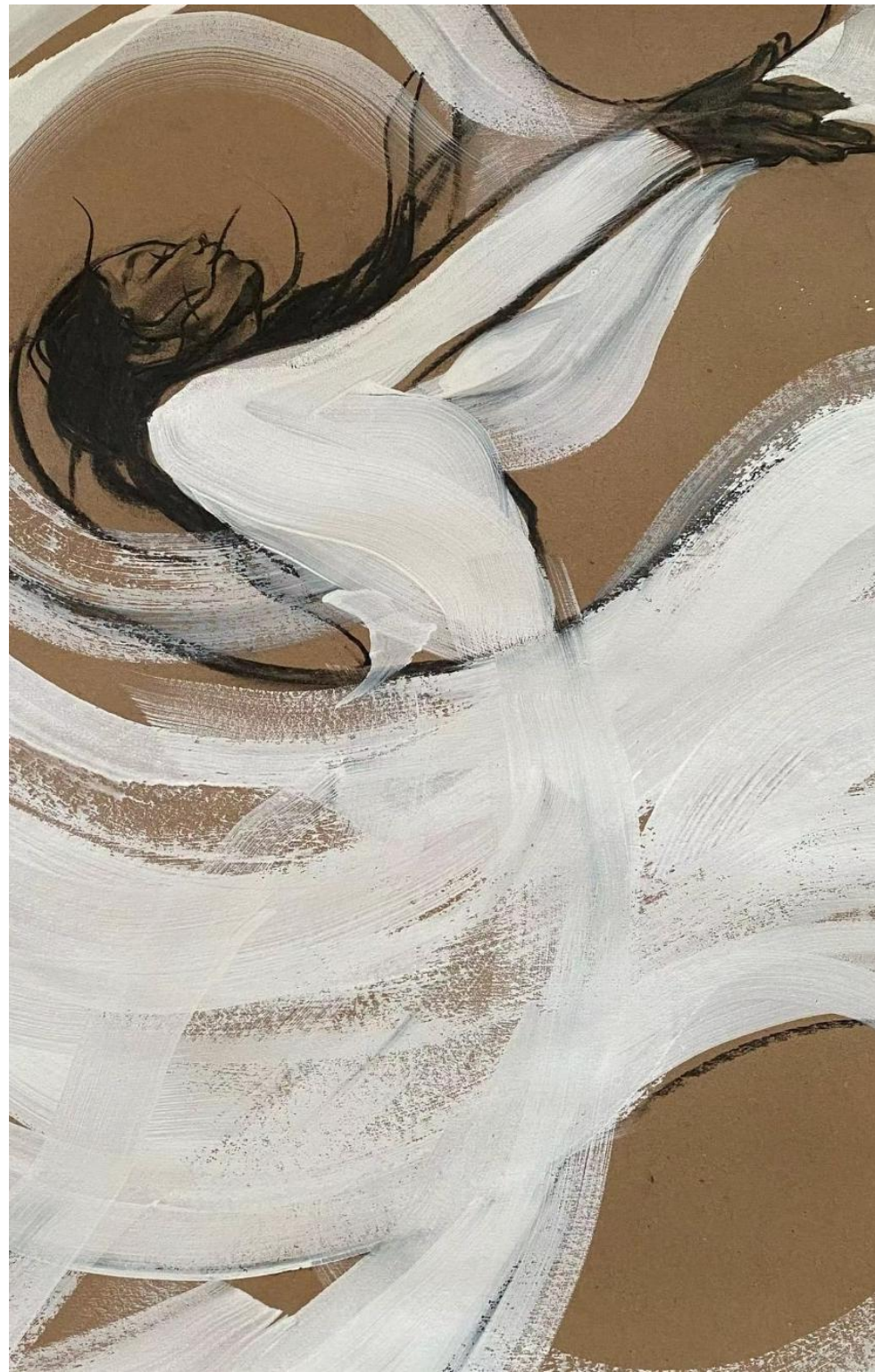
Education: Bachelor's degree in Experimental Art and Technology Art from the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

Major exhibitions: 2021, Tracing and Shaping | Oral History Exhibition of the Workers of Beijing Plastic Factory No. 3

2022, ‘Intangible Heritage · Future’ Exhibition at the Yanhuang Art Museum

2023, Central Academy of Fine Arts 2019 Graduation Exhibition

Image source: Bachelor's Degree Graduation Exhibition of the Experimental Art and Technology Art Department, Central Academy of Fine Arts. Photo: Yisu Zhang.



Audience / Public: Participation and Feasibility

Target Audience:

Women aged 18 to 35: Especially those facing family pressures, career choices, and identity crises, as these emotional issues are at the core of the exhibition.

University students and artists: Especially those with backgrounds in art, gender studies, sociology, or design, who may resonate with the exhibition's content and methodology.

Feminist networks and non-profit organisations: Feminist organisations or communities in Beijing and other regions can serve as communication hubs to promote in-depth dialogue.

Feasibility: For **women aged 18 to 35**, the exhibition will be held in Beijing, the capital city, where there are more young professionals. Online promotion can be prioritised, as many may not be interested in lectures but are active on social media. Platforms like TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and other interest-based platforms popular among young women can be used to share exhibition content with visually appealing and thematically focused copy, such as ‘After seeing this exhibition, I want to talk to my mum about gender.’ Post event announcements and behind-the-scenes content. Include tags related to feminism and avoid overly academic language.

For **university students and artists**, contact feminist organisations or art clubs at Beijing universities to collaborate on offline lectures and sharing sessions, attracting more attendees. The exhibition is located in a cultural and creative district, which may also draw art enthusiasts and creators.

For **feminist online communities and non-profit organisations**, consider submitting content or contacting organisation operators to explore collaborations with public accounts or communities focused on gender issues, such as Lean In or the Mu Lan Hua Kai Community Service Centre, which can assist in promoting the exhibition.

Curatorial Ethics Statement

This project adheres to the highest professional ethical standards, ensuring that curatorial activities establish mechanisms of mutual respect, transparent collaboration, and reflective practice between the protection of artists' rights, audience inclusivity, institutional cooperation, fair remuneration, freedom of expression, and social responsibility. The following are the ethical commitments of this exhibition, Where We Were Not Asked, during its implementation:

1. Artists' Rights and Participation Mechanisms

Informed Consent: All participating artists must provide explicit authorisation for the display of their works, text editing, video recording, and dissemination. Curators commit to providing complete background information and exhibition arrangements.

Collaboration Rather Than Representation: Curators do not position themselves as substitutes, interpreters, or explainers of artists' intentions. Instead, they act as facilitators of dialogue and structural designers, ensuring the independence and multiplicity of artistic expression.

Creative Freedom: There are no restrictions on themes or forms of expression, and artists are not required to adjust their works to suit the preferences of specific audiences or institutions.

2. Audience Inclusion and Accessibility

Accessibility: The exhibition space will be designed to minimise physical barriers, with interactive areas and clear signage to ensure equal access and participation for audiences with different physical conditions and sensory preferences.

Emotional and Psychological Safety: Exhibition content may involve sensitive issues such as gender violence or traumatic memories. Appropriate warnings and buffer mechanisms (e.g., rest areas, emotional release spaces) will be provided on-site to respect viewers' pacing.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: For works involving different cultural backgrounds or identity experiences, bilingual materials will be provided to reduce barriers to understanding and enhance a sense of belonging.

3. Public Expression Responsibility and Curatorial Power Reflection

Reflecting on curatorial discourse: In the selection of works, writing of texts, and spatial arrangement, curators acknowledge their power in constructing viewing paths and meaning production, and engage in continuous reflection and public explanation.

Opposing instrumentalised presentation: Identity labels such as 'female,' 'queer,' and 'Chinese' are not used as symbolic objects of consumption in the exhibition, avoiding single narratives or sensationalist expressions.

Stimulate public dialogue: Through on-site exchanges and online extensions, encourage audiences to actively think about questions such as 'who has the right to speak,' 'who is represented,' and 'who is absent,' making the exhibition a space for public debate.

4. Cooperation Systems and Financial Transparency

Standardise cooperative relationships: All cooperating institutions, platforms, technical personnel, etc. involved in project implementation shall clearly define their rights and responsibilities in written contracts and commit to respecting exhibition ethics

principles.

Funding Source Review: We refuse to collaborate with funding sources associated with controversial backgrounds (such as environmental destruction, exploitative labour, or hostility toward gender issues), ensuring consistency between the exhibition's values and its funding structure.

Transparent and Reasonable Budgeting: Where feasible, we will moderately disclose the remuneration distribution structure for artists and staff, subject to oversight by audiences or collaborating parties, striving for transparency, fairness, and sustainable resource allocation.

5. Ongoing Care and Feedback Mechanisms

Establishing a Care Mechanism: We recognise curating as emotional labour and respect the physical and mental well-being of all workers involved in the exhibition process (including volunteers and staff), establishing feedback and care mechanisms.

Archiving and Future Use Provisions: All exhibition images, texts, and interview records are jointly owned by the artists and the curatorial team. Future dissemination requires prior consent from all relevant parties.

Ethical Adaptation: This statement serves as the foundational ethical framework for the current exhibition. The curator commits to continuously supplementing and refining it based on actual circumstances and feedback, viewing ethics as an ongoing process of negotiation rather than fixed guidelines.

Participant's signature_____

Timeline

Week 1–2	Artist confirmation and authorisation, venue rental and contract signing, budget confirmation, and preparation of exhibition text and material design.	Saturday of Week 8	Public event opening ceremony Time: 14:00–16:30 Location: Conference room in the exhibition space
Week 3–5	Artwork transportation coordination (including domestic and international delivery) Promotional material design and printing, equipment rental booking, and workshop supplies procurement	Exhibition open	10:00 to 18:00 daily Volunteers on duty Collect audience feedback. The exhibition will be open for a total of 15 days. Public event artist talks and Q&A sessions will be held at least three times, with specific times to be determined based on the artists' schedules. Offline + live streaming.
Week 6–7	Volunteer training and scheduling, pre-exhibition promotion through social media and partner organisations, exhibition setup: 2 days	Week 10 (Saturday)	Exhibition dismantling: Dismantling period – packing artwork, returning equipment Cleaning the venue Filming the exhibition summary video Organising documents, contacting logistics for returning artwork, and establishing an online archive.
Thursday and Friday of Week 8	Venue cleaning and structural adjustments Artwork installation, installation of introductory text and descriptions for each section, placement of exhibition brochures Video/projection equipment testing, preparation of props for interactive areas, installation of interactive walls		

Online exhibition archive

Chinese Feminism Exhibition Archive

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Where We Were Not Asked

2025 Where We Were Not Asked 中国女性艺术线上展览

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Budget

Venue Rental	17 days × ¥ 1,000/day = ¥ 17,000 (approx. £ 1,900) Rental of an independent art space within the Beijing Daxing North Dyeing Cultural and Creative Park, including utilities and management fees.
Public Liability Insurance	Third-party insurance company fees = ¥1,200 (approx. £130) to cover safety risks for visitors during the exhibition and liability during the exhibition period.
Exhibition and Event Materials	Structure setup, interactive areas, refreshments for lectures and opening = ¥3,000 (approx. £310)
Printing	Guidebook, bilingual exhibition labels, postcards and interactive message cards = ¥800 (approx. £90)
Equipment Rental	Projector, sound system, extension cords and other temporary equipment rental = ¥1,000 (approx. £110)
Transportation (UK to China and return)	International courier, packaging, and customs clearance fees for UK artists' works = ¥4,000 (approx. £450)
Documentation	Exhibition photography and event highlight video editing = ¥1,000 (approx. £110)
Reception and volunteer support	Refreshments, drinking water, volunteer lunch, and supplies = ¥500 (approx. £55)

Miscellaneous expenses Miscellaneous	Express delivery, domestic transportation, temporary printing or emergency expenses = ¥700 (approx. £80)
Artist fees	6 participating artists × ¥ 1,500 (per artist) = ¥ 9,000 (approx. £920) As a basic participation fee, as a token of respect for creation and collaboration
Total:	4,065£
Funding Sponsorship	<div>1. The Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art (PSA) provides financial support for selected curatorial projects through its ‘Young Curator Programme’ (YCP). According to information from 2023, two groups of curators are selected annually, each receiving up to RMB 300,000 (including tax) in dedicated funding for exhibition planning and implementation. Additionally, after the exhibition is completed, one group will be selected to receive the ‘Qingce Plan Grand Prize,’ with the curator receiving an additional 50,000 RMB in extended support for further research and development of the project. 5000- 30000 £</div> <div>2. ENNOVA Art Museum Young Curator Programme will select three winning proposals. One group will receive 80,000 RMB in curatorial fees (tax-free) as special funding support for the Young Curator Programme, while the remaining two winning proposals will each receive a 20,000 RMB cash award (tax-free). 2000- 8000 £</div>