

PRESS RELEASE

**Duo Exhibition 'If it does not break it will bend' at Mandy Zhang Art showcasing the work of Fan Bangyu and Xu Dengqian**

**10 January – 16 February 2025**



Fan Bangyu, *Treat You to Candy, would you fancy it ?* 2024.  
Mixed media, dimensions variable.



Xu Dengqian, *Together*, 2024.  
Ruler, bamboo, wire, 40 x 30 x 17 cm.

**Opening: 10 January, 6 – 8pm**

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16 Seymour Place, London, W1H 7NG

Mandy Zhang Art presents *If it does not break it will bend*, a dual exhibition showcasing the work of Chinese artists Xu Dengqian and Fan Bangyu. Ranging from video to installation, sculpture, and photography, Xu and Fan's practices are characterised by works that at first appear erratic on visual and narrative levels. The artists seek to dismantle the superstructures that shape our social subjectivities, such as categorisations of gender and class and the workings of state power. Throughout, Xu and Fan's works embark on a complex play between culturally specific metaphors, sarcasm, autobiography and social critique, often encouraging viewers to question the nature of societal norms and human behaviour.

Xu and Fan engage in literal and poetic deconstructions through their use of readymades. Scattered around the gallery, Fan's installations build on the artist's usual practice of reconfiguring found objects into sonic and kinetic assemblages. Instruments, clothing, and sound recorders are combined with organic materials which intertwine or collapse into each other to form sculptures in varying states of decay and disrepair. Part-deconstructed piano, Fan's sculpture from their *New Angel* series (2024) personifies the artist in a blend of animal body parts, steel rods and leather belts. The angel is armed with a pair of boxing gloves and suspended from the ceiling, obliquely referencing the artist's body. Through its form, *New Angel* reflects on the artist's complex relationship to gender identity and its physical manifestations. The sculpture offers an alternative anthropomorphism while elevating the discarded, the overlooked and the rejected. This simultaneously pulls viewers in and faces them with a disquieting entity, prompting them to question their value systems and consider suppressed desires within themselves.

Xu similarly distorts ordinary objects in his recent sculptures, where he has deformed rulers by hammering, screwing, and bending. Rulers are not only used to standardise the appearance of objects in tangible world, but they have a standardised appearance themselves that makes them universally recognisable. By manipulating their properties, Xu disrupts viewer's expected encounter with a familiar object, thus visualising the workings of normativity.

The artist further challenges normativity in his video works, which present seemingly banal actions executed in a repetitive fashion. Dialogue and narrative are replaced by bizarre, staged occurrences such as lighters igniting themselves, chairs being hauled at empty spaces, or the artist flipping pancakes through the streets and trains of London. Xu's videos irrupt the everyday, making us aware of agreed-upon social norms of how one should behave in public. Thrust into Xu's uncanny reality, we are invited to question why it is that everyone shares a way of interacting with the spaces around them.

As our sense of uncertainty increases, a growing liminality underpins the exhibition. The works presented are half- tools, half- 'things,' half- destroyed, half- constructed, always oscillating between a sense of violence and a sense of invitation. Movement, experienced through Fan's kinetic works and Xu's tensed sculptures builds up exhibition goers' anticipation. We are set on edge and further pushed off it by the inviting motifs of candy and lures, which visualise our hidden desires and fetishes. Xu further offers a reflection on lust and human motivations by setting traps and replacing baits with money.

At the core of the exhibition is an attempt by the artists at overturning our belief systems. We are faced with unpredictable and often unintelligible works which reject narrativity in favour of sensory experience as an alternative mode of knowledge production. In a way, the characteristic bareness of Xu and Fan's installations makes them appear as rudimentary machines or machine parts, making the installations indexical to the artists' ideological deconstructions. Xu and Fan fundamentally change their found objects, but, throughout, each element that has been assembled is visible. The artists become reverse architects, revealing the scaffolding of thought that prompts us to take on received understandings of power and unquestioned submission.

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## Editor Notes

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**Mandy Zhang Art** is a contemporary art gallery in London dedicated to promoting emerging Asian artists and those from the diaspora. Founded in 2022, after nearly two years of successful operations in the founder's private apartment, the gallery announced the opening of a public exhibition space in Marylebone, central London. Mandy Zhang Art is committed to nurturing cross-cultural dialogues and fostering a culture of diversity and innovation within the contemporary art landscape. [www.mandyzhang.art](http://www.mandyzhang.art) / Instagram @mandy Zhang.art

**Fan Bangyu** (b. 1991, Xi'an, China) is an interdisciplinary artist working across sculpture, installation and sound. Using a combination of found objects, organic, and nonorganic materials, their work often takes the form of installations where objects wrap around or collapse into each other in varying states of decay and disrepair.

The root of Fan's practice is driven by their connection to their working class and queer identity, which is explored sensorially. Fan does this by combining culturally specific visual metaphors and puzzles with sonic or kinetic elements that seem random or devoid of narrative. The unintelligibility of the sounds and images in Fan's work creates an uncanny viewing experience, reflecting the artist's aim to deconstruct the superstructures that shape our social subjectivities.

**Xu Dengqian** (b.1998, China) graduated from the Oil Painting Department of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 2022. He has recently graduated from Goldsmiths MFA fine art programme. Dengqian's works involve video, installation, painting and performance. Through actions or reconstruction of everyday objects, he questions or provokes the institutional system in which we live. His language is characterized by an approach which is both conceptual and ironic at the same time.