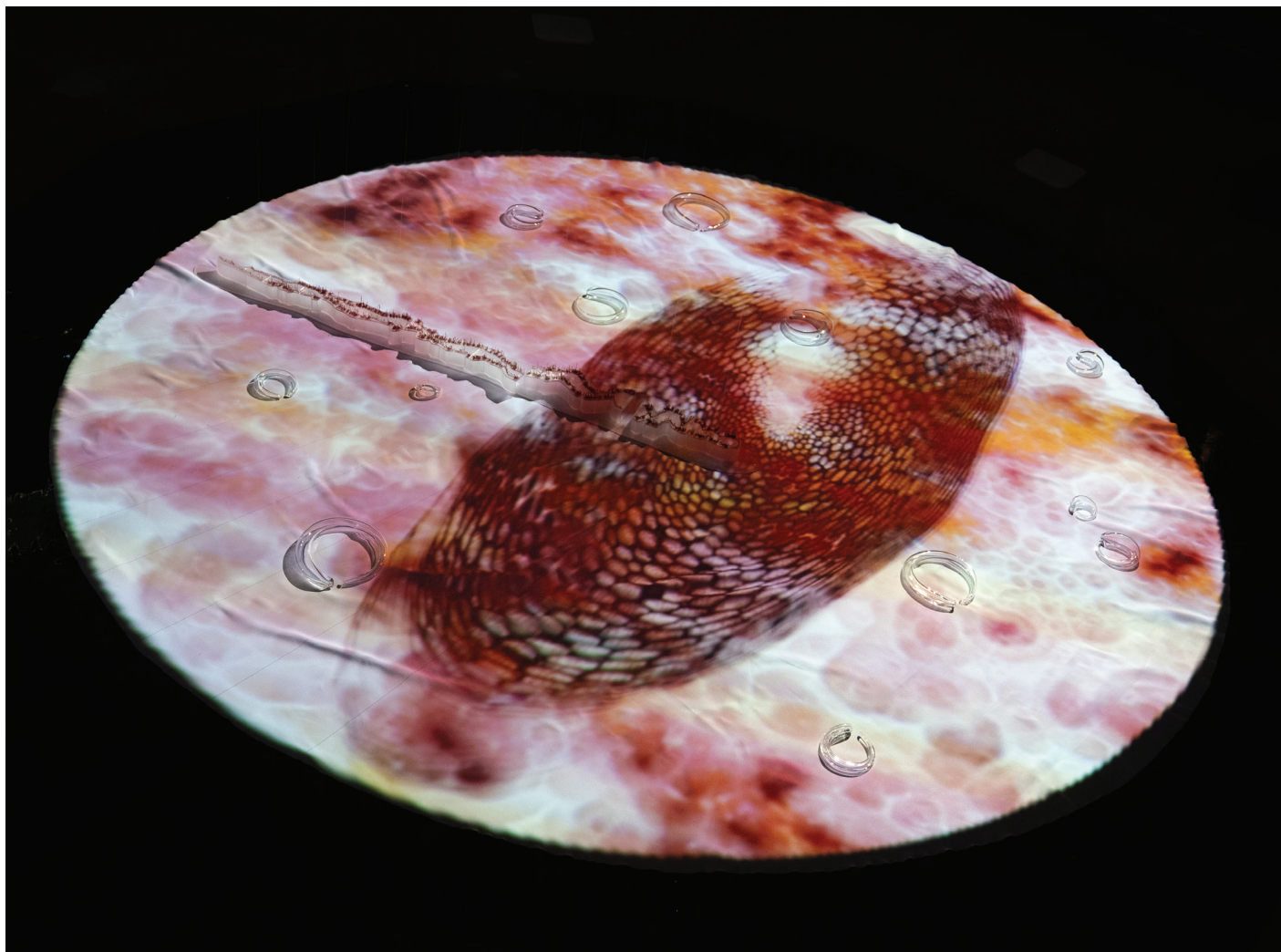


RANRAN FAN

INHALE THE INTERRUPTION 动弹



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

MARCH 22 - MAY 8, 2025

AUSTIN, TEXAS

INHALE THE INTERRUPTION 动弹

In Chinese philosophy, qì (气)—literally “air” or “breath”—is the vital force that sustains and animates life, aligning it with the natural order of the Dao. In her solo-exhibition *Inhale the Interruption*, Ranran Fan explores breathing as a cultivation of qì and a means to interrogate the dual nature of interruption: both a disruption of life’s natural flow and a necessary force to break the body and mind free from a “freeze mode” triggered by panic or overwhelming emotions.

The show becomes a ritualized space where linguistic, visual, and somatic languages converge, enacting cycles of interruption, obstruction, and renewal. Through organic materials, digital media, and embodied experience, Fan constructs a symbolic system that moves beyond representation, engaging directly with the tension between release and constriction. Divided into three sections—*Language Awareness*, *Panic Later*, and *Facing North* (all 2025)—the show presents time as both linear, with a natural chronological flow, and as a psychological experience: elastic, fragmented, stretching, collapsing, or dissolving entirely into a void where its passage becomes immeasurable.

Entering the exhibition’s first section, the observer encounters *Language Awareness*, a mixed-media, multisensory installation. Opposite the entrance, a 74-inch circular rice paper membrane stretches across the wall, resembling milky skin. Spherical clusters embedded within it create the impression of organic matter—like miniature celestial bodies or magnified particles.

Here, language is conveyed not through sight, but through scent. The orbs are handmade incense, partly crafted from an ancient recipe using Nardostachys root, clove, Costus root, charcoal powder, Holy Basil (Tulsi), and camphor—plants known for their calming, mood enhancing properties. When

inhaled, the aromatic compounds interact with olfactory receptors, converting chemical stimuli into neural signals relayed to the limbic system—particularly the amygdala and hippocampus, regions integral to emotion and memory processing.

From both neuroscientific and neuroaesthetic perspectives, scent plays a vital role in emotional regulation by directly engaging the olfactory-limbic system. It helps ground individuals by redirecting attention away from distressing thoughts and fostering mindfulness. Fan describes incense as a way to “breathe the interruption,” explaining how scent bypasses conscious thought, calms the body, and disrupts the “freeze mode”—a state of mental paralysis triggered by a sympathetic nervous system shutdown. Historically, incense burning has also been tied to the passage of time, especially in meditation and prayer practices.

Shaped by her neurodivergent perspective, Fan’s interpretation of scent often differs from others, especially in verbal expression. True to form, she introduces a machine to gauge how closely the audience’s perceptions align with hers, while deliberately embedding a biased, oracle-like response. Adjacent to this device—operating on a computer in the space—three vertical sheets of rice paper pasted to the gallery windows display English words like “remember,” “warmth,” and “trauma,” drawn from Fan’s personal writings. The words form a sinusoidal pattern, echoing neural networks or self-replicating algorithms. The words, extracted from about 1,700 of Fan’s sentences, are rated across six self-awareness categories—BS, Sentimental, Self-Deception, Resilience, Rest, and Logical—which recur periodically in red across the panels. These writings also trained a small language model, prone to structural errors. Atop a glass table the computer simulates the installation: on the screen are translucent panels of coiling words, floating lit spheres, and a chatbot named “Sentiment Sensor.” Visitors are asked, “Do you smell the unusual scent in this room? Its name is After Freeze. It boosts self-awareness in a panicky

situation.” The chatbot analyzes input based on Fan’s categories and offers prompts like “If this scent became a feeling, how would it look?” Machine responses include sounds—rain, guqin, wind, or a toilet flush—sometimes accompanied by Fan’s voice repeating words like “acknowledge” or “reset.” Through this interaction, Fan questions AI’s ability to grasp human emotions, highlighting the subjective nature of perception and the irreplaceable value of lived experience.

Beyond a concealing curtain, the second exhibition space emerges: an enveloping darkness offering a profoundly different sensory journey. The subdued lighting draws attention inward, prompting a transformation in perception. At the heart of the chamber, a luminous installation commands attention. A flat, disc-like structure—an enlarged, digital transposition of the incense and rice paper installation from the first room, lies on the floor. Across its pristine surface, projections of white bubbles appear and dissolve like steaming water, the disc rotating in alternating directions. Transparent, three-dimensional glass semi-rings and a tentacle-like waveform, resembling a red-haired clock hand, rests atop. A sensor invites visitors to exhale; upon



Language Awareness (detail), 2025

Rice paper, handmade incense (Nardostachys root, clove, Costus root, charcoal powder, Holy Basil, camphor), ink, AI chatbot, dimensions variable



Language Awareness (detail), 2025

Rice paper, handmade incense (Nardostachys root, clove, Costus root, charcoal powder, Holy Basil, camphor), ink, AI chatbot, dimensions variable

Cover Panel: Panic Later (detail), 2025

Interactive video projection, resin, 3D filament, motors, acrylic, vinyl, fabric, plastic, silicone wrapper, laptop, sensor, glass, rice paper, LED light, 16 x 16'

detection, the structure rises and segments into different sections, each ascending at varied intervals, producing a graceful undulation before settling again. To the left, a spotlight reveals a second sensor. Movement activates biomorphic shapes—delicate crimson membranes, abstracted from the image of a fried egg—that materialize and dissipate within the illuminated space. When sound enters, the atmosphere shifts: round, dusky lights emerge and drift slowly through the darkness, each enclosing a brighter, quadrangular glow—the image of a toilet bowl lit from within. The installation encapsulates a complete cycle of opposing yet interdependent forces: yin and yang, numbness and awareness, alienation and connection, chaos and structure, circular repetition and linear progression. It becomes a three-dimensional multimedia transposition of the freeze response triggered by emotional overwhelm, trauma, or panic—a latent tension simmering in stillness. Yet this stillness is only the beginning. Exhalation, movement, and sound—external stimuli introduced by the observer—set the emotional discharge and mind-body rebalancing into motion. As often seen in Fan’s artistic practice, the audience becomes an active participant in a ritualized neuroaesthetic process. Here, their breath, movement, and vocalization disrupt a state of standby, catalyzing transformation.

The aforementioned video installation, titled *Panic Later*, introduces a “timeless” clock: a circular surface devoid of numerals or markers, over which a fractured, S-shaped hand hovers. The hand does not rotate but oscillates vertically, locked at a 12-degree angle—aligned precisely with the North Pole on the compass—suggesting an anchoring to orientation in space, even as time itself falters. Fan describes this tension: “In *Panic Later*, the video projection rotates while the clock hand stays in the same position. It could be interpreted as going back and forth, but that is how I feel in the midst of a freeze response... time gets stuck. That’s why I want to add another dimension—to make it go up and down.”

The clock’s sinusoidal hand mirrors the waveform of gravitational wave strains—ripples in space-time from massive cosmic events like merging black holes. Fan, deeply interested in physics, uses this form to introduce a scientific understanding of time into emotional and psychological spaces. “Time doesn’t have to be linear, or even continuous,” she explains. “It can break into small parts; it can go in another direction, another dimension. That’s very close to healing. The process of healing is digesting trauma—and that’s what the freeze experience is.” The halted clock becomes more than a symbol of suspended time; it proposes an alternative perception, where time folds, swells, and rises in waves.

Panic Later also engages with language—its materiality and elusiveness. Along the fractured hand, strings of Chinese characters appear, engraved into the resin and coated with red extrusions. Written in Fan’s pixelated “Kōu” font, meaning “mouth” or “entrance,” the inscriptions are intentionally hard to read, reflecting the difficulty of translating personal experience. “The less legible the fonts are,” Fan notes, “the more they capture the authenticity of that experience.”

At the center of the art gallery’s grassy courtyard, a flattened cylindrical structure stands out: a transparent body supporting a copper tube, capped by a bulbous resin head enveloped in silicone rubber. Surrounding it, modular, semi-transparent acrylic discs rest on copper penannular rings, forming a large, circular mixed-media installation. Each copper ring is engraved with a semi-circular, swinging double mark facing away from its opening. At the end of these engravings—resembling ash trails or the solidified smoke of incense—stands a copper tube, proportionally matched to the disc beneath it, evoking the delicate presence of an incense stick. Upon closer inspection, the ash-trail-like pathways reveal themselves as Fan’s coiling Kōu-style Chinese characters—identical to those in the enigmatic poem from *Panic Later*, replicated in countless iterations. Even in sunlight, they remain

elusive, difficult to decipher. From this perspective, *Facing North* evokes a Daoist cosmological map, each incense stick embodying a ritual made tangible. It reflects Daoism’s skepticism toward language’s ability to capture the ineffable nature of the Dao, favoring paradox and intuition over verbal articulation.

The “North” referenced can be interpreted in two ways: geographic North (True North), the fixed axis for global navigation, or magnetic North, the shifting point a compass needle follows, altered by fluctuations in Earth’s magnetic core. This distinction between the fixed and the mutable introduces a tension central to Fan’s work. Psychologically, the misalignment can symbolize disorientation during trauma, anxiety, or emotional paralysis.

Copper, used extensively throughout the installation, deepens this theme. Malleable, ductile, and highly conductive, copper serves both literally and symbolically: it bridges internal unrest (the fluctuating magnetic field, neural dysregulation) and external clarity (the fixed geographic North, return of awareness). It suggests an attempt to realign one’s inner compass toward a true point of reference, a return to an inner Polaris even as the internal field wavers.

The motif of the circle recalls Daoist cosmology, where time is cyclical rather than linear. This continuous cycle intimates an organic return *huī* (归) to the source, resonating with *zìrán* (自然)—the inherent unfolding of all things in accordance with their nature. Bathed in natural sunlight, the installation stretches over seven feet wide, resembling an elemental sundial, accompanied by a constellation of counterparts. It invites contemplation not only of cosmic orientation and temporal flow but also the fragile, continuous process of returning to one’s true nature.

Nataline Colonnello is a contemporary art critic and curator based in Beijing, China.

Ranran Fan CV

EDUCATION

- 2022 MFA, Studio Art, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM
2013 BFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
2011 BS, Applied Biology, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *Pressing Matters* 按压即可, The Print Center, Philadelphia, PA
2023 *上天入地 Ends of the Earth*, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Salem, OR
Notice of Disquiet 我慌了, Currents 826, Santa Fe, NM
2022 *触 Brutally Sensitive*, No Land, Santa Fe, NM
往无咎 Walking On Transience, Sanitary Tortilla Factory, Albuquerque, NM
2019 *stay distracted*, John Sommers Gallery, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM

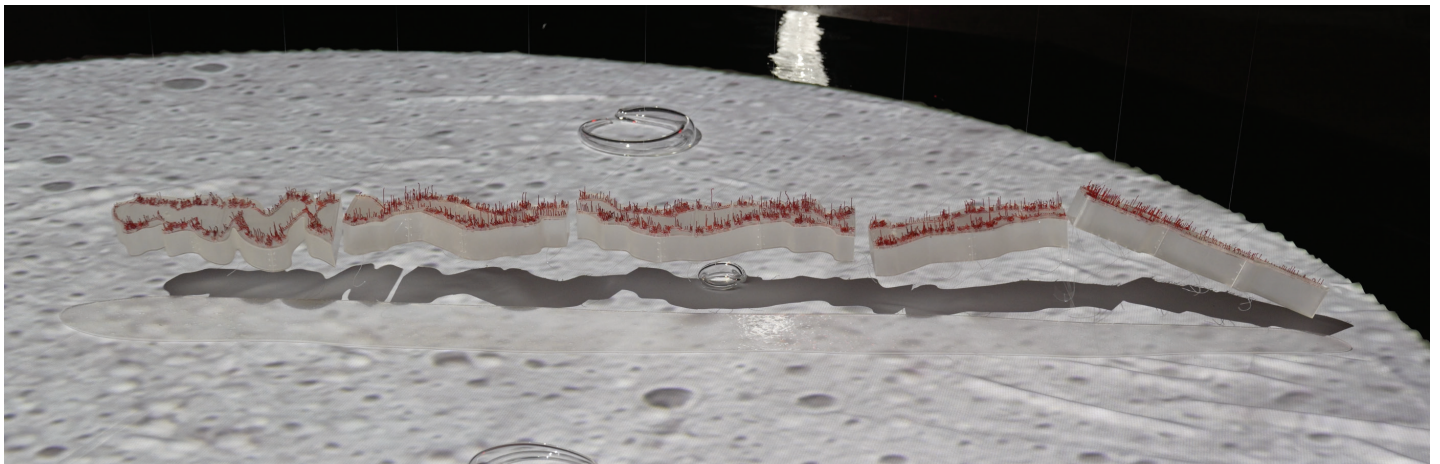
GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *Liminal Stages: Explorations on Perceptions, Existence, and Techno-consciousness*, Wind H Art Center, Beijing, China
2023 *New Visionaries*, LightBox Photographic Gallery, Astoria, OR
2022 *Not Yet and Yet*, University of New Mexico Art Museum, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM
The Hand at Fenix Arts, Fenix Arts Gallery, Fayetteville, AR
2021 *Not Knowing, Cheers to Knowing*, South Broadway Cultural Center, Albuquerque, NM
Permission to rest: a one-night exhibition, Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, NM
Shame Radiant, RedLine Contemporary Art Center, Denver, CO
Slow Roll, Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque, NM
There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in, SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM

- 2020 *8th Annual International Combined Caucus Exhibition*, BOX 13 Artspace, Houston, TX
Facing Forward, Light Art Space, Silver City, NM
New Photography II, Academy Art Museum, Easton, MD
Society for Photographic Education West x Southwest Film Festival, online
2019 *Peripheral Shelters*, Santa Fe Art Institute, Santa Fe, NM
The International Students and Professors Photo & Video Exhibition, Incheon Marine Asia Photography and Video Festival, Incheon, Korea
The Sight of Pressure, African American Performing Arts Center (AAPAC), Albuquerque, NM
2018 *40 Years of Chinese Contemporary Photography*, OCT Contemporary Art Terminal (OCAT), Shenzhen, China
The Power of the Image International Photography Exhibition, China Sculpture Museum, Datong, China
Three Shadows Photography Award Exhibition, Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing, China
2017 *Portraits 2017*, The Center for Fine Art Photography, Fort Collins, CO
2014 *GRIT: The Urban Landscape*, Copley Society of Art, Boston, MA
2012 *First Look at a Long Time*, Johalla Projects, Chicago, IL
Mapping, Chinese American Museum of Chicago, Chicago, IL
2009 *Destinations*, Hill Country Arts Foundation, Ingram, TX

SELECTED AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2023 98th ANNUAL International Competition, The Print Center, Philadelphia, PA
2022 Exceptional Visual Artist Scholar, Sanitary Tortilla Factory, Albuquerque, NM
2021 Fulcrum Fund, 516 ARTS, Albuquerque, NM
2020 SITE Scholar, SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM
2018 Shiseido Photographer Prize, Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing, China



Panic Later (detail), 2025

Interactive video projection, resin, 3D filament, motors, acrylic, vinyl, fabric, plastic, silicone wrapper, laptop, sensor, glass, rice paper, LED light, 16 x 16'



Facing North, 2025
Acrylic, copper, resin, rice paper, 87 x 79 x 15"

WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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*Photographs by Essentials Creative and
 Ranran Fan*

This project is supported in part by the City of Austin's Elevate Grant Program and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Women & Their Work is a visual and performing arts organization located in Austin that serves as a catalyst for new ideas in contemporary art. Since 1978, Women & Their Work has created significant opportunities for artists and audiences to experience contemporary art through ambitious exhibitions, commissions of new work, performances and programs that inspire audiences of all ages. We have actively developed the careers of more than 2,000 women artists, presenting 346 visual art exhibitions, 167 music, dance and theater events, 31 spoken word and literary performances, 16 film festivals and 907 programs & education workshops with the goal of ensuring that women artists are represented in all forms of art. Women & Their Work helps meet an important need in Texas providing exhibition and performance opportunities and helping to attract critical attention to the work produced here; it is the only organization of its kind in the region and one of the few organizations in the United States that dedicates itself to the work of women artists. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work

has been featured in *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *ArtForum*, and on *National Public Radio* and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

In 2020, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art acquired the archive of Women & Their Work ensuring that our entire history of the work of women artists and our website will be preserved in perpetuity.

In 2024, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired all 160 catalogs (digital and physical) produced by Women & Their Work to date. These publications, as well as all future catalogs, will be housed at their Thomas J. Watson Library, one of the largest art research libraries in the world.



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