

ARTFORUM 艺术论坛

Critic's Picks: Cici Wu

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Translated from original Chinese



Compared to daylight, mystery aligns more closely with night, for mystery often dwells in obscurity. Cici Wu's book-shaped paper lanterns, suspended before the stairwell windows of the Rockbund Museum, carry meanings of exorcism, welcoming deities, and sending off souls—clearly intended more for the night. Imagine this: each midnight, as the museum closes its doors and the living and the city fall asleep, for whom will these lanterns guide the way? The stairwell is a transitional space—a joint connecting A to B, a passageway between life and death, night and day, humans and spirits. All those summoned by the lanterns must board their vessels here.

According to the exhibition introduction, when the Rockbund Art Museum building was completed in the early 1930s, it served as the Royal Asiatic Society. In the 1970s, it was used to store confiscated books. Wu's book-shaped lanterns, crafted from “bamboo and archival-grade handmade paper traditionally used for rare book restoration,” evoke this “forgotten past.” The air in old book storage areas is far from pristine; the so-called scent of books is mostly just the smell of dust and mold.

These odors represent another form of a book's life, quietly persisting when the books themselves are no longer read or cannot be read. If someone falls ill because of this—whether spiritually or physically—it may reveal the very pathology of books: a study of how knowledge survives in a state of decay when kept in darkness.

Upon closer inspection, each paper lantern's bamboo frame is adorned with white cloth strips bearing book catalog numbers. Like miniature spirit flags, they guide books and readers on their journeys of departure and return. The lanterns consistently retain an image of being bound and sealed. This form stems from the structural relationship between bamboo strips and paper, while also carrying a metaphor for books as carriers of knowledge—bound and stacked.

Simultaneously, they resonate with several works from the ink-on-paper series *Soul of Books* (2025)—such as Nos. 01 and 08—referencing the past when books were disparaged and rendered powerless. Once forbidden to convey meaning, they became silent remnants of knowledge. Furthermore, discernible inscriptions in other works from the same series (Nos. 03, 05, 06, 07)—such as “Linsen,” “Révolution,” “La Commune de Paris,” and “Struggle”—clearly evoke themes of social transformation. This referentiality functions like an echo of textual resonance, reawakening the political language that once dominated the consciousness of the era. When placed within the context of 1970s China, these words share a common origin with the official discourse of the time, yet were simultaneously denigrated as entirely alien others on both the levels of meaning and substance.

“Lanterns from the Unreturned” is a site dedicated to the missing. From the vanished figure of an autistic youth in *Unfinished Return of Yu Man Hon* (2019), to the dissonant echoes between the transcribed interview of the boy's mother and the rabbit lantern in *Subtitle 01 (Justice and Hope)* (2019), to the vanished books, private seals, and ownerless wishes depicted in the *Lanterns from the Unreturned* and *Souls of Books* series—these works are reorganized within the exhibition's structure as threads unfolding around the theme of “unreturned missing persons.” They allow those forgotten, excluded, and suppressed subjects to flash back into the visible world in fragmented forms. The paper lantern thus becomes an intermediary—not set for the return of the missing, but deliberately reserved as a placeholder for their absence, much like the pair of chopsticks set aside at the Chinese dinner table for deities or those on distant journeys. In this sense, the exhibition does not merely mourn the violated bodies and knowledge; it establishes a temporary, witnessable space for souls still lingering at the edge of oblivion within the shadows of history and memory.

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和白天相比，神秘与夜晚更相近，因为神秘往往晦暗不明。武雨濛（Cici Wu）高悬在外滩美术馆楼梯间窗前的书型纸灯笼，携着超度、迎神和送魂之义，显然更多是为了夜晚准备的。让我们想象一下，每天午夜，美术馆闭店谢客，活人和城市一同睡去，灯笼将为谁人引路？楼梯间是过渡性空间，是从A到B的关节，也可以是生到死、夜到昼、人到鬼的通道。所有被灯笼召唤的对象，要从此处上船。

据展览前言介绍，上海外滩美术馆大楼1930年代初建成时为皇家亚洲文会，1970年代曾用于存放被查抄的书籍；而武雨濛运用“竹材和传统上用于珍本修复的保护级手工纸”制作的书型灯笼召

唤的就是这段“被遗忘的过往。”旧书堆放处的空气并不洁净，所谓书籍的味道，多半不过是灰尘与霉变的气息。它们是书的另一种生命形式，在书籍不再或不能被阅读的情形中悄然延续。如果有人因此而生病——无论属灵的疾病，还是身体上的——也许恰好揭示出书籍的病理学，一门关于知识如何在幽暗状态下以腐败的形式存续的学问。

走进细看，每一盏纸灯笼篾条框架的边沿都系着写有书籍编号的白布条。它们就像是一面面小灵幡，指引书与人的出发和归航。灯笼始终保有被捆扎、封缄的意象，这一造型既源于竹条与纸张之间的结构关系，也暗含了对书籍作为知识载体被束缚与被堆放状态的隐喻。与此同时，它们与纸上水墨系列“书之灵魂”中（2025）的若干作品（如01与08号）共同指涉了书籍被贱斥、被架空往昔——它们一度不被允许传递意义，沦为沉默的知识残骸。更进一步，在同系列其他几件作品（03、05、06、07号）中可辨识出的字迹，如“林森”、“革命”（Révolution）、“巴黎公社”（La Commune de Paris）、“抗争”（Struggle），则清晰地召唤出社会变革的主题。这种指涉就像一种文本的回声，唤醒了曾经主导时代意识的政治语言。若将这些词放置在七十年代的中国，它们既与彼时的官方话语同源共构，又在意义与实质的双重层面上被贱斥为全然异质的他者。

“来自未归还的灵灯”是一个有关失踪者的现场。从《庾文瀚未完成的归途》（2019）中自闭症少年消失的身影，到《字幕01（公义与希望）》（2019）里少年母亲的访谈文字与兔子灯彼此错置的回响，再到“来自未归还的灵灯”系列和“书之灵魂”系列所描摹的消失之书、私人印章与无主的愿望，这些作品在展览的编排中，被重新组织为围绕“未归失踪者”展开的线索，让那些被遗忘、被排除、被压抑的对象，以破碎的形式闪回于目力所及的世界。纸灯笼因而成了一个中介，不是为失踪者归来而设，而是特意为他们的缺席保留的占位符，就像中国人餐桌上为神明或远行者预留的那双筷子。从这个意义上来说，此次展览并非只是在悼念被侮辱与被损害的身体与知识，更是在历史与记忆的阴影中，为仍徘徊于遗忘边界的灵魂设立了可被见证的临时场所。