

Xue Ying: the room is empty, but pregnant

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Poetry does not live in grand words, but under the thin shell of an egg, in the heart of the unborn creature.

–Dominique Fortier, *Paper Houses (Les villes de papier)*

Capsule is pleased to present “the room is empty, but pregnant,” Xue Ying’s (b. 1993, Shandong, China) first solo exhibition at the gallery, featuring her latest sculptures and site-specific installations.

Human life unfolds above the ground, within a world governed by the principles of light, order, rationality, and efficiency. Beneath the soil lies a network of insect dwellings and plant roots. Where the sun does not shine, life extends far and wide. The artist constructs her domestic environment around a solid wooden floor, dividing it into the world above and the world below. This physical division mirrors the layered bodily and emotional experiences embedded within the family structure.

The world above the floor is concise and ordered. Ascending the steps, the viewer enters an almost empty space, much like stepping into the home of a friend for the first time, where a quiet flutter of unease and anticipation arises. The pleasure of being a guest lies in the act of observing and discovering: within the carefully composed space, details reveal traces of character and lived reality. The creaking wooden floor emits a soft sheen; patches of soil lie almost unnoticed across its surface; mounds of suds rise and spill over the edge of a basin; a warm yellow light shines from the wall through a perforated iron shoe, conjuring a faint yet enduring constellation (*Had I known that the first was the last*, all works 2026).

The cracks and edges of the floor are filled with cotton and soil, yet through these openings one may glimpse the world hidden below. Descending the stairs, the curious visitor may shift their posture, bending down to enter beneath the surface of the home. Wind passes through a bedsheet hanging in the corner, stirring its soft folds. A washing bucket becomes a deep well, its flowing water echoing the sound of a mountain creek. The dim yellow light flickers with its own quiet rhythm. Ceramic buttons adorn tangled electrical wires, embedded within the gaps of the floorboards and threaded through twisted metal wires. Beneath the floor lies scattered soil, repeatedly swept away and gathered along the cracks—traces of play, security, and uncertainty are intertwined. The subterranean is a tender emotional world, born from a childlike flux of unanchored thoughts—unintentional, purposeless, and perhaps what we sometimes call poetry.

A sheet of copper, relentlessly hammered, annealed, and colored, is transformed into a worn-out pot. A wrought-iron stand with a medieval silhouette, once used for cooking over an open fire outdoors, now rests beneath the floor. The summer flower that had fallen into the vessel has dried, yet remain strangely preserved. Flickering lights illuminate the object, allowing long-forgotten memories to resurface. Three

spoons descend along the curved contour of the vessel toward its center, where they meet without touching. The emotional tension of the work lingers within this delicate distance (*A family of three, yet to meet*).

Surrounding this sculptural relic is an assemblage of scattered everyday objects: wax blocks resembling soap, convincingly rendered eggs, cocoon-shaped bundles of metal wire, and hand-fired ceramic tiles. The light bulb hangs from a spoon handle, while paint drips between the floorboards. Through attentive observation, the artist selects and re-choreographs the ephemeral fragments of everyday life, creating a space that remains unresolved and open-ended. The works are not completed the moment they leave the studio; rather, they continue to generate new meanings and resonances through their relationships within the exhibition space, and through the presence of visitors who enter, sit upon the hand-sewn cushions, and become part of the work's continuous unfolding. Sensation cannot be anticipated, and chance cannot be staged. Xue Ying's working process reflects one of the exhibition's central propositions: beyond the rational world of calculated planning and precise execution exists another way of knowing, where one reaches out into darkness with extended arms, where the body and the senses gradually trace the contours of a world beyond the grasp of intellect alone.

Through the juxtaposition of these two worlds, Xue Ying reveals the coexistence of order and fluidity in female experience. A nonlinear form of feminine intelligence works in tandem with her sensibility. This inclusiveness emerges not only in her artistic practice but also in domestic life. *Smell: Dry* is a particularly distinctive work from her eponymous series. In this body of work, the artist uses heated kitchen utensils to leave burn marks upon fabric. The shape and material of each object, the intensity of heat, and the duration of contact interact in unpredictable ways: sometimes the fabric is scorched through, while at other times it retains only traces of varying shades of brown. The work presented in the exhibition originates from the cover of an ironing board that the artist had used for years while creating this series—a unintentional residue of past actions. This element of chance highlights the essence of the series itself: activities in the kitchen, like life itself, cannot hardly be precisely calculated or faithfully reproduced like a scientific experiment. They rely instead upon perception, experience, and intuition. The motif of ironing reappears in *The bee is not afraid of me, I know the butterfly*. The artist recreates an iron show with patina-treated copper, deconstructing it into a freestanding sculpture, while a phantom of ironing mark emerges across the folded textiles below.

Throughout the exhibition, works continue to enter into dialogue in an intertextual connectivity. Like the refrain of a poem, Xue's reprise of materials and motifs allows the context of the works to gradually unfold. The clay eggs beneath the floor extend into the nearby sculpture *In the heart of the unborn creature*. Many of the artist's male family members work in steel-related industries, and she is therefore familiar with the rows of upward-pointing spikes attached to metal-cutting machinery. She has also witnessed workers walking casually across these sharp surfaces. The work adapts the recurring motif of black spikes that Xue Ying has implemented in her previous practice. Hand-forged iron spikes, taller than the human body, pierce upward in a dense cluster, forming a descending spiral from the outer edge inward. Their tilted forms generate an intensified tension through their trypophobic sense of order. Yet eggs made of clay and wool nestled at the center of the spiral, cradled by these aggressive protrusions. Above the sharp points lies their unlikely refuge.

Following the stairs from the darkness toward the illuminated space by the window, another stairway emerges. The viewer's gaze ascends into *The Female World of Love and Ritual*. Through a deftly

orchestrated illusion of perspective, the stairway takes on a sacred presence beyond its physical scale, strewn with treasures from everyday life: ceramic buttons guide the eye across its surface; an iron ladle stands upright in a posture of confrontation; a broken silver shell filled with flesh of cotton; crystal fragments glisten with shimmer of emotions. Freshwater pearls spell out the word “care.” Through scavenging remnants and ephemera, the artist composes an epic of the mundane. The spirit of “care” anchors the emotional foundation of the exhibition—they render the inanimate sentient and the everyday timeless.

In the dimly lit room before an approaching storm, time hangs suspended, currents stream incessantly, and wind of musings and memories pass beneath the floor. The artist collects materials, experiences and imaginations from her lived experience, unsettling the ordinary with subtle clues of uncertainty. Through the exhibition, she continues her inquiry into feminine bodily and psychological experiences in the domestic realm, taking which as a prism to reveal alternative ways of relating to the world. Detritus and offerings, reality and perception, logic and intuition, certainty and possibility wax and wane like the sun and moon, illuminating the unfathomable depths and vast openness of lived experience.



薛莹：居住在可能之中

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诗意并不存在于浮夸的言辞中，而隐藏在那薄薄蛋壳下，在即将诞生的小生灵的心间。
——多米尼克·福捷《我居于无限可能：艾米莉·狄金森的一生》

胶囊欣然呈现薛莹（1993 年生于中国山东）于画廊的首次个展“居住在可能之中”，展出最新创作的雕塑和场域特定装置作品。

人类生活的世界是土地之上，依循光明、秩序、理性和效率的逻辑运转，而泥土之下是昆虫的巢穴和植物的根系，那里没有太阳，生命却延伸得很远。艺术家用古朴厚实的木地板将她所构建的居住空间分为地上与地下两个世界，物理的双重空间折射出家庭结构中身体和情感的复杂经验。

地板之上的世界是利落有序的。观者拾级而上，踏入这个几近空无一物的空间，如同初入亲友的家中，隐约的拘谨和雀跃在心头交织。作客的美妙之处在于观察和发现的乐趣：经过整理和安置的空间里，细微处透露出意趣和真实。吱呀作响的木地板散发着温润的光泽，三两处洒落着不易察觉的泥土，水池中高高堆起的泡沫溢出边界，墙上暖黄的光源透过布满烫靴的小孔，化为一道微弱而不灭的星河（《我如果知道第一杯也是最后一杯》，所有作品创作于 2026 年）。

地板的缝隙和边缘填塞着棉花和泥土，疏漏处却可低头窥见地下的世界。沿阶而下，好奇的观者可以切换身姿，附身潜入家的表象之下。风吹过角落晾挂的床笠，泛起柔软的皱褶。浣洗的水桶是一口深井，水声潺潺如山涧溪流。昏黄的灯光自有节奏地忽明忽暗。陶瓷烧制而成的纽扣装饰着盘根错节的电线，被嵌入地板的缝隙间，穿插在虬曲的铁丝上。地板之下散落着被反复打扫和整理归去缝隙的泥土，充满了玩耍、安全与可疑并存的痕迹。这里是一个丰盈柔软的感性世界，由孩童般混沌的思绪所造就，不经意，无目的——我们有时将此称为诗意。

一块铜板经过反复锻打、退火和着色方成一口看似寿终正寝的锅，中世纪造型的锻铁锅架本是为了便于室外生火做饭，如今被收置于屋内地下，而飘落锅底的夏花也已然干枯不朽。闪烁的灯光照亮它，蒙尘的记忆随之浮现。三把汤匙沿着锅器的弧线顺流而下，在中心相遇却不触碰，作品的情感张力便悬停在这微妙的距离之间（《素未谋面的三口之家》）。围绕这件富有遗迹般形式感的雕塑的，是一系列细微琐碎的日常之物。形同肥皂的蜡块，真假难辨的蛋壳、状似茧蛹的金属线团、手工烧制的陶瓷方砖……灯泡垂挂在勺柄上，油漆滴落在地板间。艺术家以细腻的体察对她生活中的蜉蝣进行遴选、再现和重组，构建了一个未成定论、意蕴朦胧的场域。作品并非在离开工作室的一刻即已完成，而是在展厅内与彼此的关系中、在观者介入空间坐在艺术家缝制的软垫上时，不断生成新的意义和回响——感受无法预支，偶然不可排演。薛莹的工作方式恰恰折射了展览的一条核心线索：在周密计划、精准执行的理性中心之外，存在另一种认知世界的方式，像是在黑暗中伸长手臂摸索，智识无法触及之处，身体与感知一点点勾画出世界的轮廓。

薛莹对两个世界的并置宣示着女性对秩序与混沌的兼容，女性非线性的智性恰恰与感知觉互为臂助。这点不仅在创作，也在家庭生活中尤为显化。《味道：干》是长期持续的同名系列中较为特殊的一件。在该系列中，艺术家用加热的厨房器皿在织物上留下灼烧的痕迹。不同的器形、材质、火候和时长相互

影响，结果难以预知，有时烫穿布料，有时在织物上留下深浅不一的烧痕。而展览中的这件，来自于创作该系列作品时常年使用的烫衣垫板上的罩布，是过去数次厨房中热量留痕的余烬。这种偶然性暗合了系列作品的内核——厨房里的活动，如同生活本身，难以像科学实验般精确计算和稳定复刻，有时要依赖感知、经验和直觉。熨烫的意象同样出现在了《小蜜蜂对我不惧怕，蝴蝶我也认识她》。艺术家用热着色的紫铜复现了烫靴的形态，将其解构成一个独立支撑的墙面雕塑，下方堆叠的织物上依稀浮现熨斗的烫痕。

展览中不止这一处出现作品之间的互文。对同一材料和意象的多种演绎如诗歌的复沓，作品的语境在循环递进中逐渐明晰。地板下陶土烧制的蛋蔓延到了近旁的雕塑《在即将诞生的小生灵的心间》。艺术家的男性家庭成员大多从事钢铁相关的工作，故而她熟知金属切割机床上装有成排的尖端朝上的刺，亦曾目睹工人日常行走于锋利的尖刺之上。作品延用了薛莹以往创作中早有先例的黑色尖刺元素。高逾人身的手工锻铁尖刺竖直耸立，密密匝匝地聚拢在方寸之间，从外向内、由粗至细排列成一个逐渐下沉的螺旋。倾斜的形态因密集的秩序感而显得愈发紧张。外围的尖刺庇护着巢居在旋心的陶土和毛毡制成的蛋。锋利的尖端之上是它们的安身之所。

沿着台阶从暗处下至明亮的窗边，又见另一个楼梯。观者的目光拾级而上，进入《爱与仪式的女性世界》。建筑般的透视令它呈现出高于实际尺度的神圣感，其上信手洒落着日常生活的珍宝：陶制纽扣牵引目光游移，铁勺以抵牾的姿态直立，银质的破碎贝壳里填充着棉花的螺肉，水晶碎石折射出情绪的闪光。淡水珍珠排列出“care”的字样。艺术家将琐碎与收集视为一种日常史诗的书写。这正是展览中一切创作的情感基石——它让物质变得有情，令日常成为隽永。

在暴雨将至的昏暗室内，时间不明，水涌不息，地板下的风吹动了记忆和心绪。艺术家从亲历的生活中收集材料、经验与想象，在日常与惯性中埋下可疑的线索。展览以家庭结构中女性的身体和精神体验为棱镜，折射出人与世界相处的多重路径。弃物与供品、物理与感知、逻辑与直觉、笃信与可能如日月一般明灭流转，照亮生命体验的幽微和丰饶。