

## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT ON RANRAN FAN.

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"触 **Brutally Sensitive,**" site specific Installation: Real-time interactive video projection, Inkjet Prints, Fabric, Vinyl; 2022.

My practice centers around inventing interactive systems. They are solutions addressing issues I have encountered due to my political, cultural, and sexual identity. I designed an encryption system that transforms my social media posts into visual puzzles, as a resistance against governments' surveillance and censorship. I created a chair that would produce text prints when people sit on it, to reflect the absurdity of the unfriendly policies against international students under the Trump administration. I invented a computer game to play with my dad as an alternative communication channel to sort out our substantial disagreements. I walked on handmade paper tiles, printing texts with my feet to remind myself to keep going and fighting despite the struggles coming from the above experiences.

In the most recent project, I created an interactive system to address a symptom called emotional numbness in Post-traumatic Syndrome Disorder. The whole gallery space has been transformed into a communication device, attempting to confront this feeling of detachment, jumpstarting a kind of reconnection between otherwise disconnected spaces. As visitors explore the imagery, words, and textures of the installation in one space, their body movements affect and communicate to other rooms just out of view, triggering changes of the sound and the video projection.



**我没有一天不努力工作，我没有一天不想念你 (There is not a single day I don't work hard); there is not a single day I don't miss you.**

Wood, Prints, Nails, Ceramic, Fabric; 2021

These solutions explore the absurd existence of the female subject under an oppressive political and patriarchal environment. Each solution is a complete alternative system that challenges the assumptions of the current systems – social structures, cultural stereotypes, and value prejudices. My works contain commonly encountered materials and mediums, including wood, fabric, ceramics, the internet, and coding. They create various sensory experiences involving the sense of smell, touch, and taste. They alter the general functionality of mundane objects or platforms, such as a chair, a game, food, or social media. They generate new functions for these materials, experiences, and objects.



**往无咎 Walking on Transience.** Installation: Cyanotypes, 3D filaments, Paper, Wood, LED lights, Hardboard, Incense powder, Brass, Vinyl, Texts (English Font: Wrong R, Chinese Font: 往无咎); Live Performance: 13:40 mins.

“往无咎 is a sentence from a hexagram, 履(Lv), in I Ching, meaning, “going forward with simple, humble steps, there will be no error.” This sentence has been helping me to get through years of struggling on finding and walking the path as a free individual under an oppressive political and patriarchal environment. It has provided the strength to fight against racial discrimination and deal with personal traumas. In this [thesis] exhibition, I covered the gallery floor with floor tiles that could print texts while stepping on them. I also made two small tiles that could be transformed into a pair of shoes for walking on the area without floor tiles. The physical pain of stepping on narrow, hard matrices with bare feet and wearing lumpy shoes resonates with my emotional response to the traumatic experiences. But through this process, these sensations and emotions become ephemeral. What truly remains is the act of walking.

Walking on transience and keep walking.

\*I Ching is an ancient divination book in Chinese culture. The hexagram, 履(Lv), literally means “shoe,” and refers to “treading, living and doing.”

## **Wrong R. Write Ranran.**

A Review of 往无咎 *Walking on Transience*.

Geometric grids. I Ching Characters. Cyanotypes. English text. Chinese poetry. Humble shoes.

Like many of Ranran's works, this form is deceptively simple.

Upon closer inspection, the tiles reveal three unique elements—Chinese characters on top, English words beneath, and rope lighting on the floor. The material used in largest quantity is tracing paper which Ranran chose because in her words it is “humble, accessible, and strong.” Inside several of these tiles, Ranran created stamps and printed English words in yellow ink on the inside of the tracing paper. When stepped on, the words become more legible. The font, created by Ranran is called, “Wrong R,” because the serif on the ‘r’ goes up instead of down. She uses this font in many of her works and it is unique in that none of the letters require diagonal lines.

In many of the other squares of the grid, a serpentine rope light weaves its way underneath the grid, illuminating the tile from below. On top of the tracing paper, several tiles have Chinese characters, formed by small cyanotype squares, each having its own Yunleiwen motif, ‘embroidered’ unto the tracing paper using a 3-D pen. “Even in transparency there is misunderstanding,” Ranran says, so she endeavors to be upfront with her materials and techniques. Interestingly, this transparency of materials contrasts with Ranran's use of languages as motifs.

This work was activated and defined by Ranran's performance, wherein she traversed and trudged barefoot over the grid, sometimes tearing the tracing paper. When these expected tears happened, she told herself, “Keep going.” The lighting in the gallery turned to a bright red and the feeling of the performance changed. A fundamental element of her navigation of the gallery was that Ranran's bare feet never touched the ground, there was always some sort of barrier between her and the floor. In this work, the floor represents society's imposition on the individual. When walking outside the grid, the primary barrier was a pair of flexible tiles that Ranran wrapped around her feet and tied on as shoes. These ‘humble shoes’ were taken on and off several times, thus re- and dis-assembled throughout the performance. In the conclusion of the performance, Ranran removed her shoes and hung them up. As she exited the gallery, she tossed incense on the floor to act as stepping-stones away from the piece. She never touched the floor with her bare feet, perhaps indicating that she never intends to face society unshielded. The final portion of Ranran's work included a sound installation. Visitors entered the low-light red gallery to the sounds of what at first resembled some sort of busy white noise. As the visitors wander around Ranran's sculptures the recording doesn't have natural ebbs and flows, but instead punctuated moments of crackling electricity and in her words the sounds, “build like optimism.” The visitor learns this is in fact a ground level recording of her first performance, her feet tearing the tracing paper and breaking the wooden grid. We hear her “walking on transience.”



往无咎 **Walking on Transience**. Installation: Cyanotypes, 3D filaments, Paper, Wood, LED lights, Hardboard, Incense powder, Brass, Vinyl, Texts (English Font: Wrong R, Chinese Font: 口); Live Performance: 13:40 mins.

Ranran's orderly grid, with legible English and Chinese text, at first seems easily visually consumable. As the reader attempts to follow the linear English writing, they inevitably get lost unable to locate a beginning or end with so few contextual cues. The Chinese text, despite being easier to see, is equally winding and abstract. According to Ranran, the first sentence of the English and Chinese texts is a translation, then they go to two different directions. The Chinese characters scattered around the center piece contains the exhibition title. 往无咎 is a sentence from a hexagram, 履(Lv), in I Ching, meaning "going forward, there will be no error."<sup>1</sup> The hexagram, 履(Lv), literally means "shoe," and refers to "treading, living and doing."<sup>2</sup> These linguistics are coded. Ranran considered what it might possibly be like to approach Chinese characters and not know how to read them. In recognizing the difficulty and exclusion every non-native English speaker can experience in the United States, Ranran does not provide an English translation for the Chinese text.

Ranran lives her daily life reconciling language, and this artwork demonstrates the duality of written Chinese and English in her self-expression. There is a hypothesis in communication theory called the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis that states the first language a person learns deeply influences their understanding of the world. The grammatical and verbal structures of the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm, Richard, and Cary F Baynes, trans. *The I Ching: Or, Book of Changes*. [3D ed.], eighth printing, November 1971ed. Bollingen Series, 19. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

language dictate how that person understands hierarchy, prioritization, characterization and much more. Ranran's first language is Chinese, but she has lived in the US for eight years. The focal point of this work is language, and by extension, communication. The artist uses language to communicate with the audience, both literally and metaphorically in her art to clarify her intent and actions as visuals alone can be too nebulous, evoking various emotions uncontrollably. Language has set limits. For Ranran, the best possible way to attempt clear communication is to use texts and images together, she is not interested in absolute ambiguity. Ranran's work, from her poetry to her performance, is an evolving process. In her words, "But through this process, these sensations and emotions become ephemeral. What truly remains is the act of walking."