



Installation view of **SHUANG LI's** *Demolition Lovers*, 2024, installation with sound, light, shadow, metal, acrylic: 20 min 10 sec, at Prada Rong Zhai, Shanghai, 2024. Photo by Alessandro Wang. Courtesy Prada Rong Zhai.



In Italo Calvino's short story *The Distance of the Moon* (1965), people once climbed ladders to reach the moon until gravity suddenly shifted, leaving some forever stranded in space. During the Covid-19 pandemic, stuck in Europe and unable to return home to China, Shuang Li found unexpected solace in Calvino's tale of cosmic separation. For the Berlin- and Geneva-based artist, the distance from family—though measured not in light years, but in unanswered messages, missed calls, and perhaps frozen screens—felt just as vast.

Borrowing the title of Calvino's story, Li's exhibition at Prada Rong Zhai in Shanghai presented new resin sculptures, videos, and installations. One light and sound piece, *Demolition Lovers* (2024), was born from pandemic-era WeChat conversations between the artist and her mother. The work transforms digital messages into a luminous meditation on contemporary disconnection: What remains when words sent digitally lose their meaning, when emojis fail to bridge emotional chasms, and when video calls create more distance than intimacy?

The installation comprises two large chandeliers, each combined with wind chimes in a spiral formation, almost like two upended versions of Tatlin's Tower. Positioned diagonally within the room—one representing the artist and the other her mother—they engage in a visual dialogue synchronized with electronic beats by the artist's musician friend DJ Hyph11E. For 20 minutes, the twin chandeliers pulse and dim, flash and fade, as their colors shift from clinical white to warm amber and piercing red, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in discord. Here, while language dissolves and dissipates with the lights and music, Li's work creates a rhythm that mirrors the staccato nature of online messaging—the sudden bursts of communication followed by long silences; moments of connection punctuated by drifting minds.

Li's work speaks to a specifically Chinese context, the one-child-policy generation's complex relationship with family, amplified by the recent pandemic's enforced separations. Her exploration of failed communication and the maternal bond resonates with works across different traditions and mediums. Writers and artists have long grappled with the experience of familial disconnection: Vietnamese American poet Ocean Vuong, who wrote tender letters to his mother, in a language that she cannot read, or Louise Bourgeois, who throughout her career returned obsessively to the maternal figure and the ambivalent nature of motherhood. Ultimately, Li's work captures a digital aphasia in our age—where words slip away from their intended meanings, never quite arriving at their destinations, leaving behind only traces of emotion.

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