Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lili Xie’s Curatorial Practice at HOOK Space: Building Connections Through Contemporary Art

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Through artist-led exhibitions and interdisciplinary programming, Chicago-based curator Lili Xie develops a curatorial practice attentive to identity, intimate narratives, and the ways art creates space for dialogue.

In Chicago’s contemporary art scene, independent art spaces offer room for artistic experimentation, exchange, and forms of presentation that extend beyond conventional exhibition formats. At HOOK Space, curator and co-founder Lili Xie approaches this possibility through a program of exhibitions and interdisciplinary projects that bring together artists working across different media, subjects, and personal experiences.

Xie holds an MFA in Photography from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). Her own artistic practice spans photography, film, and performance, alongside ongoing field research. Working across these disciplines has informed her approach to curating, particularly her attention to the relationship between an artist’s intentions, the conditions of presentation, and the audience’s experience. She considers how an exhibition’s context and arrangement can influence the way viewers engage with artistic ideas.

Xie’s curatorial practice is shaped by an interest in how contemporary art engages with identity, the body, cultural experience, and interpersonal relationships. Rather than approaching exhibitions solely as displays of finished works, her projects create contexts in which individual artistic practices can enter into conversation with broader social and cultural questions. Through her work at HOOK Space, she develops opportunities for artists to present their work while inviting audiences to encounter perspectives that may differ from their own.

Curating Through Different Perspectives

Xie’s 2026 exhibition Clouds and Stars, featuring the work of Chicago-based artist and storyteller Muchen Wang, explores the relationship between everyday memories, companionship, and loss. Narrated through the perspective of a dog and her human, the exhibition approaches grief through intimate moments and imaginative storytelling. Its emotional register is gentle rather than dramatic, allowing ordinary experiences to carry the weight of memory and affection.

The exhibition reflects Xie’s interest in artistic practices that approach complex experiences through unexpected perspectives. Wang’s narrative language brings together innocence, fantasy,

and emotional sincerity, creating a space in which grief can be considered not simply as an experience of absence, but also as an expression of enduring attachment.

Another example of Xie's curatorial work is Uncontained Figure (2026), a solo exhibition featuring artist Yining Chen. The exhibition offers a different point of entry into questions of embodiment, materiality, and transformation. While Clouds and Stars approaches personal experience through memory and storytelling, Uncontained Figure shifts attention toward the body and its material possibilities.

Xie curated both exhibitions, yet they remain distinct in subject and form. Their contrast suggests a curatorial approach that responds to each artist's particular materials and concerns rather than imposing a single aesthetic across the program.



Photo: Lili Xie

Beyond the Exhibition Format

Xie's curatorial work at HOOK Space also extends into moving-image programming, performance, and other forms of artistic exchange. She co-curated the moving-image screening Majoritized Daily, Minoritized Life (2026) with Michael (Linsi) Yang, and Girls' Night Takeover (2025) with Muchen Wang. The space's wider program has also included Night of OK (2026), a performance event, Lick the Product, and Tinder Map (2025).

Working across different formats allows Xie to engage with artistic practices that may require distinct forms of presentation and audience participation. A moving-image screening directs attention toward duration and sequence, while a live performance establishes a more immediate

relationship among the artwork, the space, and those present. Within an independent art space, these differences leave room for projects to respond to the particular needs of the artists and their ideas.

This interdisciplinary approach is central to understanding Xie's work. Her practice is not defined by a single medium or subject, but by attention to how artistic ideas are presented and experienced.



Photo: Lili Xie

Building an Independent Art Platform

As co-founder and curator of HOOK Space, Xie's role extends beyond developing individual exhibition concepts. The program she helps shape brings narrative-based solo exhibitions, material-focused artistic practices, collaborative screenings, and performance events into the same independent venue.

Those projects differ not simply in subject but in the forms of attention they ask of an audience. From Wang's narrative exhibition to Chen's investigation of materials and the time-based structure of a film screening, the program depends on curatorial choices responsive to each project rather than on a single exhibition model.

Through HOOK Space, Xie has developed a continuing body of work that encompasses solo exhibitions, group projects, screenings, and performance-related programming. Her curatorial experience includes projects organized in both 2025 and 2026, reflecting an ongoing commitment to exhibition-making and the development of an independent artistic platform in Chicago.

The space provides a context for this work to unfold over time. Rather than treating each exhibition as an isolated event, Xie's practice connects individual projects through a sustained interest in artistic inquiry, cultural experience, and the possibilities of exchange. The resulting program brings together different voices without requiring them to share a single narrative.

Creating Space for Dialogue

At the center of Xie’s curatorial practice is an interest in how art can make room for experiences that are personal yet capable of resonating beyond the individual. Questions of identity, belonging, memory, and the body often emerge through specific materials and lived experiences. In the exhibition context, these experiences can become points of encounter between artists and audiences.

Across projects as different as Clouds and Stars and Uncontained Figure, her practice reflects an attention to the particularity of each artist’s work and to the connections that can emerge when those works are brought into public view. At HOOK Space, this means creating a setting where different ideas and ways of seeing can meet.

https://hook-space.cargo.site/

Photo: Jun Li

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