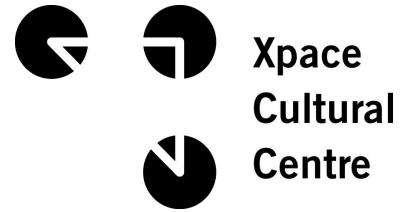


WINDOW SPACE



Butterfly Ate That Dream

Yujie Wang

January 24, 2026 – March 7, 2026

When viewing *Butterfly Ate That Dream*, it becomes clear that Yujie Wang transformed Xspace Cultural Centre's Window Space into a threshold, a place where longing and uncertainty meet, and where the ordinary is quietly charged with the sublime.

Here, the window does not simply frame the street outside. It breathes. Silk surfaces hover in the light, catching and releasing it as if exhaling. Mirrors glint softly along the floor and walls, scattering fragments of reflection that never quite settle. Images blur, overlap, return. Are we looking at a single suspended moment, or at time itself thinning and folding as it passes through us?

The installation is composed of three identical photographs printed on sheer fabric and hung from the ceiling. From the front, the fabrics intersect and partially obscure one another, producing a gentle visual drift as viewers shift their position. At the center of the image sits a green apple placed atop a circular mirror. The apple is doubled by its reflection, while the mirror itself reads as a dark opening, suggestive of a void or a passage. A black butterfly with blue accents rests lightly on the apple's surface, poised in stillness. Behind this arrangement, the background dissolves into softened hues of

blue, green, and black, tree branches stretching against a spring sky. For this Window Space installation, Wang extends the photograph's internal logic outward. Circular mirrors, identical to the one pictured, are laid across the west and south planes of the space, allowing image and environment to echo and refract one another.

Wang's work often dwells in states of passage, and this installation emerges from a deeply felt experience of inhabiting the in-between. Born and raised in Dalian, China, a city shaped by long winters and heavy snowfall, she recalls the charged moment when winter begins to give way. Snow melts unevenly, ice loosens into trickling streams, droplets gather and fall. Mud appears alongside a sense of promise. It is not a conventionally beautiful scene, yet it is filled with quiet anticipation. For Wang, this seasonal shift mirrors a recurring mental state, one marked by tension between hope and uncertainty. It is a feeling she associates with growth, with moments in life when change is underway but its destination remains unclear.

That sensation is embedded in the work's visual language. The green apple carries the freshness of early summer and the sense of something just beginning. It is unripe, vibrant, and alive with possibility. Wang associates it instinctively with youth and emotional sincerity, recalling how green apples appear in Japanese and East Asian cinema as symbols of tender, awkward, and slightly sour forms of love. The butterfly, by contrast, introduces fragility and risk. Beautiful and fleeting, it gestures toward transformation while refusing any promise of permanence. Wang notes its short lifespan, and the faint danger that always accompanies change. Beneath it all, the mirror anchors the image with a darker gravity. It reflects, but it also absorbs, reading as a hollow or a tunnel. The mirror suggests that growth often requires passing through something opaque, even painful.

The photograph itself is the result of a careful, tactile process. Wang began by constructing a physical collage. She took two photographs, printing them separately. One image, featuring the apple, butterfly, and mirror, was cut out and layered over

another photograph of trees and sky. This composite was then photographed again. Early experiments placed the central image against a black background, but Wang found herself drawn instead toward light. She wanted the final image to feel open, brighter, capable of holding hope without denying complexity. This method of layering and re-photographing mirrors the work's conceptual structure. Memory accumulates slowly, through small gestures and repeated encounters. Wang describes the original photograph as yeast, something living and active, fermenting over time. The installation becomes the bread that emerges later, shaped by duration and reflection.

Time is essential to how *Butterfly Ate That Dream* unfolds. The work does not point to a single event or a fixed narrative. While the background photograph was taken in spring, the impulse to create the image arose during a late winter in Oakville, where the thaw reminded Wang of her childhood in Dalian. The installation resists specific geography or time. Instead, it gathers layers of lived experience. The three suspended fabrics suggest overlapping chapters of a life. Moments that may feel heavy or painful while unfolding can later reveal themselves as sites of growth. As viewers move through the space, the images align and misalign, offering no stable vantage point, only gentle shifts and partial clarity.

Wang's practice balances intuition with structure. Photography, she explains, is an instinctive act for her, a way of responding quickly to a feeling that demands to be seen.¹ Installation requires a more deliberate logic. The transition from photograph to installation felt to her like writing a novel, a process of giving shape to something poetic and abstract until it can stand on its own. This balance lends the work a sense of calm. There is a meditative stillness beneath the uncertainty it holds. Rather than being overwhelmed by feeling, Wang approaches it with awareness, allowing sensitivity and control to coexist.

¹Yujie Wang, in an in-person interview with Sherry Chunqing Liu (December 17, 2025).

At the heart of the work is the act of naming a feeling. Wang describes this liminal state as a recurring condition, one she has encountered at different ages and expects to meet again in the future. It is a period defined by not knowing, by the absence of clear direction. By recognizing and naming this state, she suggests, it becomes more possible to endure it. The feeling does not disappear, but it becomes less suffocating. Awareness itself becomes a form of agency, even if control remains elusive.

There is a quiet heroism embedded in this gesture. Not the triumph of overcoming hardship, but the resolve to continue alongside it. Wang speaks ambivalently about the myth of Sisyphus, questioning whether it romanticizes suffering or simply offers a way to survive it. If the stone cannot be removed, perhaps it can be adorned. Perhaps making it beautiful is not denial, but care. In this sense, the butterfly is not a symbol of escape. It is a companion to persistence.

For viewers navigating distance, instability, or transition, the work may offer particular solace. For diasporic subjects, for those in their twenties, or for anyone living through uncertainty, the installation resonates as a shared emotional terrain. Yet its reach extends beyond any single life stage. Uncertainty returns again and again, each time we believe we have found solid ground. This is the rhythm of time passing. In *Butterfly Ate That Dream*, Wang captures this recurring condition with tenderness and restraint. The installation does not promise resolution. Instead, it holds space for becoming, reminding us that every winter is different, and that spring, in one form or another, will come.

– Sherry Chunqing Liu