

5-50

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Ardent Longing

Exhibition Reception:

January 10, 5 - 8 pm

Exhibition:
January 10 – February 8, 2026

5-50 Gallery presents *Ardent Longing*, a two-person exhibition featuring the work of **Dan Oliver** and **Tiantian Lou**. Though distinct in material and method, both artists interrogate the fragility of structures—architectural, psychological, and existential—and reveal how the built environment mirrors the contingencies of human experience.

Chicago-based painter **Dan Oliver** merges personal memory with contemporary unease, translating moments of rupture into images rendered with surprising calm. His paintings draw on the legacies of the Chicago Imagists and twentieth-century surrealism, depicting intimate scenes of chaos—domestic interiors engulfed by flame, objects caught mid-collapse—yet executed with a serenity that belies their catastrophic content. In these meditative still-life-like narratives, destruction is witnessed only by flora, fauna, and the inanimate objects that populate each space. The work channels existential thought, imagining catastrophe not as an aberration but as an inevitable condition of being. Oliver suggests that when one fully acknowledges the impermanence of the structures we inhabit—literal and psychological—one may encounter a strange form of acceptance, even clarity.

Brooklyn-based artist **Tiantian Lou** approaches architectural form — not through destruction, but through softening. Working across painting and sculpture, Lou examines monumentality as a language of permanence, authority, and order. Her stacked panel paintings compress architectural geometries into carefully balanced compositions, where forms hover between building and object. Symmetries shift, edges slip slightly out of alignment, and colors modulate subtly, creating a pervasive sense of precarity. The result is a destabilized architecture—one that reveals its own vulnerability beneath the veneer of rigid geometry.

This inquiry extends into Lou's fabric sculptures, in which columns and other structural archetypes are reimagined in cloth. By sewing, folding, and layering, she introduces a distinctly human touch to these historically authoritative forms. What begins as a measured plan evolves into an object shaped by softness, distortion, and the small decisions of the hand. As these works scale upward, their vulnerability becomes more pronounced, transforming the monument from a symbol of permanence into a site of intimate instability.

Together, Oliver and Lou offer two approaches to the architecture of uncertainty. Oliver's practice unbuids: the home burns, structures fail, and existential truth emerges in the glow of destruction. Lou's practice rebuilds: she dismantles assumptions of rigidity and permanence, revealing the pliability and human contingency embedded in the forms that surround us. One charts the moment when a structure gives way; the other lingers in the liminal space where structure softens, shifts, or reconstitutes itself.

In dialogue, their work asks what it means to inhabit spaces—physical or emotional—that are never as stable as they appear. Both artists lay bare the quiet negotiations between order and upheaval, monument and ruin, certainty and its inevitable unraveling.

Dan Oliver (b.1963) is a Chicago-based artist, born in the American Midwest, and influenced by movements such as Surrealism, German Romanticism, and the Chicago Imagists. His diverse interests in philosophy, cinema, history and music also inform his studio practice. In 2021, his exhibition, *Afire*, at the Evanston Art Center, which opened on the 150th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire, launched his most recent body of work concerned with fire as a symbol of transformation on both personal and societal levels. Dan Oliver has also been a museum professional, and was the founder of Glow Exhibitions, an artist-run gallery dedicated to exhibiting emerging Chicago artists. His timely, dreamlike imagery has attracted the interest of an international audience, with recent exhibitions in Asia, Europe and the United States.

Tiantian Lou (b. 1995) is an artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She graduated with architecture degrees from Princeton University and Rhode Island School of Design. With experience in textile and printmaking, Tiantian operates a range of artistic media and utilizes them in experimental ways. Her works has been shown internationally, including Centre of Contemporary Art, Vancouver (2025); Volta Art Fair, Basel (2025); Shu Museum, Beijing (2025); Untitled Art Fair, Miami (2024); Soloway Gallery, Brooklyn (2024); Two Palms Press, New York (2023); LATITUDE Gallery, New York (2022); Milan Design Week, Italy (2022); Chashama Gallery, Brooklyn (2019)