

ART REVIEW

Will you marry me?

Artists Magic Feifei and Isaac Duan reframe marriage as a collective experiment.

by **Isaac Vazquez**
September 11, 2025



Arthur Johnson Weiss officiating at Isaac Duan & Magic Feifei's "to live happily ever after forever and ever."
Credit: Courtesy Shanghai Seminary

On August 17, Magic Feifei and Isaac Duan performed a marriage ceremony at Shanghai Seminary. In between two rows of chairs and flags—of the U.S. and of China—and in front of a tropical backdrop, each artist read their vows to another couple, and in return, the other couple read their own back. Underneath the division of flags, against the weight of national symbols and personal promises, the ceremony unsettled the tradition of conjugal life. It concentrated on responsibility instead of contracts. Their marriage ceremony reminded us of what we may owe to one another.

In the U.S., marriage is an extensive, legally binding economic contract. It comes with tax savings, more credit and loan options (debt), and, for some, a path to citizenship. For many, it provides an image of everlasting love and freedom through the right to make one's own choices. For others, marriage is knotted with unfreedom, discipline, capitulation, and oppressive heteronormativity. Regardless of where you stand, marriage occurs between two people.

Choosing marriage holds power, though this choice is not equal for everyone. Immigrants and those living in precarity don't have the privilege to choose why they get married—it can carry a consequence to opt out (risk of deportation or the loss of opportunity or autonomy). From this perspective, viewing marriage as a right to make one's own choices can be both fictive and liberatory. It can serve as a form of rebellion or as a reminder of the structures that limit who can exercise it.

Exactly at this intersection is what Feifei and Duan offer us. This was a ceremony of vows, of love, and another kind of debt. Their exchange was about a moral obligation regarding what you owe people. Not owed in the economic sense, but to take from Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, a form of debt which could never be repaid, an interdependence that negotiates how we celebrate and work with one another continuously. As Arthur Johnson Weiss, who officiated the ceremony, said: “You have begun it here today in speaking your vows before your friends and strangers, and you will do it again in the days and years to come, standing by each other, sharing all that is sweet and bitter in life.”

This emphasis on continuity shifts the ceremony from a singular event into a practice that must be built upon. By extending the vows beyond the couple, into the collective and future, the ceremony reframed marriage as a collective experiment in living with and for others.

Debt and what we owe may not seem like the best choice of words, but through them, we may think of another form of liberation through a momentary act; a practice of freedom through ongoing experiments with each other (to pull from Maggie Nelson). Their performance—four individuals in communion with a crowd who witnessed their commitment to one another—demonstrated how ritual can open a space beyond its usual constraints. In that space, the vows became less about binding law and more about rehearsing another way of being together.

Maybe it is a project about learning how to feel good together, although not without some risk—the risk of exchanging love for a political practice, converting hope into possibilities.

These moments of liberation remind us that the current conditions don't have to be fixed; we can create opportunities to change routes. To quote one of Isaac's vows, “Let us move forward together, through this shaken, broken, and uncertain world, into the next journey that awaits us.”

Shanghai Seminary

Thu–Sat 1-6 PM, or by appointment, 3262 S. Morgan, 708-880-9807,

shanghaiseminary.com