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The Guardian  
"Anatomy of an artwork: Phillip Lai's Untitled, 2016."



## Anatomy of an artwork: Phillip Lai's Untitled, 2016

**Art**  
Anatomy of an artwork

The London-based artist wants to give us a spatial experience with familiar objects

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Can I have some more please... Phillip Lai's Untitled. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist

### Offhand

"Often there's an offhand quality to the work." So says Lai about his recent output, all of which has involved objects, from lampshades to concrete blocks, arranged in an oddly poetic manner that belies and undermines their otherwise prosaic nature. Here, a blue bucket, attached to a wall, is partially filled with uncooked rice.

### **An encounter**

[Art](#) so often uses a visual motif to communicate something else; X represents Y. Yet, for Lai, this is not the case. The bucket remains a bucket; the rice remains rice. Yet Lai is no Duchamp. Combined, his objects become something else, an invitation perhaps to think about our encounter.

### **Decipher**

We look, we grasp for analogy: the rice, perhaps a landmass on the sea-blue container. This doesn't help us with deciphering a meaning, but it helps us to process how we are looking. The objects are stripped of their use, and become materials in an abstract composition.

### **Relationships**

The bucket and rice will sit among further objects in Lai's solo show. There they will form more relationships, more encounters with other things and also, importantly, with bodies as the visitor walks around them, each intuiting them in their own way.

*[Modern Art, EC1, to 6 Aug](#)*