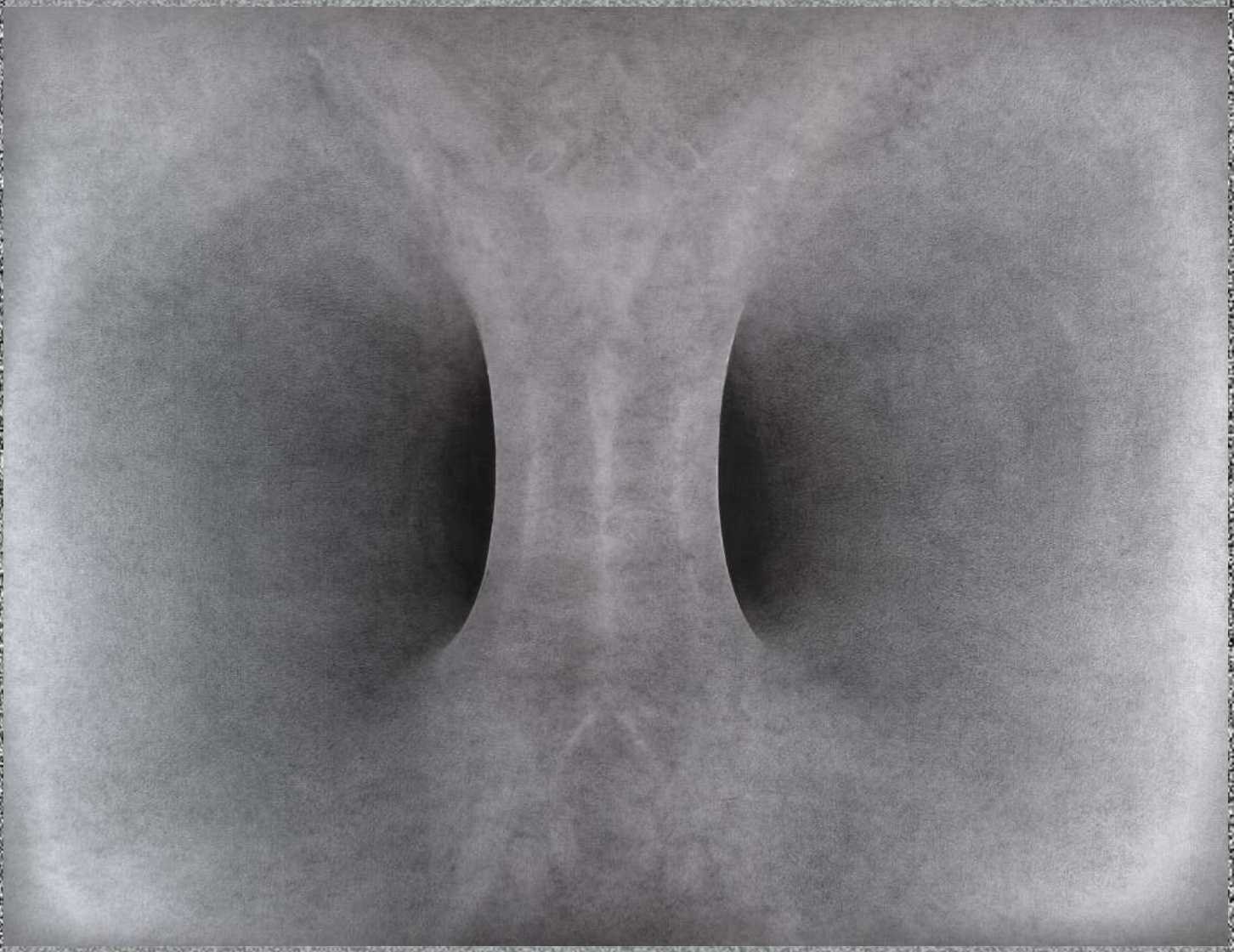
YUNYAO ZHANG



SELECTED WORKS

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BIOGRAPHY

Working in graphite, colored pencil, charcoal, pastel on white felt, Yunyao Zhang produces compositions that position his subjects fragmented or close up, resulting in enigmatic, haunting scenes. His work articulates a disquieting vision of the body transformed by representational processes.
Drawing from photographs, medical imaging, or his own imagination, tubular forms, cavities, and enigmatic details also emerge. Initiated in 2010, Zhang's drawing practice–allowing neither erasure nor error–demands near-surgical precision. Equipped with a palette limited to a range of blacks and grays, and far removed from any spectacular gesture, he meticulously maps the surface and draws freehand upon it to create a matte, imprinted texture: gradually, the image emerges from the velvety surface of the felt. Since the beginning of his studies in Shanghai, Yunyao Zhang has worked with light and material, with a particular interest in the human body, eroticism, sensuality, emotions and drama.
Zhang's process of creating his drawings is methodical and labor-intensive, he has undertaken new experiments in his recent exhibition projects. In 2023, he initiated Palace of Alienation at the He Art Museum, inspired by 19th-century European encyclopedic animal illustrations, and more specifically by the work of the Austrian master dyer and painter Aloys Zötl. He depicted primates in colored pencil and graphite on felt. Later, on the occasion of Once Within a Time - 12th SITE Santa Fe International, curated by Cecilia Alemani, he also presented collages combining academic drawings, references to art history, and dried plants he gathered in the region.
It is the research-driven dynamic that runs throughout Yunyao Zhang's practice that has fascinated us since discovering his work at the Biennale de Lyon, and that has shaped our desire to support him and to integrate his work coherently into the gallery's program.

Born in 1985 in Shanghai, Yunyao Zhang lives and works in Paris. A graduate in 2007 from the Oil Painting Department of the Academy of Fine Arts at Shanghai Normal University, he moved to Europe at the beginning of 2020. In 2013, he was the youngest Chinese artist selected for the Glenfiddich Artist residency program.
His work has been presented in several major international exhibitions and events, including the 12th SITE SANTA FE International - curated by Cecilia Alemani (Santa Fe, US, 2025), Musée Fenaille (Rodez, France, 2025/2021), BY ART MATTERS (Hangzhou, China, 2025), HEM Art Museum (Foshan, China, 2024), Musée des beaux-arts de Caen (Caen, France, 2023), The 16th Edition of Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art - "Manifesto of Fragility" (Lyon, 2022), MAM - Musée des Arts de la Marionnette (Lyon, France, 2022), MAC Lyon (Lyon, France, 2022), Qingdao Art Museum (Qingdao, 2021), Zeno X Gallery (Antwerp, 2021), Watou Arts Festival (Watou, Belgium, 2021), chi K11 art museum (Shanghai, 2016), CAFA Art Museum (Beijing, 2015), Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai (Shanghai, 2013), etc.
His solo exhibitions include: "Sweetheart" (Artro & Don Gallery, Kyoto, 2025), "Palace of Alienation" (HEM Art Museum, Foshan, 2024), "Palace of Alienation" Part II (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2024), "Palace of Extasy" (Qiao Space, Shanghai, 2019), "Skin Gesture Body" (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2017), "Nec Spe, Nec Metu" (Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2017), "After Evensong" (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2015), "Touch Point" (01100001 Gallery, Beijing, 2013), "Mirage" (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2013), and "Paradbox" (Don Gallery, Shanghai, 2011), etc.

His works are held in several public and private collections, including: Lorin Gu, Recharge Foundation, USA; Pinault Collection, France, CMS Collection, France; Yan Du Collection, Asymmetry Art Foundation, UK; Kollitsch Collection, Austria, Frédéric de Goldschmidt Collection Cloud Seven, Belgium; White Rabbit Collection, Australia; HEM Art Museum Collection, Foshan, China; The Cloud Collection, Nanjing, China; Asymmetry Art Foundation, UK; De Ying Foundation, China ; BY ART MATTERS, China ; Paul Thiers N.E.S.T Collection, Belgium, QIAO Zhibing Collection, China

YUNYAO ZHANG

Once Within a Time, 12th SITE SANTA FE International Biennial

27 June 2025 – 12 January 2026

Curated by Cecilia Alemani
SITE SANTA FE, USA

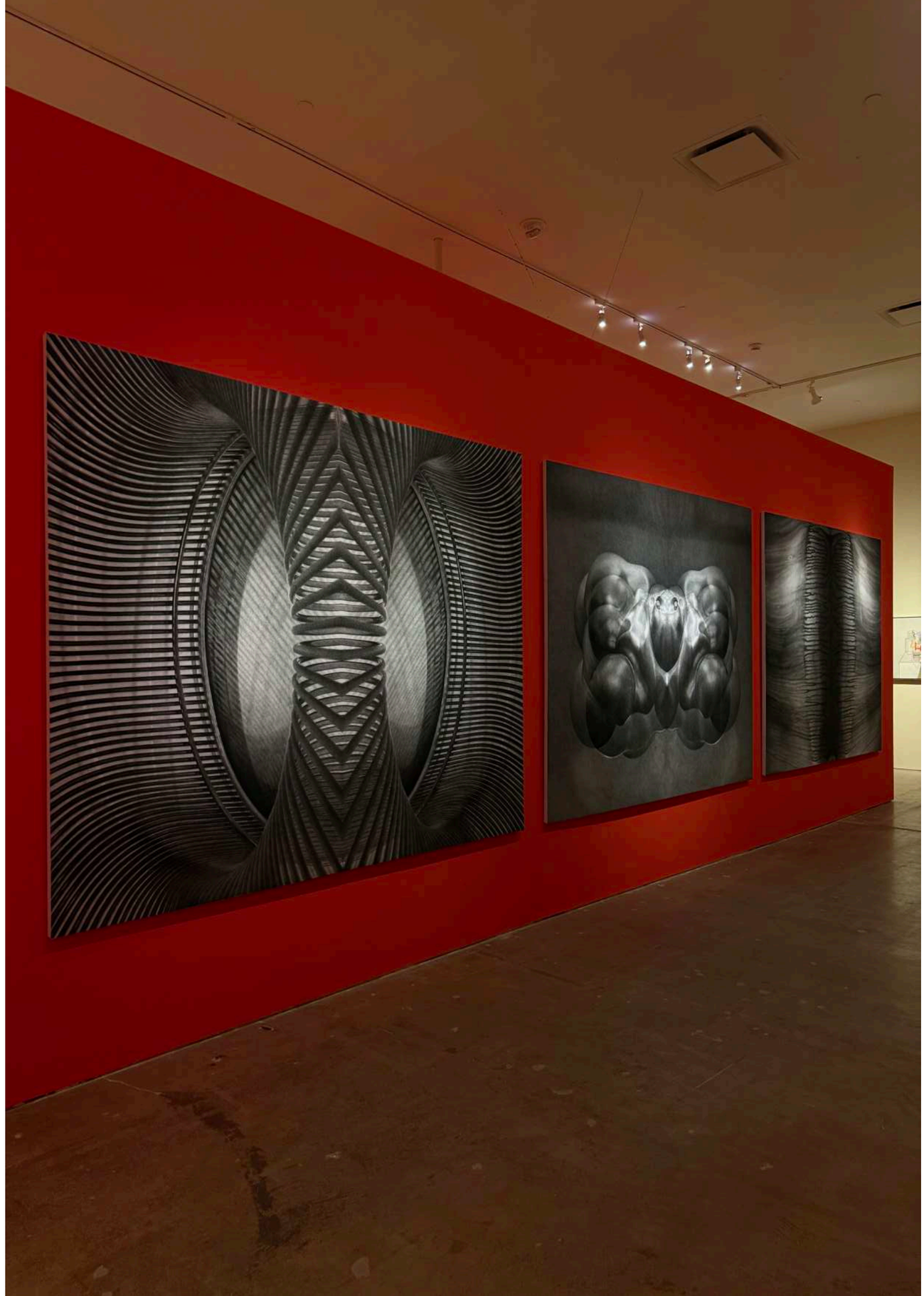
"*Once Within a Time* takes its title from the most recent film by Godfrey Reggio, the legendary experimental filmmaker who has long resided in Santa Fe. Reggio's *Once Within a Time* (2022) intertwines fairytale atmospheres with apocalyptic landscapes, pursuing a form of storytelling that blends the fantastical and the mundane in a moving portrait of the existential condition. Inspired by the film's circular narratives, the 12th International places storytelling at its heart, exploring New Mexico's multilayered histories through the lens of more than ninety participants.

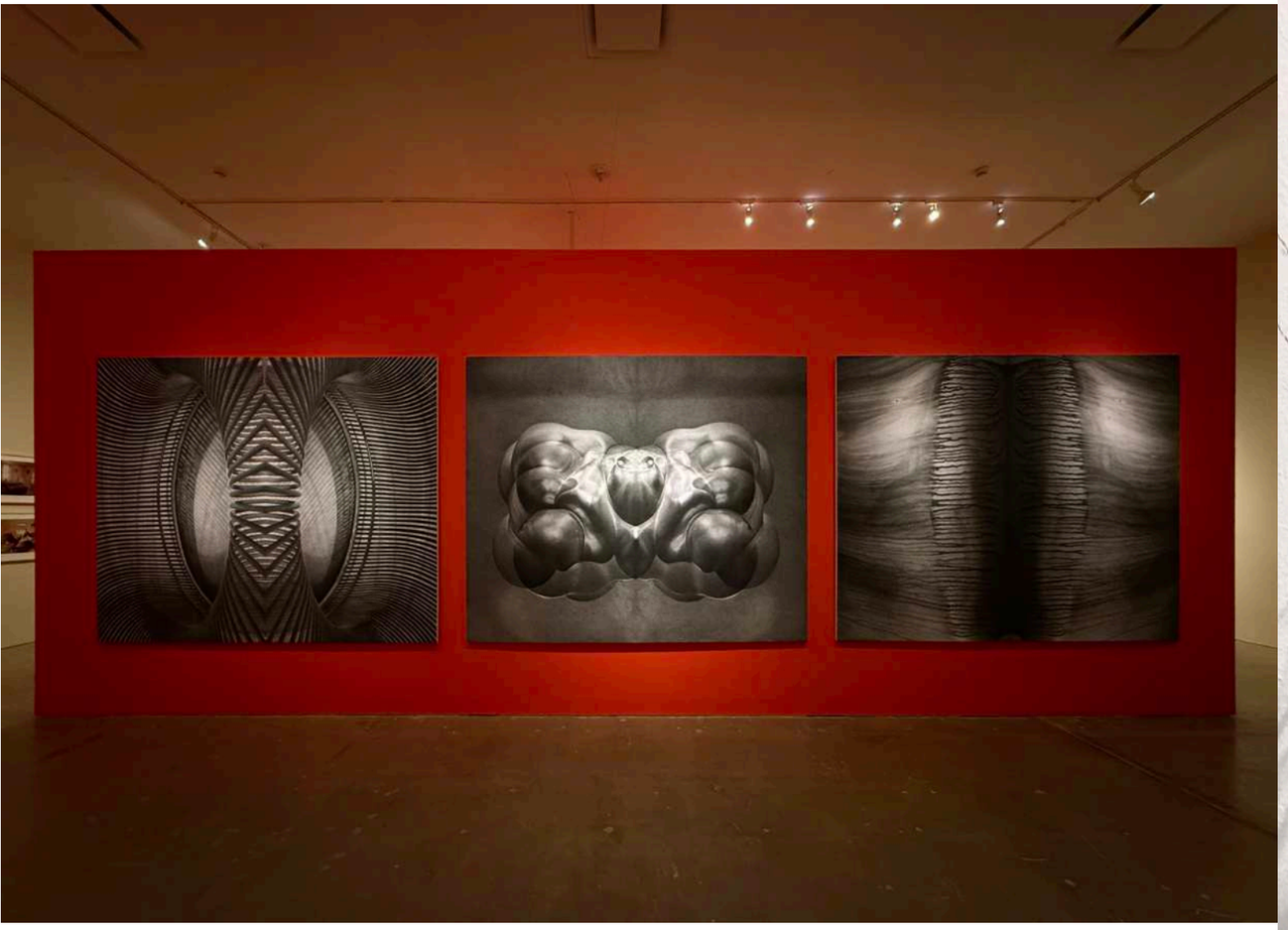
The exhibition revolves around a vibrant collection of over twenty characters—or figures of interest—with close ties to the Southwest. This diverse cast encompasses local heroes, mythical beings, unassuming residents, reclusive artists, distinctive writers, and charismatic healers. The biographies of these people—incarnated in a collection of artifacts, documents, images, and objects—function as catalysts for over seventy local, national, and international artists. Many of the featured artists have created new work that responds, directly or indirectly, to the experiences and lore of these figures. The commissions are shown here alongside contemporary works from around the world, offering insights into the region's rich history and its artistic and literary heritage.

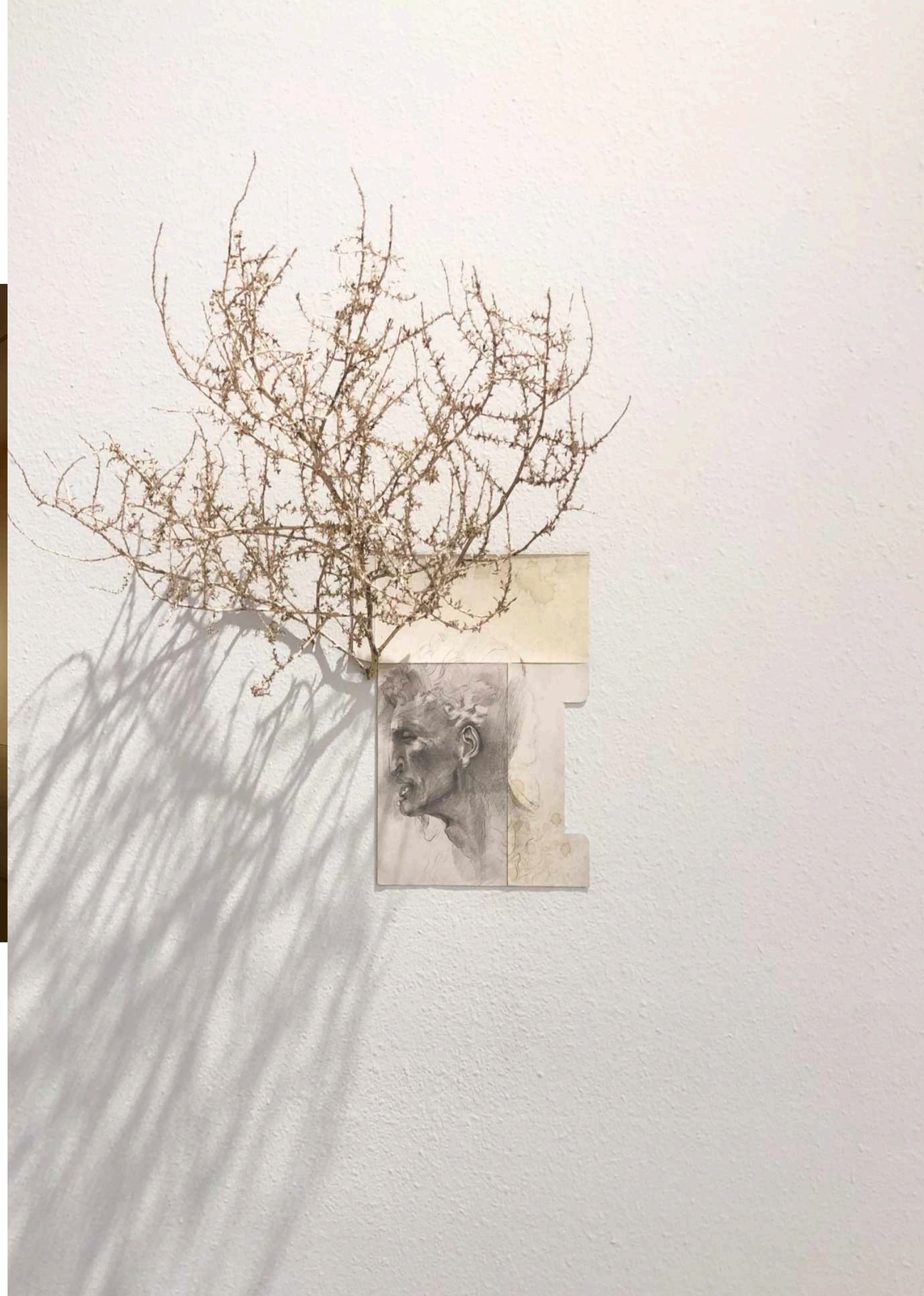
In a first, this iteration of the International extends beyond SITE SANTA FE to more than a dozen locations across the city. These partner venues comprise cultural institutions such as museums and landmarks, as well as spaces in a public park, a former foundry, an empty storefront, the lounge of a cannabis shop, a toy store, and more. These varied locations set the tone for novel dialogues between figures, artists, and places, prompting visitors to explore different corners of Santa Fe.

Conceived as a vast family album, *Once Within a Time* centers people—specifically, those who have inhabited, traversed, or left their mark upon the Santa Fe region across the centuries. Transcending a singular theme or narrative, the 12th SITE SANTA FE International manifests as a symphony of voices, engaging with the city of Santa Fe and its myriad identities and tales."

Source : Press release







YUNYAO ZHANG

FELT, VELVET, SOOT, GYPSUM, ENGINE OIL

Group exhibition

Bortolami, New-York
9 January – 24 January 2026

Featuring new and recent works by Diana Al-Hadid, Leonardo Meoni, Jonathan Okoronkwo, Claudio Parmiggiani, and Yunyao Zhang, the exhibition centers on two-dimensional artworks that forego painting's traditional materials. The artists use the titular supports and mediums to expose and explore the limits of pictorial systems, while further emphasizing how context informs material choices—from industrial trade to art historical movements. Felt, velvet, soot, gypsum, and engine oil are all employed by the participating artists in order to break with convention and expand the field.

Yunyao Zhang's The Connector series investigates the transformation of material and perception through an extended process of drawing with graphite on felt. Repeated application gradually darkens the artist's surfaces, producing fields of black and grey that foreground materiality as both a physical condition and a visual experience. Defined by organic forms, symmetrical structures, and a consistent scale, the series reflects an interest in rhythm, balance, and repetition emerging from material-driven processes rather than representation. The recent works draw from a fragment of an armchair designed by Patricia Urquiola in 2000, recontextualized within the meditative spatial atmosphere of On Kawara's gallery at Dia Beacon. Flowing organic lines are counterbalanced by dispersed black rectangular elements, creating a stark black-and-white contrast revealing a quiet, underlying force and inviting sustained, contemplative viewing.

Source : Press release



YUNYAO ZHANG

SWEETHEART

Solo exhibition
Co-presented by ARTRO and Don Gallery

Artro Space & Keishun-in, Kyoto, Japan
12 November - 14 December 2025

"Structured as a dual-site exhibition, Sweetheart stages a dialogue between the secular and the spiritual, the material and the imaginary. ZHANG's long-standing practice centers on felt as his primary medium, a material whose tactile softness and resilience become vessels for emotion and the passage of time. Through the repeated acts of rubbing, drawing, and layering with graphite and charcoal, his images emerge and dissolve within the accumulation of time, oscillating between clarity and blur, presence and disappearance.

Located in the heart of Kyoto, Artro Space occupies a century-old earthen storehouse originally built during the Meiji era. Once used as a warehouse, the building has been carefully transformed into a contemporary art gallery that preserves its historical texture while embracing new artistic life. A café situated at the entrance connects art with everyday experience, transforming the act of viewing into a more intimate encounter.
Responding to this context of daily sensibility, ZHANG presents a series of still-life works depicting desserts and vessels rendered on felt. These images, soft in tone yet precise in form, evoke both sensory delight and quiet philosophical reflection on desire, tenderness, and fragility. Here, Sweetheart transcends its literal sweetness to become a metaphor for the intimacy between human and object — a "gentle gaze" that has been both consumed and reconstructed in contemporary life.

Built in the 16th century, Keishun-in, part of Myoshin-ji Temple, stands as one of Kyoto's most historically significant Zen temples and is designated as a tangible cultural heritage site by the city. Its meditative gardens and architectural restraint embody the Japanese aesthetic concepts of Ma (□, the space between) and Mujō (□□, impermanence). Within this contemplative setting, ZHANG will present the latest phase of his ongoing Time series — twenty small-scale felt drawings created in 2025.
Initiated in 2021, Time is an evolving body of work in which ZHANG transforms the sculptural visages of different eras and geographies into a dissolving visual language through repetitive, meditative drawing. For the Kyoto presentation, the new works focus on Noh and Gigaku masks, symbols deeply embedded in Japanese performance and spirituality. These masks, poised between personhood and emptiness, form, and spirit, encapsulate a delicate tension central to Japanese aesthetics.

In Noh theatre, the stillness of a mask is never devoid of expression; rather, it embodies infinite emotional potential. ZHANG reinterprets this cultural form through his characteristic "de-figurative" approach, transforming ritual objects into meditations on time and existence. The blurred lines and faded layers within his drawings echo the reverberation of memory — resonating with Zen notions of emptiness (kū) while extending the artist's ongoing inquiry into perception, embodiment, and temporality.

As ZHANG Yunyao's first solo exhibition in Japan, Sweetheart represents not only a continuation of his artistic trajectory but also a cross-cultural exploration of "soft thinking" — an inquiry into sensitivity, time, and touch across Chinese and Japanese aesthetic systems. From the minimalist calm of Artro's café to the spiritual quietude of Keishun-in's garden, the exhibition traces a continuous flow between the worldly and the contemplative, the material and the conceptual. Within these shifting spaces, ZHANG's works unfold as meditations on the texture of time — at once a moment of sweetness, and a silent disappearance.

Source : Press release







YUNYAO ZHANG

360°: WHY WE PAINT?

Group exhibition
Curated by SUN Man and Stefano Collicelli Cagol

BY ART MATTERS, HANGZHOU, CHINA
16 May 2025 to 12 October 2025

"The exhibition was conceived by Francesco Bonami, Director of BY ART MATTERS, and Wu Tian, Deputy Director, and co-curated by Sun Man, Curator at BY ART MATTERS, and Stefano Collicelli Cagol, Director of the Luigi Pecci Centre for Contemporary Art.
Beginning with the personal motivations of each artist, the exhibition explores how painting — one of the most ancient forms of visual expression — has become a reflection of today's "glocalised" world, connecting local narratives with global contexts across three interlinked regions; it also features over one hundred remarkable works by 39 artists from around the world, created in the decades following the millennium and shown within the context of these two leading art institutions. The exhibition aims to spark a cross-generational and cross-cultural dialogue centred on the current state of painting.

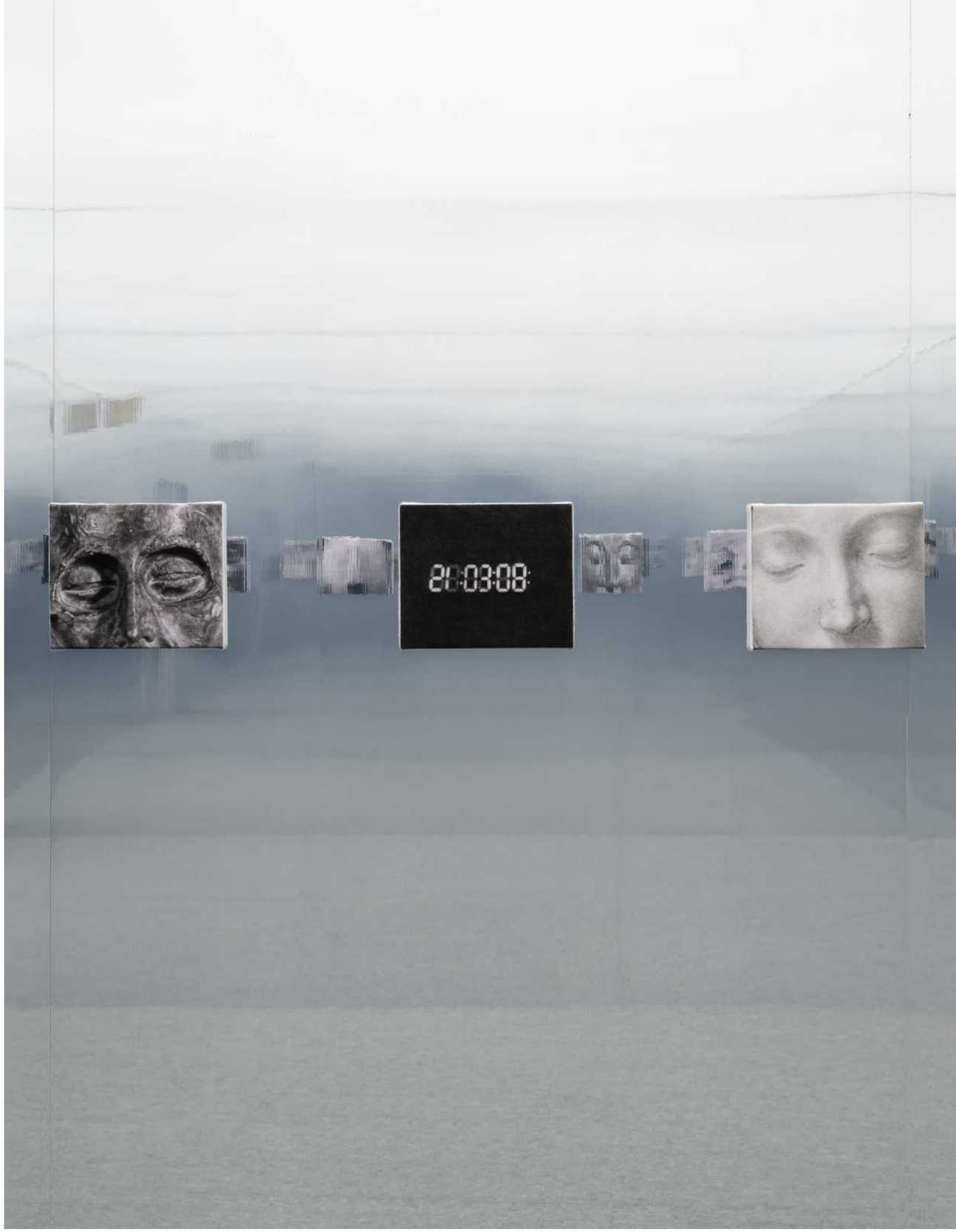
This is a series of works that ZHANG Yunyao plans to continue to work on for years, which will consist of 100 sketches on felt, all of the same size. The artist named this series of works "Time", which not only refers to its literal meaning, but also gives them the freedom to extend and sublimate. ZHANG Yunyao began to create this series in 2021, and has presented the first phase - 42 of them - in 2025 at BY ART MATTERS (Hangzhou, China).

As part of the second section of the group exhibition "Extensions of Image-Making Boundaries ", ZHANG Yunyao built an infinitely extended space constructed by four mirrored walls and a light-filtering ceiling on top of it. The artist "suspended" 42 sketches on felt in a separate exhibition space to respond to the current situation of multiple parallel and intertwined media or technologies such as painting, drawing, photography, and printing, and to face questions such as "What is painting?" that were born after the sigh of "painting is dead" (French painter Paul Delaroche).

These close-up sketches of the eyes of ancient statues are placed at the same eyelevel of the audiences', and the one-way "watching" has become "gazing at each other" to some extent. The artist tries to break the traditional presentation of common paintings or sketches, weakening the technical expression of individual works, and emphasizing the order, continuity and irreversibility of the concept of "time" conveyed by the series as a whole idea.

In psychology and philosophy, "time" is normally considered to be a subjective, relative, and sometimes vague experience. ZHANG Yunyao slowly reveals the clues hidden behind "time" to the audience by repeatedly and constantly depicting these ancient and specific sculpture close-ups - when we stand clearly opposite to "time", we can finally distinguish the past, the present and the future."

Source : Press release (excerpt)




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YUNYAO ZHANG

PALACE OF ALIENATION, PART II

Solo exhibition

Shanghai SUHE HAUS, 2F Room 203
8 November - 8 December 2024

Don Gallery is very pleased to announce that ZHANG Yunyao's solo exhibition, Palace of Alienation (Pat II), will be presented during the Shanghai art season from 8 November to 8 December 2024 at Shanghai SUHE HAUS, 2F Room 203. This exhibition is the latest presentation of the artist's large-scale new works since his 2019 solo exhibition Palace of Extasy, and was curated by ZHANG Li. At the same time, the exhibition will echo ‘Palace of Alienation (Part I)’, which will be held at HE Art Museum, Shunde on 10 November, extending the theme of creation in the form of ‘dialogue between two cities’.

Unlike the first part of The Palace of Alienation, in which ZHANG Yunyao changed the colours and patterns, the second part of the exhibition sticks to the previous medium of graphite pencil and white felt, suspending objects in a specific space and time as material-independent pure images. These items and sceneries combine in intimate and contradictory psychological agitations to become emotional validators, mirroring the artist's and his associates' position. Simultaneously, reproduction and gaze constitute a spectral liminal moment, drawing and releasing time's energy in the exhibition space's heterogeneous form.

Source : Press release (excerpt)













YUNYAO ZHANG

PALACE OF ALIENATION PART I

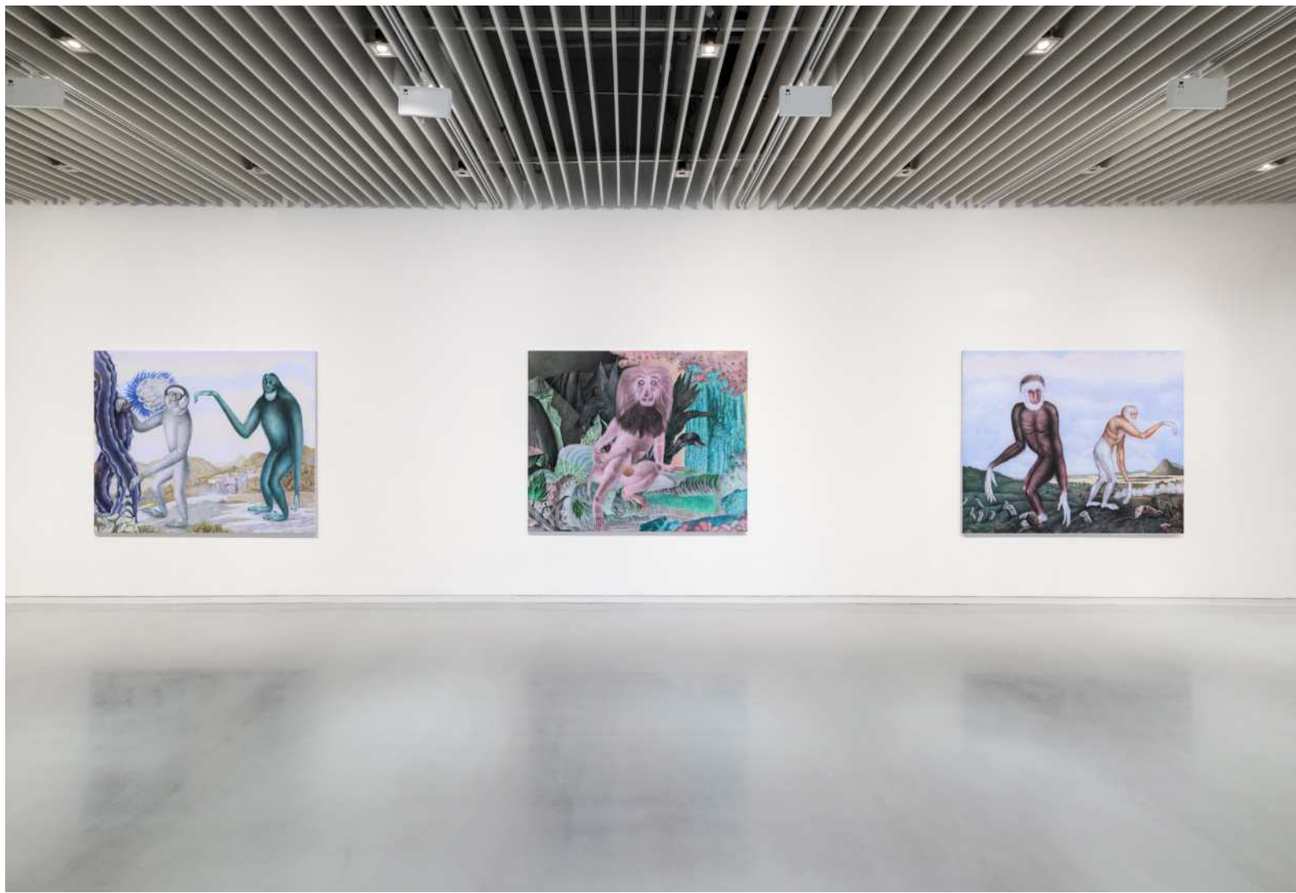
Solo exhibition

HE ART MUSEUM, Schunde, China
10 November 2024 - 8 March 2025

From November 10, 2024 to March 8, 2025, He Art Museum (HEM) presents Zhang Yunyao's solo exhibition "Palace of Alienation". The exhibition features the artist's new series "illustrated encyclopedia animals", conceived since 2022, and marks a new chapter in his more than ten years' exploration of felt. The exhibition showcases a series of felt paintings with subjects of apes, along with a group of photographs capturing images of animals in zoos.
Zhang Yunyao drafts images on felt. With calmness and restraint, he captures every delicate strand of apes' fur and the foliage of the deep forest. He has been exploring the expressive potential of felt as a creative medium since his first experiment over a decade ago. The irreversible nature of the material forces him to plan every step with precision.
Technique itself is his conceptual statement.
This new series of paintings continues his exploration on the representation of body, though this time the subjects appear to be non-human. In today's increasingly anxious society, the boundary between human and animal blurs further. Drawing inspiration from Marx's theory of alienation, Zhang reintroduces the metaphor of the ape, inviting viewers to reconsider their own existence within this Palace of Alienation.
Contradiction runs through the entire exhibition, with the felt further obscuring our sensory experience. A sense of danger lurks beneath the seemingly peaceful nature. We find ourselves wandering with unease, yet still moving back and forth to confirm what we've seen.
And you, are you prepared to look into the apes' eyes?

Source : Press release












YUNYAO ZHANG

URANIA

6 November 2025 - 16 January 2026

Goddess of the sky, protector of astronomy and geometry, daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne, URANIA is also the title of a cult science fiction book series launched in the early 1950s by the Italian publishing house Mondadori.

Guided by the formal language of science fiction and threaded by fragments of the sky, this first collective exhibition in our new space is conceived as a research-based project, bringing together a constellation of contemporary artistic propositions that explore the field of sculpture and foster intergenerational dialogues between artists.

(...)

The preferred technique of Shanghai-based artist Yunyao Zhang is freehand drawing on felt. Study in Portraiture 4 (after Temple of Love by Rick Owens) (2025) and Hypothesis on Evolution (2025) are two of the exhibited works created using this technique. The first belongs to a series inspired by fashion designer Rick Owens' recent exhibition at the Palais Galliera; the second, evoking a David Cronenberg–like universe, depicts an alien being (spine, jellyfish, phallus) accompanied by its study drawing on paper. The fourth work exhibited, also titled Hypothesis on Evolution (2025), presents an image inspired by Modigliani and Brancusi's Cycladic forms, completed with the collage of a dried plant collected in Portugal.

Source : Press release





YUNYAO ZHANG

MANIFESTO OF FRAGILITY - 16TH LYON BIENNALE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

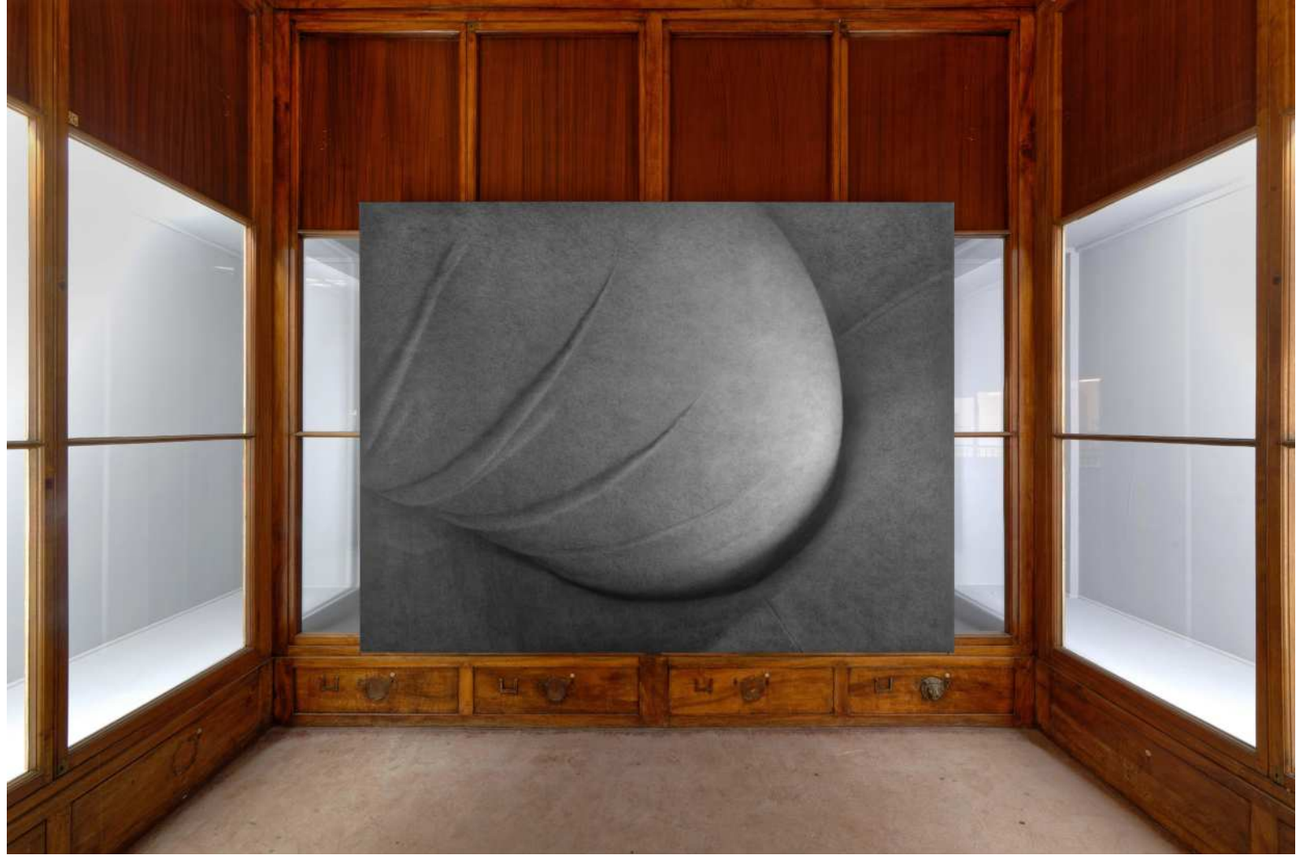
Curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath
The 16th Biennale de Lyon (Guimet Museum, macLYON, Gadagne Museum)

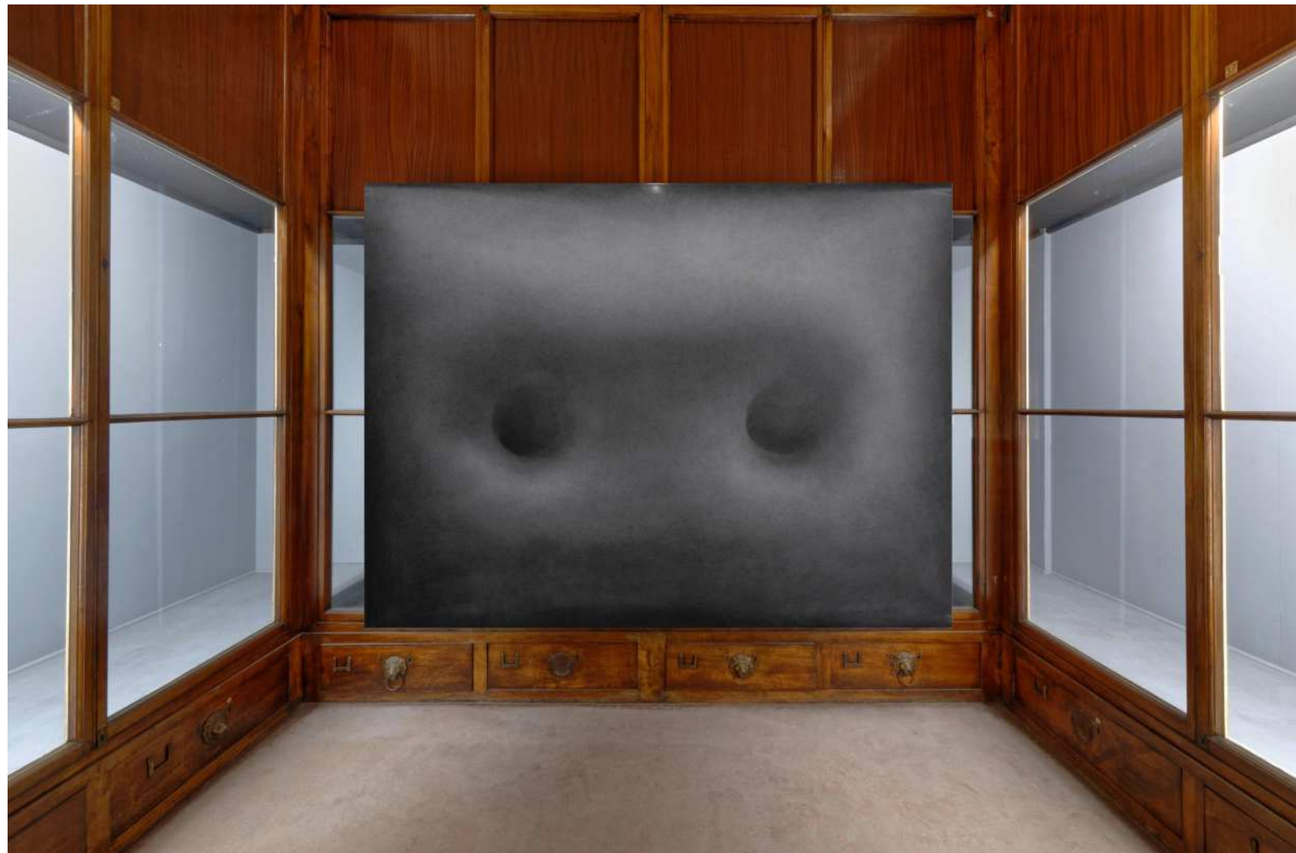
14 September - 31 December 2022

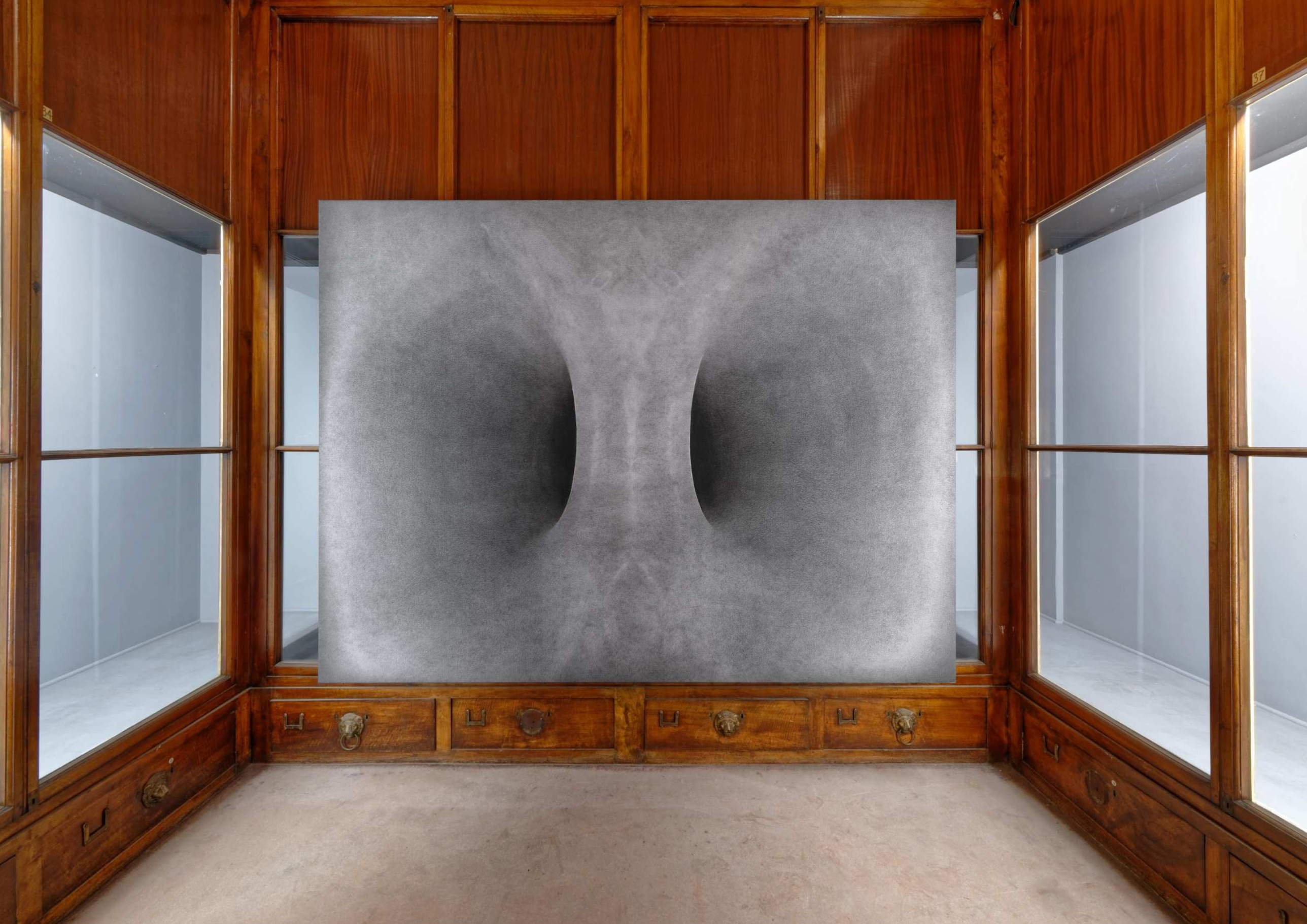
With references to classical and Renaissance sculpture, painter Zhang Yunyao uses graphite and pastels on felt canvases to create large-scale, figurative works that form contemporary dialogues with the past. Zhang uses a demanding and precise technique to apply his materials to the matted fabric, creating a relief effect that is further enhanced by the way the materials combine with the textured surface to reflect light.
His works appear to be composites of different angles of the same sculptural forms; overlapping depictions of multiple subjects fade into each other, creating new correspondences that suggest suspended film montages. The mythological scale of Zhang's images demonstrate the continued relevance of ancient ideals in the formation of contemporary understandings of strength, beauty, and power.

The 16th Lyon Biennale: *manifesto of fragility* positions fragility at the heart of a generative form of resistance that is emboldened by the past, responsive to the present and primed for the future. In acknowledging fragility as one of few universally felt truths in our divided world, the Biennale assembles a host of creative practices and objects spanning two millennia that variously speak to the vulnerabilities of people and places, past and present, near and far. Conceived as a collective statement authored through word, image, sound and movement by 200 artists and creatives, it calls on a community of resilient voices to draft a manifesto for a world that is blamelessly fragile. The Biennale is structured around three distinct yet inter-connected layers, where fragility and resistance are explored through the lens of the individual, the city, and the world respectively.

Source: Biennale de Lyon









YUNYAO ZHANG

HOME IS WHERE THE HAUNT IS

Group exhibition
Curated by Poppy Dongxue Wu and Cyril Kuizhen Rao

X Museum Triennial
27 August - 26 November 2023

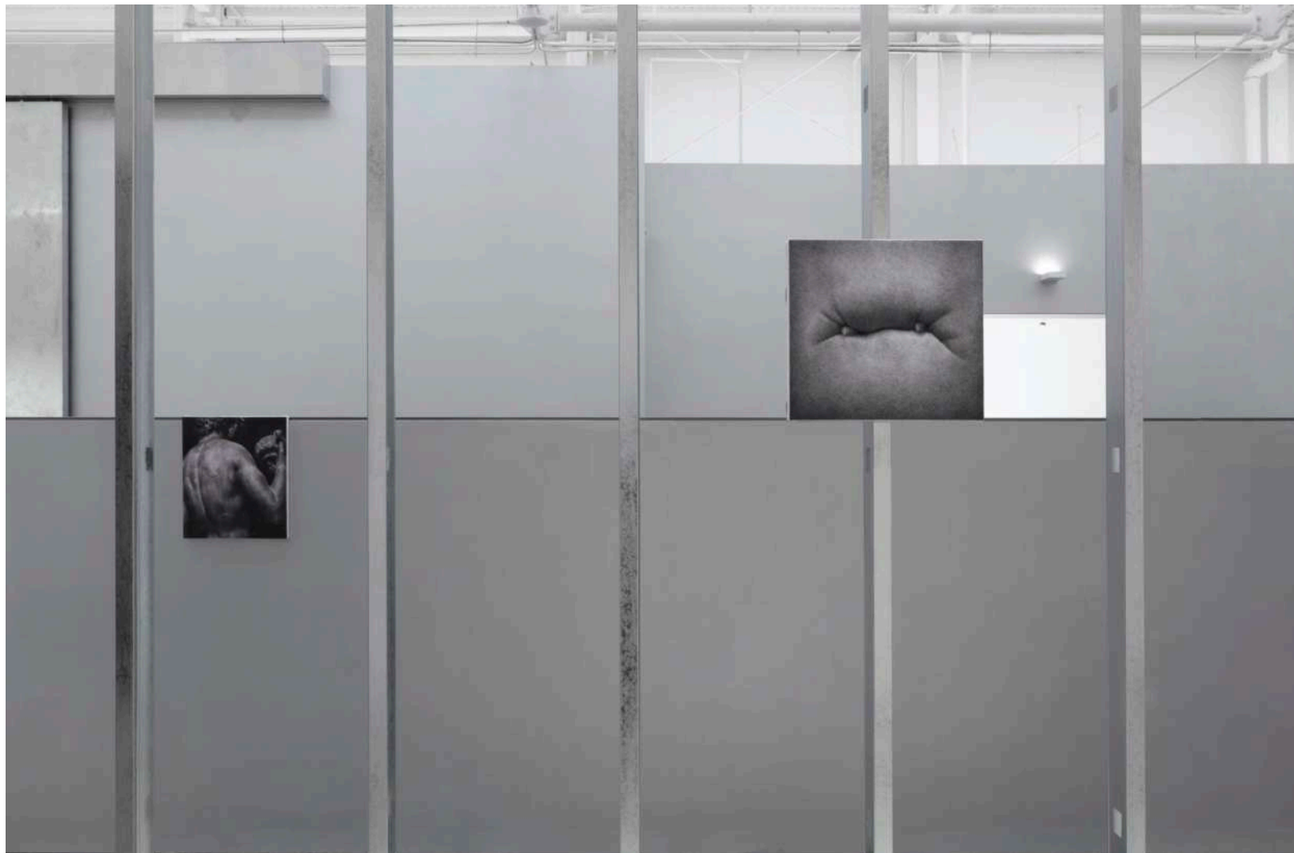
The exhibition responds to the complex social and historical construct of ‘home’ and its etymological implication, ‘haunt’. Connecting ideas of intimacy, memory, heritage, ethnicity, alienation, possession and obsession, Home Is Where the Haunt Is brings together a wide group of multicultural Chinese artists whose fluid practice constantly straddles between home and elsewhere, individual and community, past and present. As a universal social institution and an essential constituent of society, ‘home’ denotes a dwelling place and bears the sentiment of the permanence of history. Broadening home as a hotbed for psychological states, the exhibition explores the evolving of human selves in a global context of cultural heterogeneity and that which invades or disturbs it. From physical contact induced by e-textiles in moments of isolation, to the various uses of mulberry in the system of Chinese Medicine, to coral and deep-sea creatures, works in the exhibition expand intimacy as a practice of generative kinship—the latest ecosystem formed by new technology and the relational existence of organisms.

History infiltrates the current through memory and heritage, through possession and obsession. By unravelling the multiple connotations of ‘home’, the exhibition also examines history’s effect on the present, it delves deeper into the roots of Chinese culture through a wide arrange of installations. Encompassing sound clips, audio-visual installations, and site-specific works, the artists in this exhibition use Xiang (Hunan) embroidery and Shaanxi shadow puppetry, folktales, and novels in their contemporary expression. Revolving around diasporic memories and fantastical futures, the exhibition also attempts to invoke the interstitial existence between now and then, time and space, presence and absence. The works in the exhibition oscillate between abandoned buildings on Bangkok’s streets, linger around the dimly-lit dance pool of ballrooms and excurse in the sugar refineries of the previous century. After the fragments of time are pieced together, these scenes of profound historical moments—often associated with a community’s ethnic relations and kinship—become places where hauntology comes to exist.

As a research-based project on the development of contemporary Chinese art over the past three years, Home Is Where the Haunt Is zooms in to the millennial artists growing up under the tide of globalisation by unwrapping the intricate meanings of ‘home’. These artists are simultaneously inside and outside, and their practice is often situated at the boundary between knowledge and technology. Some works are tender hymns of love and dependence that emerged during momentous migration; others connect reality and the virtual, exploring the invisible power structure lurking behind the human and technology interaction through reshaping the fragments of mundane life. In these boundary-defying expressions, the fluid concept of ‘home’ lingers over various times and spaces through senses such as scent and sound. Ultimately, the exhibition returns to artists’ practice and the complexity incurred by media and representation through a multifaceted, multi-linear discursive approach, thus responding to the enduring and timeless essence of ‘home’.

Source: X Museum's Website





YUNYAO ZHANG

PARTICIPATION IN WATOU ARTS FESTIVAL

Group exhibition
Curated by Benedicte Goesaert, Chantal Pattyn and Peter Verhelst

Watou Arts Festival at Watou, Belgium
3 July - 5 September 2021





YUNYAO ZHANG

OFF ROAD II

Group exhibition

Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium
10 November - 18 December 2021

For its second OFF ROAD exhibition, Zeno X Gallery again departs from its regular gallery program to present work by nine international artists who are collaborating with the gallery for the first time.
OFF ROAD II features work by Mounira Al Solh, Troy Michie, Hana Miletić, Kresiah Mukwazhi, Dona Nelson, Lisa Oppenheim, Sara Ouhaddou, Diane Simpson and Zhang Yunyao. A mix of artists from different corners of the world and from different generations, each with their own view and unique way of expressing thoughts and feelings through painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, textile installations and stained-glass windows.

Using non-traditional media and surfaces such as graphite and felt, Zhang Yunyao explores the language of painting and the intersections of historical and individual memory. Depictions of biblical and mythological characters and scenes are important sources of inspiration that are re-woven into his images. By incorporating felt as the support for the medium of his paintings, Zhang attempts to explore the unfixed meaning of emotions and desires. Felt is lightweight and not absorbent, so liquid pigments meet little resistance on its surface and spread out in unpredictable ways. In contrast to the unpredictability of his materials, every approach in Zhang's work is carefully calculated, and even the smallest lines and dots are meticulously thought out before he starts the piece. Zhang is hypersensitive to the subtle variations of graphite and the psychological effect of such variations, which is why his work often features black with a sheen of silver. Up close, the gloss presents as full, rich granules of pigment, evoking a strong tactile experience. On the whole, it speaks a textural language of lustre, skin and flesh.

Source: Website





YUNYAO ZHANG

PALACE OF EXTASY

Solo exhibition
Curated by HE JING

Qiao Space, Shanghai
30 October 2019 - 12 June 2020

Over the last two years, ZHANG has been developing a clearer and clearer awareness of the interval between concept and image where his work inhabits.On the one hand, this awareness is an outgrowth of a more relevant motif -- one involving the study and repeated description of the human form and its imagery. On the other hand, the artist has become a maestro of the medium of felt, which has been a mainstay of his long-term practice -- an understanding that transcends technique, and includes a methodological and conceptual instinct borne of practice. Working with felt as a canvas, ZHANG is “voluntarily forced” into an irreversible method of painting, which demands rigorous execution and an ironfisted grasp of every detail. Within this process, which ZHANG has coined “anti-painting,” execution outweighs “lyricism.” The artist does not “express” form via line and brushstroke, rather, he “maps out” the image by tracing and filing it in.To extend the metaphor further, if painting is a process of energy and expression, and each stroke of the brush is a metaphor for passion and pain, then ZHANG Yunyao’s “painting” is a calm and “painless” pursuit. It is as if the direct stimulation of the body’s faculties has been inhibited, lulling the sensory metaphor of painting into a state of dormancy.

However “painless” this ambitious “anti-painting” technique may present metaphorically, the way it presents on the canvas is another beast altogether, one which forms a counterpoint.In the dislocated space between “Painting” with a capital “P” and the specific image, ZHANG’s work follows its own set of rules, constitute a subtle area of intrigue. The perception of ZHANG’s work totally betrays the sense of “apathie” and “sense of loss” underlying their conceptual mechanism. On the contrary, the paintings are abnormally functional.As a painter, ZHANG is hypersensitive to the subtle variations of gloss and the psychological effect of such variations, which is why his work often features black with a sheen of silver. Up close, the gloss presents as full, rich granules of pigment, evoking a strong tactile experience. While on the whole, it speaks a textural language of lustre, skin, and flesh. Contrary to the “insensate” mode of choice the artist uses while painting, the resultant images have been created for the explicit purpose of teasing out a specific sensation and experience with their lustrous siren song of sensation -- a tremor which erupts under the skin, only at close proximity to the flesh.

On this level, it can be said that ZHANG’s work is not “anti-painting” at all -- in that it is not antithetical to the emotion of painting. In an instant of reversal, the negation of concept and behavior finds a hierarchy within the work itself, which allows the sensory experience to be maneuvered around and re-released.ZHANG says that the functional experience and the depth of pleasure he demands of his work cannot be attained except on the level of désœuvrement (tr: idleness). He must delay and restrain experience while painting in order to elevate the experience of the painting to another echelon of intensity. This zone of suspension and re-entry approaches the “absence of feeling” that Bataille emphasizes in his textual analyses of de Sade -- an attitude of “ruthlessness” and “absence of feeling” through which one proves the existence of the individual by delineating the negative space, an “elevation” experienced via suspension.This moment approaches the religious experience, marking a supreme experience of the faculties, so intense, that it can only be attained through “disengagement” or “extasy” of the ego. It represents a higher plane of experience for the body and its faculties, a heterogeneous temporality which is ekked out.If it is said that ZHANG’s paintings take a detour, suspending the sensory metaphor of painting by seeking out a metaphysical experience in the ontological sense, then this act of creation is itself a moment of “extasy” -- one which possesses a reflective structure and takes a roundabout path. Therefore, ZHANG’s so-called “anti-painting” represents paradoxically, a departure from and a return to painting.

Text by Javier Villa for the presentation of Diego Bianchi (excerpt)



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