WHITE CUBE

Press Release

Inside the White Cube
Zhang Yunyao
When the Surface Thinks
30 October – 18 December 2026

Press preview:
Thursday 29 October 2026, 4–5pm
Exhibition tour 5pm
Followed by champagne reception until 8pm

RSVP essential: hongkongpress@whitecube.com

White Cube Hong Kong is pleased to present *'When the Surface Thinks'*, a solo exhibition by Paris-based Chinese artist Zhang Yunyao (b. 1985, Shanghai).

Zhang reconsiders the conventions of painting, using primarily the industrial textile of white felt – a material that is both light-absorbent and resistant to revision. With graphite, coloured pencil, charcoal and pastel, he draws freehand, creating a matte, imprinted texture on the painting's velvet-like surface. The artist's sources range from photographs, sculptures and medical images to his own imagination, giving rise to tubular forms, cavities and intricate details.

Since 2010, Zhang has developed a meticulous and labour-intensive drawing practice that subverts the traditions of Soviet Realism and the French Beaux-Arts that informed his early academic training at the College of Fine Arts at Shanghai Normal University.

For his exhibition at White Cube, the artist presents major works building upon his recent institutional exhibitions across the US, France, Japan and China, including the 12th SITE SANTA FE International, New Mexico; the 4th Artocène Contemporary Art Biennial, Saint-Gervais Mont-Blanc, France; Musée Fenaille, Rodez, France; Keishun-in, Kyoto, Japan; and BY ART MATTERS, Hangzhou, China.

On view at the gallery are the artist's large-scale, illusionistic abstractions from his *'*Connector*'* series, alongside tight close-ups of carved heads from the *'*Time*'* series and studies of classical statuary. Unlike oil on canvas, which allows for overpainting and correction, his use of graphite here becomes embedded in the textured plane.

The presentation is titled *'*When the Surface Thinks*'* after the artist's largest work to date, inspired by Paul Valéry's famous line 'La peau est ce qu'il y a de plus profond' (What is deepest is the skin). Contending that meaning can reside within a surface, he proposes painting as a sentient field that registers, reflects and thinks.

*'*Zhang Yunyao: When the Surface Thinks*'* is on view at White Cube Hong Kong from 30 October until 18 December 2026.

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Notes to Editors:

- Zhang Yunyao (b. 1985, Shanghai, China) lives and works in Paris. After graduating in 2007 from the Department of Oil Painting of the College of Fine Arts at Shanghai Normal University, Zhang moved to Europe in 2020. In 2013, he was the youngest Chinese artist selected for the Glenfiddich Artists in Residence Programme.

  Selected solo exhibitions include ARTRO & Keishun-in, Kyoto, Japan (2025); He Art Museum, Foshan, China (2024); Don Gallery, Shanghai, China (2024; 2017; 2015; 2013); and Qiao Space, Shanghai, China (2019).

  His work has been shown in numerous international group exhibitions, including Wuhan Biennale, Hubei, China (2026); Re-Rom, Ghent, Belgium (2026); 12th SITE SANTA FE International, New Mexico, US (2025); 4th Artocène Contemporary Art Biennial, Saint-Gervais Mont-Blanc, France (2025); Musée Fenaille, Rodez, France (2025; 2021); BY ART MATTERS, Hangzhou, China (2025); Musée des Beaux Arts de Caen, France (2023); 16th Biennale de Lyon, France (2022).

  Zhang's work is held in public collections including Pinault Collection, France; Kollitsch Collection, Austria; White Rabbit Collection, Australia; He Art Museum, China; Qiao Zhibing Collection, China among others.

- White Cube's exhibition programme extends across locations in London, Hong Kong, Paris, New York, Seoul and online. Since its inception in 1993, the gallery has exhibited the work of many of the world's most highly acclaimed contemporary artists. Visit whitecube.com.

- Follow White Cube on Instagram, Facebook, X, WeChat, and Xiaohongshu.