



Duan Jianyu: Daisies, a Light Breeze, No Relatives Writing Poems

Released April 30, 2026

Exhibition Period:

2026.5.1 – 2026.8.30

Location:

UCCA Beijing

Central, West, New Galleries

Media Contact:

Connie Li

Media Relations Specialist

+86 10 5780 0258

+86 166 7560 8773

yanjin.li@ucca.org.cn

Press material available at

ucca.org.cn/en/press

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents “Duan Jianyu: Daisies, a Light Breeze, No Relatives Writing Poems” from May 1 to August 30, 2026. Over nearly three decades of artistic practice, Duan Jianyu has cultivated a painterly language that is whimsically absurd and edged in quiet acuity. Her work brings together diverse cultural references and vivid textures of lived realities, continually opening up new possibilities for painting in dialogue with contemporary life. This exhibition offers a systematic survey of the artist’s work over the past decade, tracing her sustained exploration of contemporary painting across different dimensions including pictorial expression, creative methods, modes of perception, and historical consciousness.

BEIJING, China—From May 1, 2026, to August 30, 2026, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents “Daisies, A Light Breeze, No Relatives Writing Poems,” Duan Jianyu’s (b. 1970, Zhengzhou, Henan province) first institutional solo exhibition in Beijing and her most comprehensive presentation to date in terms of scope and duration. The exhibition brings together approximately 50 paintings, 6 groups of sculptures, a series of painting installations, and selected works on paper, including several recent works presented for the first time. Anchored in a shift in the artist’s working methods in the mid-2010s, the exhibition traces Duan Jianyu’s key series from the past decade, offering a systematic overview of her sustained exploration of contemporary painting, touching upon aspects including creative language, lived experience, and historical consciousness. “Duan Jianyu: Daisies, a Light Breeze, No Relatives Writing Poems” is curated by UCCA Chief Curator Chelsea Qianxi Liu.

Duan Jianyu is one of the most significant figures in contemporary Chinese painting. Drawing on an open and diverse range of visual resources, she employs light brushwork, a vividly imaginative mode of expression, and a subtly absurd sensibility to deconstruct and reconfigure the complexities of everyday life. Over nearly three decades of practice, she has consistently reflected on the relationship between painting and reality with critical care. Detaching painting from its function of simply representing reality, she continuously recalibrates its narrative intensity, loosens established aesthetic paradigms, and incorporates an awareness of the historical dimensions of painterly practice itself, allowing the medium to become more open-ended and thought-provoking.



Her work is closely attuned to the vitality of culture and the multiplicity of lived experience. It brings images associated with so-called “vernacular culture” together with references to early oil painting traditions in both China and the West, establishing a multi-directional dialogue between different visual experiences. She also addresses the status of women within society, shifting aesthetic and cultural tastes shaped by consumer culture, and the desires and predicaments of contemporary life, while also introducing elements of myth and urban fable to construct a layered, narratively-charged perceptual space.

The exhibition title “Daisies, a Light Breeze, No Relatives Writing Poems” conveys a sensibility shared by the subjects to which Duan Jianyu has long been drawn. “Daisies” and “a light breeze” refer to ordinary yet vital forms of existence, while “No Relatives Writing Poems,” taken from a poem by Polish poet Wisława Szymborska, reads as an everyday utterance in which poetry and life quietly converge. Echoing Szymborska’s tone, Duan Jianyu approaches the world with a modest, unpolished, and perceptive sensibility, attuned to subtle details and moments of surprise, revealing the unexpected possibilities of painting in response to contemporary life.

Organized into six sections, each comprising one or more series, the exhibition moves across different perspectives, drawing out key threads in Duan Jianyu’s practice and opening multiple pathways into her painterly world. It begins with the “Sharp, Sharp, Smart” series (2014–2016), which marks both the artist’s first engagement with subject matter previously outside her purview as well as a methodological shift toward serial narrative structures. Taking “Shamate”—a youth subculture that emerged in the early 2000s—as a rhetorical metaphor, the series points to the dynamism generated through the convergence of diverse cultural forms. In this series, Duan constructs a loose, intertextual narrative network through the juxtaposition of disparate elements. She utilizes a truly broad range of visual resources, as evidenced by her incorporation of elements from so-called “vernacular culture,” which include folk literature, legends, craft traditions, and everyday customs, as well as internet slang, social media content, and mass-produced commercial art. Drawn from different cultural strata and channels, these references are woven into her works, revealing their circulation and transformation, as well as the traces of everyday life and aesthetic sensibilities they carry. This tendency runs throughout nearly all of her series.

Another important aspect of Duan Jianyu’s practice lies in how she approaches the relationship between painting and the real. For her, painting is not a form of representation, but a means of rendering reality more complex and thought-provoking. The series “Automatic



Writing” (2019), “Michelin Seven Stars” (2020), and others explore aesthetic sensibilities and modes of behavior shaped by consumerist value systems. Duan places this increasingly structural condition of contemporary life at a reflective distance, maintaining its visual allure while continuously exposing its internal contradictions.

In works such as the “Facekini” series (2019) and *Women Hiding in the Wardrobe to Avoid Chores* (2020), the focus is on the bodily experience, psychological space, and emotional relations of women—particularly middle-aged women. The female figures she depicts, including herself, are often composed and self-possessed. They are not idealized as youthful, slim, or graceful subjects, but instead appear strong, corpulent, relaxed, and at ease with themselves. Rather than existing for the gaze of others, they are absorbed in their own sensations and states of being.

“Yúqiáo (The Fisherman and The Woodcutter)” (2023–2024) is one of Duan Jianyu’s most significant recent series. She reinterprets and reactivates this highly symbolic motif from Chinese tradition, transforming the two figures into average individuals in contemporary contexts. In series such as “Horse” (2018–2019), “Ethnological Patterns” (2022–2026), and “Dumplings Were Discovered in the Ruins” (2025), her reflections on painting’s specificity as a medium and its history coalesce into a form of historical consciousness regarding painting in and of itself, as well as a critical rethinking of the established ethical frameworks of realist painting.

The exhibition also presents a number of new works. *A Minimalist Exhibition Failed Due to Excess Milk* (2026) unfolds like a short absurdist narrative, foregrounding the artist’s wit and her composed response to the unpredictability of lived experience. *Daisies, the Most Innocent Flowers in the World* (2026) metaphorically addresses the complex emotional relations between mothers and children. *A Room of One’s Own* (2026), drawing on the imagery of Virginia Woolf’s canonical text, points to both the physical and psychological space required by women. In addition, several groups of sculptural works are interspersed throughout the exhibition, extending the artist’s favored imagery beyond painting into three-dimensional form.

“Daisies, a Light Breeze, No Relatives Writing Poems” adopts an almost everyday tone to outline the inner sensibility of Duan Jianyu’s practice. Approaching the world from a perspective close to that of ordinary individuals, she allows the most everyday experiences to



gradually emerge within pictorial space. Here, poetry resides within reality, and painting becomes a gently sustained mode of perceiving lived existence.

About the Artist

Duan Jianyu (b. 1970, Zhengzhou, Henan province) graduated from the oil painting department at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 1995. She has taught at the South China Normal University of the Arts in Guangzhou. Selected recent solo exhibitions include: “Duan Jianyu: Yúqiáo” (YDP, London, 2025); “Duan Jianyu: The Foam of Days” (Mirrored Gardens, Guangzhou, 2022); “Automatic Writing - Automatic Understanding” (Pond Society, Shanghai, 2020); “Duan Jianyu Solo Exhibition” (2019 Art Basel, Basel); “Sharp, Sharp, Smart” (Mirrored Gardens, Guangzhou, 2016); “A Potent Force: Duan Jianyu and Hu Xiaoyuan” (Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, 2013). She has participated in international exhibitions and biennials, including: “One Hand Clapping” (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2018); “APT8 Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art” (Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2015); “15 Years Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA)” (Power Station of Art, Shanghai, 2014); “The Third Guangzhou Triennial: Farewell to Post-Colonialism” (Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, 2008); “China Welcomes You...Desires, Struggles, New Identities” (Kunsthau Graz, Graz, 2007); “The Second Guangzhou Triennial: Beyond” (Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, 2005); “Venice Biennial 50th International Art Exhibition: Z.O.U. - Zone of Urgency” (La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, 2003); “4th Gwangju Biennial: P_A_U_S_E” (Gwangju, 2002). Duan was the recipient of the Best Artist Award at the 2010 Chinese Contemporary Art Awards (CCAA).

Public Programs

UCCA will present a series of public programs in conjunction with the exhibition, inviting audiences to explore the narrative structures, visual experience, and cultural contexts within Duan Jianyu’s practice from multiple perspectives. On the opening day, exhibition curator Chelsea Qianxi Liu will lead a guided tour, followed by a Conversation with the artist, curator, and Cai Tao, Professor at the School of Art and Humanities, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. Additional programs include a Conversation that considers Duan’s work through the lens of contemporary painting and related perspectives, further examining how her paintings respond to contemporary life and articulate image-based experience and cultural memory. Curator Yang Zi will also, for the first time, present in Chinese the short story *The Thoughtful Fisherman-Woodcutter*, written for Duan Jianyu’s “Yúqiáo” series, followed by a dialogue with writer Zhang Yuling.



尤伦斯当代艺术中心
Center for Contemporary Art

For full program details and updates, please refer to UCCA's latest official announcements, and follow UCCA's website, WeChat, and other social media platforms.

Support and Sponsorship

UCCA thanks SHANG XIA for their special support. Exclusive wall solutions support is provided by Dulux. UCCA also thanks the members of UCCA Foundation Council, International Circle, and Young Associates, as well as Lead Partners Aranya and The Donum Estate, Lead Art Book Partner DIOR, Presenting Partner Bloomberg, and Supporting Partners AIA, Barco, Dulux, Genelec, SKP Beijing, Stey, and Wanbo Media Group.

About UCCA

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art is a leading institution of contemporary art that serves as a vital bridge connecting Chinese art with the global art scene. Guided by the mission of "bringing the best in art to a wider audience," UCCA operates a constellation of three distinct museums, each with unique architectural styles and exhibition programs, offering audiences a rich array of exhibitions, public programs, and educational activities. Since its founding in Beijing in 2007, UCCA has welcomed more than ten million visitors to over 200 exhibitions that systematically explore the key historical narratives of Chinese contemporary art in tandem with best-in-class exhibitions of leading international artists.

ucca.org.cn/en