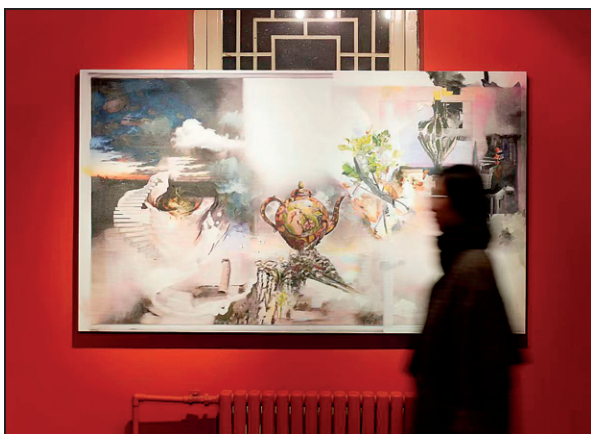


## LIFE



From left: A visitor walks past a painting by French artist Gaspar Willmann at his solo exhibition, *Compression*, at Yishu 8 gallery in Beijing. Willmann, a 2023 Yishu 8 French Young Artist Award winner, works during his two-month residency in the capital. A corner of the exhibition, showing his video and artworks. The exhibition will run until Jan 17. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# New impressions of Beijing

Artwork is collection of capital's images that sees French painter adopting a visual complexity, **Li Yingxue** reports.

During his two-month residency in Beijing in late autumn and early winter, French artist Gaspar Willmann found inspiration in the city's quiet details — mingling hues of fallen leaves and the charm of the *hutong* (alleyways).

These moments became the foundation of success for Willmann, a 2023 Yishu 8 French Young Artist Award winner.

On Dec 7, his solo exhibition *Compression* was unveiled at Yishu 8, an art platform providing residencies for artists from France and China. The venue is located inside the historical building of the former Sino-French University in Beijing.

The show presents eight paintings created during Willmann's time in the capital, offering a glimpse into his vivid impressions of the city. The exhibition runs until Jan 17.

Christine Cayol, founder of Yishu 8, describes Willmann as an artist who transcends binary thinking to explore contemporary themes.

"He moves seamlessly between digital tools and traditional brushes. During his two-month residency in Beijing, he brought a sharp, inquisitive perspective, countless questions and a unique approach to painting," she says.

"Willmann's work embodies the essence of painting — a quiet, contemplative pause in a world hurtling toward virtualization," Cayol adds.

Willmann, born in 1995 and a graduate of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, lives and works in Paris. In recent

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Gaspar Willmann, French artist

years, his solo exhibitions have been held in Paris, Marseille and Basel.

His practice, spanning painting and video, delves into the processes of editing and transformation. His work examines how people consume and share images and explores the emotional and collective meanings embedded within them.

The exhibition reflects a concept central to Willmann's creative pro-



From left: Willmann with Nicolas Pillerele, minister counselor for culture, education and scientific affairs, the French embassy in China, and Christine Cayol, founder of Yishu 8, at the exhibition's opening on Dec 7.

cess. He explains that he is drawn to the idea of packing as much information, memory or emotion as possible into a single square, compressing it into a cohesive whole.

"In the digital world, compression transforms data into something shorter and more efficient without losing its essence. It's like storing memories in a coded form for later. I like that idea," he says.

Willmann describes himself as something of an image collector.

"There are two types of images I'm drawn to: those from search engines, often the top results, which evoke a sense of déjà vu and carry collective meaning," he explains. "And then there are images from my daily life, captured on my smartphone — more intimate, serving as witnesses to fleeting

memories or moments."

His artistic process begins with images layered in Photoshop, where one obscures the next in a series of overlapping compositions. This approach creates a visual complexity that makes the original sources nearly impossible to discern.

Once the digital composition is printed onto canvas, Willmann transitions to traditional tech-

niques, using a paintbrush to reinterpret the imagery. For him, painting is a way to pause, reflect and reconnect with the images, breathing new life into them. Amid the dynamic, chaotic brushstrokes, new landscapes emerge.

His residency in Beijing became a rich source of inspiration, captured using this same method.

"I particularly liked this season in Beijing, especially for the quantity of leaves scattered in shades of green and yellow. It sometimes looked like an infinity of pixels that would compose foliage," he says.

The eight works on display, whether horizontal or vertical, share a consistent size — a deliberate choice by Willmann. He explains that the dimensions mirror the windows in his Paris studio.

"The history of windows is fascinating, as it weaves through both the evolution of art and the advancement of technology," he notes.

Nicolas Pillerele, minister counselor for culture, education and scientific affairs at the French embassy in China, highlighted the significance of the exhibition, describing it as a key cultural event in Beijing commemorating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and France. He also thanked the gallery and its founder "for their unwavering dedication over the past decade, fostering communication and creation among young artists from both countries," he says.

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## Artisan makes pottery the name of the game

Artisan Peng Chengxiong (right) works in his studio and applies color onto pottery with his wife (bottom left), Zheng Baozhu, in Dehua county, Quanzhou city, Fujian province, early this month. His pieces include single-character ceramic artworks that integrate Chinese characters into traditional sculptures (bottom right).

Dehua has a long history of ceramic production. As early as the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasties, the area's ceramics were major exports on the ancient Maritime Silk Road. Today, the local ceramic industry is flourishing with many practitioners, such as the couple, exploring development of the old art form and passing down their skills from generation to generation.

Peng uses 3D porcelain sculptures to present the two-dimensional lines of characters, creating an effect similar to pictographs.

"Ancient oracle bone script was 'characters' that depicted 'objects', but I create 'objects' that resemble 'characters,'" he says.

His series depicting zodiac signs and family surnames are collectors' favorites. PHOTOS BY XINHUA



## Vloggers help improve lives in the countryside

YINCHUAN — Looking sharp, Ma Liang stood on a podium surrounded by farmland and spoke in English and his local dialect about the specialties of the area where he grew up in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region in Northwest China.

"I have a strong sense of mission to create a new image of my home region by using English as well as local expressions to change the impression people may have of Ningxia," Ma says, adding that this is why he chose to return home to make short videos.

Ma graduated from Xi'an International Studies University in 2009 as an English major. He held a variety of jobs, took part in cultural exchange, and visited many countries.

In 2022, he decided to return home to Xiji county, Guyuan city, to start a new business with his friend Ma Haodong, a documentary film director.

"When I was younger, I ran away from this mountainous area, but now I've come back to develop a new understanding of my home," he says. "The loess landscapes of Ningxia are a big stage on which to start businesses."

To help make videos that best showcase his home, Ma Liang has sought inspiration in novels, poems and essays about the area. He has posted videos online promoting apples, potatoes and pumpkins, the latter taking him four months to make.

That hard work paid off, as the video drew 17 million views on social media platform Douyin and helped sell 60,000 kilograms of

Xiji county pumpkins in just two weeks.

The success of Ma Liang and his team spotlights the booming e-commerce sector in rural China. In recent years, the country has boosted development of e-commerce in rural areas, helping 1,489 counties build 3,000 county-level e-commerce public service centers and logistics distribution centers, as well as 158,000 village-level e-commerce service sites.

As a result, produce and products can be quickly sent between cities and villages, and vice versa. As an important engine for promoting the development of rural industry, e-commerce has become a significant part of the national rural revitalization quest.

Another example worth noting is a video featuring Peng Bo, which introduces a local specialty in another part of China. Rice is the focus of this video, in which Peng speaks both English and a local dialect, and which went viral. To date, more than 200,000 kilograms of this rice from Wanjin village, Yuhong district, Shenyang, Northeast China's Liaoning province, have been sold.

"Through our videos, people have seen the beautiful rural scenery in Yuhong district and learned about its simple and honest folkway, as well as our agricultural products," says Peng, deputy head of the culture and tourism bureau of Yuhong district, Shenyang, adding that she wants to help bring real benefits to local people.