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Sponsoring Thought
Chando Ao
November 6/December 18, 2026
Curated by K.O. Nnamdie

Sponsoring Thought takes its title from a term in cognitive psychology describing the underlying beliefs and unconscious assumptions that structure conscious thought. The thought behind the thought, it names an invisible framework through which experience is processed, remembered, and understood.

Chando Ao's paintings occupy an atmospheric terrain between image and abstraction, where figures, landscapes, and diffuse forms surface within thick accumulations of pigment. Neither entirely figurative nor wholly abstract, these paintings possess an elusive quality, as though emerging from a distant memory or an unsettled state of consciousness before receding into the painted field. Built through successive layers of application, removal, and reworking, Ao's paintings retain a sense of movement and instability.

Across the exhibition, familiar visual references are continually displaced. In *Scape* (2026), a restrained blue field is divided by a faint horizon, suggesting a meeting of sky and water that never quite settles into either. The landscape becomes an indeterminate space, held together only by subtle shifts in pigment. *Failures* (2026) sets a pale, cloud-like formation against an almost entirely black ground, its luminous blue and silver contours at once anatomical and celestial. Beside it, the dense red mass of *Janus* (2026) approaches the corporeal, recalling an enlarged organ or an unfamiliar face. A dark central mark interrupts its textured surface, introducing the possibility of an opening, an eye, or an interior.

The surfaces retain evidence of their own construction: fragments of earlier compositions, gestures interrupted, and forms partially buried beneath subsequent applications of paint. Three years in the making, *Tomorrow* (2026) is a testament to Ao's accretive process: its tawny gold field simmers while the layers beneath are partially obscured, dissolved, or overtaken. What appears is inseparable from what has been concealed. Painting becomes an act of both excavation and obstruction, in which each image carries the residue of another.

In *Sponsoring Thought*, memory is not treated as a repository of fixed images but as an unstable process of reconstruction. Perception is always mediated by associations, impulses, and assumptions that operate beneath conscious recognition. The paintings inhabit this interval, where an image is never entirely its own, and meaning remains subject to revision.

If every thought is shaped by something that precedes it, and every image carries the trace of something unseen, then the question remains: whose thought is it anyway?

– K.O. Nnamdie

Chando Ao (b.1990, Fengdu, CN) lives and works in New York, US. Ao gained his BFA from Tufts University (Boston, US) in 2016. Selected exhibitions include: “Sponsoring Thought,” curated by K.O. Nnamdie, Tara Downs, New York, US (2026); “Cell Repair,” organized by Eidmann Gallery, Tara Downs, New York, US (2026); “Creative Machine,” Taikang Art Museum, Beijing, CN (2024); “When the Monster is Speaking,” Inside-Out Art Museum, Beijing, CN (2024); “Brains and Beauty: At the Intersection of Art and Neuroscience,” Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, US (2024); “Machine Violence,” Postmasters Gallery, New York, US (2023), All Art Is Virtual, Thoma Foundation, Santa Fe, USA (2022). He has participated in residencies at Cornell Tech, New York, US (2024–2025) and New Museum, New York, US (2023–2024). His work is held in the collections of X Museum, Beijing, CN, and the Thoma Foundation, Santa Fe, US.