

Zao Wou-Ki

Prints

November 9, 2023 — January 13, 2024
3rd Floor

Opening Reception
Thursday, November 9, 6 – 8pm

Press Release

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I paint my own life, but I also try to paint an invisible place, that of dreams, somewhere where one feels in perfect harmony, even in the midst of agitated shapes or opposing forces. – Zao Wou-Ki

Marlborough Graphics is pleased to present an exhibition of prints by the preeminent French Chinese-born artist, Zao Wou-Ki. Celebrated for his oil paintings, Zao also worked extensively in a variety of mediums, including watercolor, ink, and printmaking. The works on view span several decades, created between the years 1957 and 2007.

Zao Wou-Ki was a Chinese-French artist known for his non-representational paintings that blended Eastern and Western modes of art making. 'Everybody is bound by a tradition. I am bound by two,' the artist once reflected. Born on February 1, 1920 in Beijing, China, he studied at the Hangzhou Fine Arts School for six years where he was influenced by the work of traditional Chinese and Japanese art as well as Western painters like Paul Klee and Franz Kline. In 1947, the artist moved to Paris where he became the neighbor of Alberto Giacometti and friends with Sam Francis, Jean-Paul Riopelle, and Pierre Soulages. It is this amalgam of traditional Chinese and Western cultures which informs Zao Wou-Ki's art and places it, aesthetically and formally, in a unique and important position in the history of painting.

Zao created his first lithograph in Paris in 1949. When describing the process, the artist stated: 'The idea of throwing color on a large white porous stone, like on China paper, pleased me. I used a lot of water, which is not at all to be recommended. Edmond Desjobert, a remarkably skillful lithographer, criticised me for it and told me the outcome would be poor, because one could not mix so much water with the lithographic ink. Even so I tried, and while the proofs were being printed he became enthusiastic.'

Brushstrokes—whether in color or black ink—become abstract image fields in which foreground and background are in constant flux. Each conveys an abstract visual event that is emotionally charged, turbulent in structure and striking in impact. In effect, Zao created his own nonrepresentational artistic language that transcends identifiable associations with symbols in writing and the natural world.

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Untitled (1978) etching with aquatint, AP, 19 1/8 x 25 7/8 in. / 48.6 x 65.7 cm
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During his lifetime, Zao exhibited worldwide. He received the Japan Art Association's Praemium Imperiale Award for Painting and the Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur. The artist died on April 9, 2013 in Nyon, Switzerland at the age of 93. In 2016, he was the subject of his first retrospective held in the United States titled *No Limits Zao Wou-Ki* at the Asia Society in New York.

Today, Zao's work can be found in over one hundred museums worldwide. Among them are the following: Fogg Art Museum, Boston, MA; Art Institute of Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Asian Art Museum of San Francisco; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montreal, Canada; Fonds National D'Art Contemporain, Paris, France; Musée National D'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Fondation François Pinault, Paris, France; The Tate Gallery London, England; Folkwang Museum, Essen, Germany; Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, Austria; Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Belgium; Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; National Institute of Fine Arts, Beijing, China; Hong Kong Museum of Art, China; Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan; Taiwan Museum of Art; National Museum of History, Taipei, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan; Fundacio Joan Miro, Barcelona, Spain; The Museum of Tel Aviv, Israel; Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan, Italy; Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan; Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan; National Museum of Art, Japan; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico; Museo Tamayo de Arte Contemporaneo, Mexico City, Mexico; Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal; Collection Thyssen Bornemisza, Castagnola, Switzerland.