

Zao Wou-Ki as Master Printmaker at STPI, Singapore

BY DARRYL WEE | JULY 05, 2016



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Zao Wou-Ki, Untitled, 1968, etching with aquatint, Image: 39 x 73.5 cm, Paper: 63.5 x 90 cm

(© ZAO WOU-KI PROLITTERIS, ZURICH, 2016)

One of the highlights of STPI's 2016 program opens this week — an exhibition dedicated to the printmaking practice of master artist [Zao Wou-Ki](/artists/-zao-wou-ki-201053) (/artists/-zao-wou-ki-201053).

Featuring works on loan from a private collection, “Zao Wou-Ki: No Boundaries” reveals a lesser-known side of an artist whose approach to ink and watercolor painting was profoundly influenced by the printing methods and techniques that he also mastered. Straddling the legacies and traditions of both

French and Chinese painting over the course of his storied career, Zao drew fresh insights from his dual artistic heritages. As he once said, “everybody is bound by tradition. I am bound by two.”

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BLOUIN ARTINFO spoke with Emi Eu, director of STPI, about the often-overlooked aspects of Zao Wou-Ki’s career as a master printmaker, his effortless synthesis of both Western and Asian artistic traditions, and the popularity of his works among Asian collectors.

This exhibition will showcase more than 40 paintings, watercolors, and prints from a private collection. Why was this particular collection chosen? Does it demonstrate a specific aspect of Zao's life and career particularly well?

This show was carefully curated to highlight the lesser-known part of Zao Wou-Ki's practice — printmaking. Zao dedicated himself to the lifelong pursuit of oil paintings and ink painting during the 1970s, and watercolors towards the end, but he actually also produced a significant output of lithographs and etchings: more than 400 prints over the course of his lifetime, since his first encounter with lithography at the Desjobert printing house in Paris in 1950.

Furthermore, he had done so in the traditional “peintre-graveur” sense, where the artist's print practice was another means for formal exploration, not mere reproduction. As such, one may chart his stylistic developments through them — and this is the focus of the exhibition.

The prints in the show start from 1953 to as late as 2007, and they do mark crucial points or shifts in his artistic career, particularly the ways in which he merged East-West traditions and influences to build his own visual expression.

We try to contextualize this practice in a larger scope by presenting them alongside some of his ink and watercolor works, as well as oil paintings. As a whole, we hope this survey will not only draw attention to another aspect of Zao's oeuvre, but also that it will be a good introduction to this unique 20th century Modern abstract painter.

What insights might the audience glean from this particular showcase when presented with both paintings and prints by this prominent Chinese artist?

The fact that he was a master at both, but also that his distinct visual vocabulary as evidenced in his paintings are parallel to the creativity in his prints: a journey towards an abstraction inspired by the Western painters [Paul Klee](#) (/artists/5262-paul-klee) and Cézanne; a rediscovery of his Chinese roots along the way as he appropriates Chinese calligraphy and ancient inscriptions; a reinvention in his approach and treatment of paint and ink, line, color; and a return, in a sense, back to gestural washes, subject matter, and compositions that were ultimately Chinese in character.

Audiences will hopefully see the rhythms of his fundamental and intercultural influences applied in both mediums, and appreciate how his approaches in each have shaped the other. For instance, his re-acquaintance with India ink in the 1970s after over 20 years influenced his treatment of oil painting thereafter.

How would you describe the general interest in Zao Wou-Ki's work in Singapore? Are there many Singapore-based collectors of his work?

He has been extremely appreciated by collectors in the region and beyond because he was really the first artist on the international platform who successfully brought the practice of East and West together, especially by collaborating with other artists from different disciplines.

This was evident when it came to print illustrations for the French poet and painter Henri Michaux, as well as poets René Char, Jean Laude, and Arthur Rimbaud, to name a few.

“Zao Wou-Ki: No Boundaries” runs from July 7 through August 27 at STPI.

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	<u>ARTIST / TITLE</u>	<u>SALE INFORMATION</u>	<u>ESTIMATE</u>	<u>PRICE SOLD</u>
	Zao Wou-Ki Abstraction, 1958	November 30, 2013 Sotheby's Beijing Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art (Lot 34)	\$ 5,743,500 - \$ 7,384,500 USD	\$ 14,716,489 USD Premium
	Zao Wou-Ki 15.01.82 (Triptych), 1982	October 04, 2013 Sotheby's Hong Kong Sotheby's Hong Kong 40th Anniversary Evening Sale (Lot 11)	\$ 8,772,000 - \$ 11,609,999 USD	\$ 10,995,959 USD Premium
	Zao Wou-Ki 16.5.66, 1966	October 04, 2013 Sotheby's Hong Kong Sotheby's Hong Kong 40th Anniversary Evening Sale (Lot 16)	\$ 3,870,000 - \$ 6,450,000 USD	\$ 10,273,559 USD Premium
	Zao Wou-Ki 3.4.60-1.2.69, 1960	October 04, 2013 Sotheby's Hong Kong Sotheby's Hong Kong 40th Anniversary Evening Sale (Lot 17)	\$ 2,580,000 - \$ 3,870,000 USD	\$ 9,117,720 USD Premium

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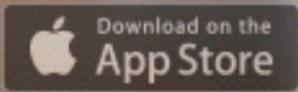
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