

VILLEPIN

Zao Wou-Ki: *The Eternal Return to China*

December 1, 2021 – May 22, 2022

G-2/F, 53-55 Hollywood Road

Central, Hong Kong



Zao Wou-Ki, *Le Temple des Han* (triptych), 2005, 195cm x 324cm. Photo courtesy of Dennis Bouchard.

Villepin is delighted to announce its upcoming exhibition of the late Chinese French master Zao Wou-Ki, exploring the artist's lifelong examination and reflection of Chinese inheritance.

Following Villepin's inaugural exhibition with the artist in 2020, *Zao Wou-Ki: The Eternal Return to China* continues the gallery's ongoing research into his life and art. This presentation aims to uncover the complex facets and layers of his artistic journey from China, around the world and ultimately, back to his native homeland. Throughout the artist's career, his relationship with China was omnipresent and permeated his work.

This curated presentation will feature exceptional and rarely seen works, including oil paintings, ink works, and watercolors. Through research into newly discovered archive interviews with the artist, this exhibition aims to shed light on a lesser-known aspect of Zao Wou-Ki and his relationship with China, its history and culture. Although he spent most of his career in Europe, China has always been close to his heart and served as a lifelong inspiration in his work.

During his early and late period, he often evoked the ideas and artistic styles of ancient China, embodying a sense of freedom without being confined to any school or movement in the process. His work succeeded at both ends of artistic creation, moving nimbly between and across abstraction and figuration. Zao Wou-Ki transcended the boundaries of tradition, which enabled him

to create a highly individual visual language of his own. At the same time, he adamantly rejected the commonly circulated images of China in Europe, which he found to be vulgar chinoiserie and caricatures.

Particularly drawn to the cultural and creative innovations of ancient China, the artist sought to create artworks that reflected his personal history. Together with friend and renowned architect IM Pei, Zao Wou-Ki did not feel encumbered by tradition but rather was encouraged by this period in Chinese history that exalted truth and freedom through art.



“In a way, these works show that Zao Wou-Ki never really left China, and China never actually left him in turn. It remained perpetually in his life, thoughts, and in his art. This exhibition offers a new perspective and understanding of Zao Wou-Ki in his quest for harmony between seemingly opposing poles, which continues to be much needed in today’s contemporary world,”

comments **Arthur de Villepin**, Chairman and Co-founder of Villepin.

Zao Wou-Ki, *19.03.2006* (Triptych), 2006, 195cm x 291cm. Rights reserved.

In order to evoke a sense of Zao Wou-Ki’s incredible adventure, the gallery will be redesigned to reflect his ambition between tradition and modernity, and the ancient Chinese culture that served as a constant inspiration to his life and work.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Zao Wou-Ki



The late Chinese French master and polymath Zao Wou-Ki (b. 13 February 1920 in Beijing, China; d. 9 April 2013 in Nyon, Switzerland) worked primarily with oil, watercolor, and ink, also occasionally creating engravings and lithographs. “Wou-Ki” literally means “ad infinitum” (to infinity) in Chinese, and this forename would prove prescient for an artist extraordinaire who embraced diverging cultural identities without ever being chained to any. Arriving in Paris in 1948, Zao was inspired and enlightened by the French capital, and the admiration of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) during his formative years evolved, and throughout his artistic career he would continue to be influenced by Western Modernism, in particular Impressionism and Expressionism. Zao’s timeless pieces have been collected by and exhibited at the leading museums and galleries around the world, including most recently Paris Museum of Modern Art, France; Asia University’s Asia Museum of Modern Art in Taichung Taiwan; Asia Society Museum in New York, United States; Nantong Museum, China; and STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery in Singapore, but to name a few.

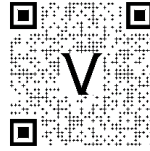
Zao Wou-Ki, 1980. photo Michel Delaborde, Dist. Rmn-Grand Palais.

About Villepin

Shaped by Dominique and Arthur de Villepin's passion for art, Villepin is a new gallery model created by collectors for collectors. Founded in 2019 in Hong Kong, Villepin is specialized in selected important artists, estates and foundations, advocating their work through carefully curated exhibitions while bridging them with the leading collectors and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world. Beyond its gallery walls, Villepin also acts as curator for exhibitions in museums and institutions.

Each exhibition at Villepin is based on in-depth scholarship and offers a unique experience to immerse visitors in the life and art of each artist. Previous exhibitions have also produced special bilingual publications that include original essays and curatorial research. Artists presented by Villepin include Zao Wou-Ki, Myonghi Kang, Pierre Soulages, Georges Mathieu and Hans Hartung among others.

As curator and advisor to a close community of collectors, Villepin is focused on education and promoting scholarship of its artists through intimate salons and collaborations with leading institutions, foundations, universities and museums. Through their extensive experience in building close friendships with artists, the father-son partnership aims to share their expertise, encourage dialogue, and support collectors in building long-lasting relationships with artists, who are at the heart of Villepin's initiatives.



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