

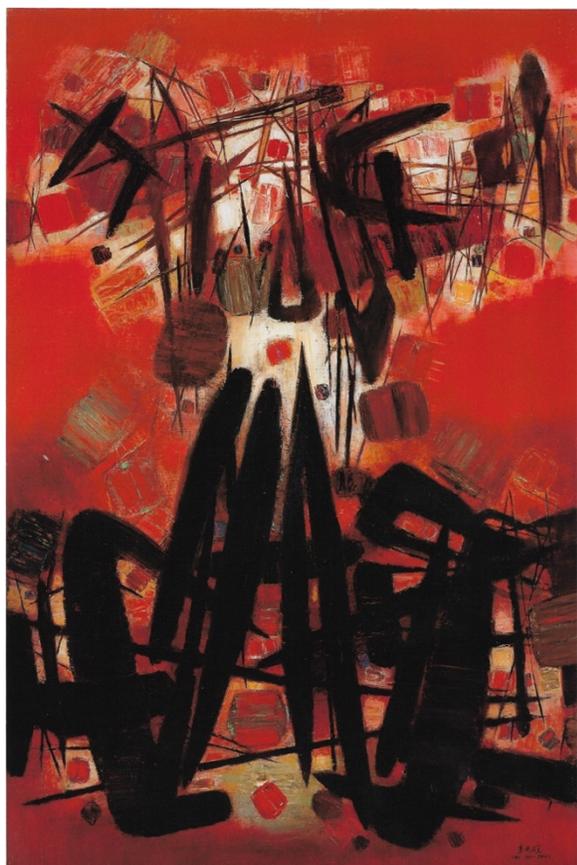
LÉVY GORVY 厲為閣

Hangzhou to Paris: Journey to Abstraction

20 September–16 November 2019

Lévy Gorvy
Ground Floor, 2 Ice House Street
Central, Hong Kong

Opening Reception: Thursday 19 September, 6–8PM



Hong Kong—Lévy Gorvy Hong Kong is delighted to announce *Hangzhou to Paris: Journey to Abstraction*, an exhibition that illuminates the work of Chinese émigré painters Chu Teh-Chun and Zao Wou-Ki and the mid-20th century Parisian avant-garde scene that embraced them. Anchored by exemplary paintings from foundational periods of their careers, *Hangzhou to Paris* will also feature important works by their French, American, and Canadian contemporaries who worked in Paris at the time: Nicolas de Staël, Hans Hartung, Henri Michaux, Joan Mitchell, Jean Paul Riopelle, and Pierre Soulages. Following the success of *Un art autre*, which opened at Lévy Gorvy's London space earlier this year, *Hangzhou to Paris* will continue that exhibition's reassessment of abstraction in the postwar period, this time with specific emphasis on the legacy of international exchange between China and France. Opening 20 September, *Hangzhou to Paris: Journey to Abstraction* will span the entirety of our ground-floor space in the historic St. George's Building in Central.

Chu and Zao both began their artistic journeys at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou. China's most progressive fine arts academy of the day, it was founded in 1928 during an era of rapid political and cultural transformation as the nation entered debates regarding its engagement with the West. The two were both mentored by Lin

Fengmian, a visionary artist and teacher who sought to reconcile traditional Chinese art with Western modernism. Forced to relocate temporarily to Chongqing during the war years, the Academy allowed both artists to flourish, as they engaged with modernist masters and developed their own aesthetic directions, laying the foundation for their long and productive careers.

Chu and Zao both chose to settle in Paris, an alluring destination for those who sought creative freedom and a supportive community for avant-garde ideas. In 1948, Zao settled in Montparnasse, where he would become neighbours with Alberto Giacometti and close friends with Hartung, Michaux, Soulages, and other figures central to the era's intellectual and artistic developments. Chu relocated to France in 1955 and was inspired to radically transform his work after visiting a de Staël retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Quickly becoming immersed in the avant-garde milieu of postwar Paris, Chu and Zao embarked on distinct yet parallel aesthetic paths defined by the shared influence of Chinese calligraphy and landscape painting traditions, which each sought to infuse with the expressive language of European abstraction.

Renowned for their boldness and gestural freedom, the paintings in *Hangzhou to Paris: Journey to Abstraction* embody these artists' contributions to the painterly innovations for which the mid-century Parisian avant-garde would become known. Chu's *Composition No. 53 – Rouge, la pluie de pétales sur le village. Blanc, le nuage au-dessus la maison* (1960) couples his knowledge of historical Chinese art forms with his nuanced awareness of pictorial space. Likewise, Zao's works manifest his desire 'to paint that which cannot be seen, the breath of life, the wind, movement, the life of forms.' These ambitions are epitomised by *Marais* (1956), a striking painting titled after the historic district at the heart of Paris and that exists between the worlds of ideographic signs and of nonrepresentational form. The lyrical abstractions of Hans Hartung's *T 1949-24* (1949) is representative of his graphic, stripped-down yet remarkably evocative mark-making. Riopelle's vibrant *Abstraction (Orange)* (1952) and *Le réveil* (1970) exhibit his unique approach to abstraction. Mitchell's monumental *Untitled* (1957) and *12 Hawks at 3 O'Clock* (1960) exemplify her energetic brushwork and spatially nuanced compositions. Together, these vital and expressive paintings expand the understanding of abstraction during this era of modernist experimentation.

Featuring paintings that have never before been exhibited in Hong Kong, *Hangzhou to Paris: Journey to Abstraction* celebrates Chu and Zao's formally resonant and thoroughly cosmopolitan artistic achievements alongside others of their Parisian cohort, providing a means to contextualizing and appreciating the work of each artist through the lens of the scene that united them. Bringing the innovations of Eastern and Western culture together in the spirit of these exceptional artists, this exhibition is intended to further the gallery's commitment to presenting ground-breaking art that bridges across national boundaries.

About the Artists

Zao and Chu have been widely exhibited across Europe, Asia, and North America, and the two artists achieved considerable international recognition during their lifetimes. Major exhibitions of Chu's work have been organised by the Fine Arts Museum, Shanghai (2005), National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2010), and National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung (2013). Zao has been commemorated with retrospectives at Asia Society, New York (2016–17), and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2018–19). Both artists were inducted into the prestigious Académie des Beaux-Arts and into the Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur, France's highest order of merit. Zao was recognised by the Japan Art Association with the Praemium Imperiale Award for Painting in 1994. Chu was awarded the Gold Medal by the Fondation du Mérite européen in 2006.

About Lévy Gorvy

Lévy Gorvy cultivates a program devoted to innovation and connoisseurship in the fields of modern, postwar, and contemporary art. Founded by Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, Lévy Gorvy maintains gallery spaces at 909 Madison Avenue in New York, in Mayfair, London, and in Central, Hong Kong. The gallery fosters continued dedication to the living artists and artists' estates that it represents and offers a robust program of exhibitions and multidisciplinary events. The gallery also produces ongoing art historical research and original scholarship, publishing exhibition catalogues, monographs, and other key publications. The Zürich office, Lévy Gorvy with Rumbler, offers bespoke private advisory services to collectors and institutions around the globe.

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IMAGE: Chu Teh-Chun. *Composition No. 53 - Rouge, la pluie de pétales sur le village. Blanc, le nuage au-dessus de la maison*, 1960. Oil on canvas. 76.8 x 51.2 inches (195.1 x 130 cm). © 2019 ADAGP, Paris