

# Marlborough

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## ZAO WOU-KI: *PAPER AND CHINA*

MARLBOROUGH GALLERY: SEPTEMBER 16 – OCTOBER 11, 2008

The Directors of Marlborough Gallery are pleased to announce the opening on September 16 of an exhibition of china and works on paper by the preeminent Paris-based Chinese artist, Zao Wou-ki. This exhibition will be Zao's second show at Marlborough Gallery and the first New York show since his critically acclaimed retrospective at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris in 2003.

The works on paper will be comprised of inks on paper executed in the last three years and ten large scale (approximately three and a half by five feet in length) color serigraphs. The works show a masterly control yet spontaneous fluidity of space, or what Daniel Abadie refers to in the catalog's essay as "breathing space." Speaking of Zao's approach to drawing he writes, "Being Chinese, he has always understood emptiness, the breathing space that is the real essence of traditional Asian painting...Zao sets up a "dream space" that is infused with breath, to use François Cheng's magnificent expression for this fundamental tenet in Chinese thought." In terms of Zao's use of color and space Abadie states, "Zao's challenging assertion, in the 1960's, that he was not painting landscapes but space, is justified in these recent works. He no longer represents the maple of the autumnal garden, the flower bush or the violent waves at Biarritz. He expresses them through color. It is color, rather than any effect of modelling that invents all the Indian summers or the frothy lace in the evening light." Abadie also points out that it was inevitable that Zao, being a painter and Chinese, would eventually encounter the traditional art of porcelain although his approach to it, mixing pigments and spreading them with brushes and palette knives directly onto white forms, is starkly unorthodox. The exhibition will show eighteen porcelain works in forms of vases, cups, and plates. Abadie says, "By ignoring the porcelain workers' expertise, Zao generated unexpected images and colors, from subtle monochromes to the most vibrant arrangements of blues, greens, and yellows and from austere blacks to sumptuous reds allied with gold. Like the recent watercolors and prints this work is driven by the pleasure of discovery. The artist creates wonder, first for himself, then for his audience, rediscovering a childlike gaze in a vision of the world that is touched by magic."

Zao was born in Beijing in 1920. His family dates back to the Song period (10th–12th century.) He began his training at the age of 15 at the School of Fine Arts in Hangzhou. He left for Paris in 1948 to study modern painting with the result that Paul Klee had a deep influence on his early work. He became a part of the group of painters associated with the School of Paris, in particular, Pierre Soulages and Nicolas de Staël. He also became friends with Giacometti and Sam Francis as well as with musicians and writers, especially the poet, Herni Michaux. From 1955 until his last show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery he traveled often to New York and became friends with Barnett Newman, Franz Kline, William Baziot, Saul Steinberg, and Hans Hoffman. The freshness and spontaneity of American painting appealed to his aesthetic interests and to his vivid knowledge of both Eastern and Western art. It is this amalgam of cultures as manifested in both traditional Chinese painting and abstract Western painting which informs Zao's art and places it, aesthetically and formally, in a unique and important position in the history of painting.

In 1994 Zao received Japan's Imperial Prize for Painting, which was personally given to him by the Emperor. In 1998 a retrospective of his paintings traveled to Shanghai, Beijing and Canton. In 2002 he was elected to the Académie des Beaux Arts in Paris. Zao has lived and worked in Paris since 1948.

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.

A fully illustrated color catalogue will be available at the time of the exhibition.

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