



Title: *Untitled*
ARTIST: Zao Wou-Ki/ (1921-2013) Chinese
DATE: 1974
Framed: 24 1/4 x 26 1/4; image: 17 x 20 inches
MEDIUM: Lithograph
ACQUISITION #: 97.1.6
 Additional work in the collection by the artist: Yes

A French-Chinese Artist

French-Chinese artist Zao Wou-Ki was born in Beijing, China on February 13, 1920. Motivated by his father, Zao started painting and drawing when he was 10. Being born into a wealthy family whose heritage stretched back to the Song Dynasty, his father could afford to send him to the National School of Art in Hangzhou to be trained by Chinese artists. With the encouragement, however, of his French-educated teacher he moved to Paris in 1984 to free himself from the rigid tradition of Chinese art. Zao spent his first day in Paris fascinated by visiting the Louvre and looking at the original artworks he had seen in books. It was in France that he enjoyed the communication of post-war artists like Joan Miro, Pablo Picasso, and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva. Inspired by Abstract Expressionism and Impressionism, he chose abstract painting for the rest of his artistic experiences. He combined the traditional Chinese aesthetic with modernist abstraction. Zao believed only through his paintings could he express his unified French-Chinese identity and culture. His signature is a symbol of his unified identity. He wrote his first name with Chinese characters and his last name in western letters. He did not title his works after 1959 and named them by the year of creation to avoid interrupting the viewers' interpretations.

The Prints of Zao Wou-Ki

Although Zao is most famous for his large canvas paintings, he also created print masterpieces. Like his oil and watercolor paintings, his prints showcase dual influences of Asian and western traditions. Zao created his first lithograph in 1949 at the Edmond Desjobert workshop in Paris. Later he explained his experience like this: "The idea of throwing color on a large white porous stone, like on China paper, pleased me." The monochrome lithography and its medium – stone, ink, and paper – reminded him of his love for Chinese ink painting and his goal to find a the way to modernize it. After meeting abstract artists his early monochrome figural prints shifted to a more abstract, and bolder style through the use of brighter colors. The vibrant and energetic colors of the prints, as Alexandra Gill explains, showcase mystical landscapes with eastern qualities. But at the end of his life the artist used muted colors such as ochre, brown, and saffron. Zao used the visual effects of printmaking in his painting; he shaped lines on the paintings by using the sharp end of paintbrushes.



Zao Wou-Ki, *Sketch of Young Girl*, lithograph, 1949. 8 5/8 x 9 1/16 in.

RESOURCES:

<https://www.christies.com/features/Zao-Wou-Ki-8534-3.aspx>
<http://confuciusmag.com/ink-and-wash-paintings>
<https://www.christies.com/features/Collecting-guide-The-prints-of-Zao-Wou-Ki-8904-1.aspx>

Vocabulary

Song Dynasty: the Chinese Song Empire originated in 960 with Emperor Taizu and ended in 1279.
Tang Dynasty: Emperor Gaozu founded the Tang Dynasty in 618, which continued until 907. Under the Tang dynasty China became the most powerful country of its time.
Abstract Expressionism: The movement originated in New York in the 1940s. The artists aimed to reflect their emotional expressions through spontaneous visual acts and marks.

Traditional Chinese Ink Wash Painting

Beautiful and sometimes complicated Chinese ink wash paintings are created by simply using paper, ink, water, and brushes. Artists spread the paper and dipped their brushes in ink, diluted with water, to make various values from black, to gray, to white. Chinese ink painting goes back to the Tang dynasty when artists of this type were highly educated and the philosophy of such paintings was to catch the soul of the objects in the paintings. For example, the artist painted a flower to capture its liveliness and fragrance, not to exactly imitate the shape and color of the petals. Common landscape paintings usually depicted the mountains and waters of beautiful famous areas. The loose and freely illustrated landscape paintings depicted the vividness and rhythm of nature.

THE VALUES OF NATURE: ACTIVITY LESSON PLAN 3-5

Session Activity: In this activity children will experience monochrome Chinese ink wash painting to create abstract landscape art from nature.

Objective: Students will understand the concept and technique of Chinese ink wash painting with its reliance on value from white to black. Students will develop their understanding of abstract art.

Material: paper, ink, brushes, water.

Activity Procedure:

1. The teacher will introduce Zao Wou-Ki's Chinese ink wash paintings in terms of technique and subject matter.
2. The teacher will explain the abstract landscape quality of the artist's work.
3. The teacher will demonstrate ways to create value from white to grays to black.
4. The class will go to a park or walk around the school. They will take watercolor materials with them in order to do plein air monochromatic abstract landscape work in the tradition of Zao Wou-Ki's work.
5. The teacher will ask the students to pick scenes that might include trees, flowers, or wider views.
6. Students create their own monochromatic abstract landscapes using at least three values.



Zao Wou-Ki, *Untitled*, brush and ink on paper, 1980.
26 1/2 x 27 1/8 in.

NEXT GENERATION SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: 3—5

Big Idea: Skills, Techniques, and Processes

Enduring Understanding: Development of skills, techniques, and processes in the arts strengthens our ability to remember, focus on, process, and sequence information.

Benchmarks: Integrate the structural elements of art and organizational principles of design with sequential procedures and techniques to achieve an artistic goal.

NEXT GENERATION SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: 9-12

Big Idea: Historical and Global Connections

Enduring Understanding: Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).

Benchmarks Analyze the impact of social, ecological, economic, religious, and/or political issues on the function or meaning of the artwork.

Objective: Students will develop an understanding of Chinese ink wash painting technique with special attention given to the principles of lines, values, and space, particularly negative space. Students will incorporate the concept of the infinite universe in their paintings.

Material: Paper, ink, brush, and water.

Activity Procedure:

1. Students will be shown a selection of Chinese ink wash paintings as well as Zao's landscape prints/paintings and others abstract artists' works that inspired Zao such as Paul Klee, Franz Kline, and Joan Miro. Students will discuss the qualities of Chinese ink paintings and the ways that Zao combined them with abstract art in his paintings/prints. The following questions will be asked:
 - What are the qualities of Chinese ink wash paintings?
 - Describe the qualities of line, value, and space used in these works.
 - What are the qualities of western abstract art?
 - In what ways did Zao combine Chinese ink wash paintings with western abstract art?
 - How did Zao's paintings/prints reflect his dual French-Chinese identity?
 - In what ways did Zao's paintings parallel the Chinese philosophy of nature?
2. The second part of the activity takes place plein air.
 - Students will paint scenes in the Chinese ink wash painting style and create their own abstract art paying special attention to line, value, and negative space.
 - The paintings should reflect the Chinese philosophy of nature.



Joan Miro, *The Smile of the Flamboyant Wings*, oil on canvas, 1953.
35 x 46 cm.

THE RHYTHM OF NATURE: ACTIVITY LESSON PLAN 9-12

Session Activity: In Chinese philosophy nature is infinite. Therefore, it is impossible to paint the truth of universe. Ancient artists captured the soul and spirit of nature by omitting the details. They created works with abundant negative space. Inspired by this philosophy and abstract art Zao Wou-Ki created his works of art.