

*****EXCERPT OF ARTICLE TRANSLATED FROM MANDARIN TO ENGLISH*****

Who's behind the Zao Wou-Ki Boom at the Hong Kong Auctions?

In October 2017, the average price of Zao Wou-Ki's oil paintings on the Asian secondary market reached a record high. This year's pricing surge for Zao Wou-Ki works follows his prior market peak in 2013, with this year's boom surpassing the previous in both speed and intensity.

The Zao Wou-Ki Foundation

The Zao Wou-Ki Foundation was established in Geneva, Switzerland in 2012. The Foundation does not own any part of the collection, nor does it sell any works itself. Its primary responsibility is the authentication and promotion of Zao Wou-Ki's works. According to its research, the artist made approximately 1,800 paintings between 1935 and 2008, at which time he decided to conclude his oil painting career. The Zao Wou-Ki Foundation is currently working on the compilation of "The Paintings of Zao Wou-Ki: Complete Works from 1935-2008".

Aside from compiling this publication, the Zao Wou-Ki Foundation is also actively organizing public institutions, private collectors, and the primary and secondary markets as joint forces to promote Zao Wou-Ki's art. A series of retrospectives were held in regions with the largest collections of the artist's work, and these exhibitions have had a profound impact on the art historical understanding of the artist and the collection of his works.

Primary Market

The market has undoubtedly felt an even more direct effect than the artist's exhibition history. Due to the efforts and promotion by many mainstream galleries for nearly fifty years, Zao Wou-Ki not only has a solid market in Europe and the United States but has also seen a successful market growth within Asia with the rise of local Asian economies.

In 2017, a key moment for the artist was Lévy Gorvy's entering into Zao's primary market. In early 2017, the gallery opened its "Willem de Kooning | Zao Wou-Ki" exhibition in New York, bringing together these two Eastern and Western abstract masters for the first time.

Dominique Lévy, co-founder of Lévy Gorvy, disclosed that the gallery will continue to "work closely with the Foundation". "It is our duty to help the artist's family manage its asset inventory, and we will try to manage it in a conservative yet productive way to ensure that the

artist's standing continues to improve and the work continues to increase in value. We take time to discover works that are less well-known in order to present them to the public. Our mission is to generate as much interest as possible through our exhibitions and our connections with museums around the world. " Lévy also mentioned that "Willem de Kooning | Zao Wou-Ki" will travel to Hong Kong in 2018.

For Lévy Gorvy, Zao Wou-Ki's appeal is far more valuable than the artworks themselves. "In the past, Zao Wou-Ki's collectors have been based mostly in Europe and the United States, and now with the gradual change in market structures over the past decade, the Asian market has started to pay increasing attention to Zao Wou-Ki's work. De Kooning is already famous in Europe and the United States; therefore, it is an excellent opportunity for Asian collectors and exhibition viewers to enhance their understanding of Chinese and Western Post-War art through the juxtaposition of these two artists in the exhibition. What we have to do is boost the artist's influence through his artistic achievements throughout the region," Brett Gorvy said.

Secondary Market

A number of recent events have created a prime market environment for the appearance of higher auction records, missing only are top lots to attract collectors. The previously-mentioned publication has solved this problem to a certain extent. "The Paintings of Zao Wou-Ki: Complete Works from 1935-2008" not only provides a more accurate placement of many important works, but it also undoubtedly saves the auction houses much work.

On October 14, the average hammer price of Zao Wou-Ki's oil paintings surpassed that of 2013, and it may increase further still by the end of the 2017 fall auctions.

Zao Wou-Ki's collectors are spread throughout the globe, with the majority located in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, and with Chinese living overseas. In recent years, with the influx of mainland Chinese buyers, the prices of Zao Wou-Ki's works have been steadily climbing. A number of Western galleries and collectors are also pursuing Zao's works.

Half of his oil paintings that have appeared on the Asian market thus far have hammered above estimated prices. With the gradual rise in prices as well as an optimistic market atmosphere where important works are appearing more frequently, many Zao Wou-Ki collectors are more actively modifying their collections. According to statistics, between 2013 and 2016, 52% of Zao's works with an auction hammer price greater than 10M HKD came from Asian private collections, and most of these works dating from the 1950s and 1960s. Hong Kong and Taiwanese collectors are still the most active and most powerful competitors for the large-scale Zao Wou-Ki works that have appeared recently.

As an example of the evolving understanding of and interest in his work, the third period of Zao Wou-Ki works, the 'oracle and calligraphy period', is considered by Western collectors to be the most representative of the artist's style. Early Taiwanese collectors were also fond of works from that period. Conversely, mainland and Indonesian-Chinese collectors prefer later works because his late works possess a more Eastern aesthetic, reflecting more their culture and spirituality. However, with a general growth of understanding about Zao Wou-Ki's different

artistic periods, regional preferences that were once quite different are gradually beginning to merge.

The boom of Zao Wou-Ki's work is a product of time and locality, and on a deeper level it also reflects how China's art collection trends are evolving