

SOTHEBY'S HONG KONG TO PRESENT
ZAO WOU-KI'S
UNTITLED (1958)
FROM THE COLLECTION OF
THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

ON VIEW AT SOTHEBY'S NEW YORK
FROM 5-10 FEBRUARY 2019
AHEAD OF PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS IN ASIA

AUCTION: 31 MARCH, HONG KONG



Zao Wou-Ki, *Untitled*, 1958, oil on canvas, 114.3 x 162.6 cm
Estimate: HK\$60,000,000 – 80,000,000 / Approx. US\$7,700,000 – 10,000,000
Property of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, sold to benefit the art fund

Hong Kong, 29 January 2019

Sotheby's announced today that a seminal 1958 work, *Untitled*, by Zao Wou-Ki will highlight its *Modern Art Evening Sale* in Hong Kong on 31 March 2019. Coming directly from the collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the work will make its auction debut more than six decades after its creation, carrying an estimate at HK\$60–80 million (approximately US\$7.7– 10 million) and with the proceeds to benefit the museum's art fund.

Vinci Chang, Sotheby's Head of Modern Asian Art, commented: 'Sotheby's is the undisputed leader of the Zao Wou-Ki market, currently holding four of the top ten prices for the artist at auction, including his new benchmark set last fall. This spring, we are privileged to be entrusted with this remarkable painting from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. With its distinguished provenance and impeccable quality from the artist's critical "Oracle Bone" period, this masterwork will no doubt generate interest and excitement from collectors worldwide.'

Zao Wou-Ki's 'Oracle Bone' Period

Oracle bone inscriptions are the most ancient form of Chinese characters dating as far as 3,000 years, and are the earliest written records of the history of humanity. Prior to declaring wars or making critical decisions, ancient Chinese emperors sought guidance from the gods, either by inscribing oracles on animal bones and turtle plastrons, or by casting decrees upon bronze.

Zao's father, a banker in China, was one of the earliest collectors of oracle bones, which in turn nurtured the artist's penchant for ancient artifacts from his childhood. During his initial years in Paris in the 1950s, Zao published a monograph dedicated to the treasures of ancient China, which informed his painting style as it evolved into abstractionism, marking the beginning of his acclaimed 'Oracle Bone' period.

In 1957, Zao embarked on a life-changing journey to the United States, where he began his collaboration with the Kootz Gallery – a gallery best known for its championing of abstract art. This won him enduring friendships with numerous American masters, such as Franz Kline, Philip Guston and Adolph Gottlieb, among others. Meanwhile, Zao's revolutionary combination of the ancient oracle bone and modern painting style became instantly pursued by world-class museums, propelling the artist to becoming a leading Eastern figure in the golden age of abstract expressionism.

About *Untitled*

Relatively large in size, *Untitled* is a rare gem from Zao Wou-Ki's 'Oracle Bone' period. The modest use of colours resembles the thousand year-old bronzeware that withstands the test of time. Evolving from indecipherable ancient Chinese characters, the sharp and distinct brushstrokes become abstract motifs that emanated a strong presence of classical Eastern aesthetics.

Provenance

Initially presented by the Kootz Gallery, *Untitled* remained in the collection of Judge and Mrs. Samuel I. Rosenman, the first White House Counsel, until 1964 when it was donated to the Guggenheim. Established in 1939, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York based its initial acquisition and research direction on a commitment to abstract art, later opening its iconic Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building and expanding its collection with masterpieces by many of the most influential artists of the 20th century. Among the Guggenheim's holdings of Zao Wou Ki's canvases and works on paper, *Untitled* is a classic depiction of the best of the artist's Oracle Bone Period. The work remained in the Guggenheim collection for five decades and will now appear at auction for the first time.

PREVIEWS

New York, 5-10 February

Taipei, 16-17 March

Hong Kong, 29-31 March

AUCTION

Modern Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong, 31 March

SALE DETAILS

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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer's premium and are net of any fees paid to the purchaser where the purchaser provided an irrevocable bid.

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