



Dealer's Stamps on the works of T'ang Haywen

by Philippe Koutouzis



After the death of T'ang Haywen on 9th September 1991, the inheritance of T'ang was declared vacant – no heirs were found and T'ang had made no will; so the French state and precisely the Administration of the Domains – ordered the sale at auction of his belongings, therefore also of his paintings found in his apartment.

Four auctions (4) were organized by the auctioneer Mr. Yves-Marie Leroux in 1992 and 1993.

I undertook the task to find the family and succeeded in 1994. In 1995 I became the representative of the Estate and made possible for the family to receive the full amount resulting from the auctions after the payment of the death tax¹.

In 1996 as representative of the estate I obtained from the **D.N.I.D**² the certified copies of the minutes of the four auctions. These minutes taught me that the sales were organized without catalogue, without list of works, without any image or reproduction of the works; without any documentation. I learned later, from **several witnesses**, the terrible conditions in which these sales were held.

Because of this situation and in order to create a provenance for the works, three dealers who had acquired works during the sales decided to produce a stamp – image above – in order to apply it on the back of the works each one of them they had acquired.

Mr. Jacques Barrère, Jean-Michel Beurdeley, and Jean-Claude Riedel are these Parisian dealers.

A fourth dealer, not officially registered as a dealer but actually a full time dealer according to French law refused to join them. **He is currently involved in two police investigations in France and Belgium concerning the auctioning of doubtful paintings and the issuing of doubtful certificates.**

Concerning the stamp, the provenance of studio sales intervening after the death of artists are sometimes established thanks to a stamp applied – before their sale – on the front or on the back of the works.

¹ Certain friends of T'ang knew that he had a brother but did not know how to contact him or had forgotten that they had his address buried in their archives. French law provides for a maximum period of six months for settlement of an estate and T'ang was poor and unknown; therefore, the D.N.I.D had no reason, material or moral, to actively research his family. So the dispersion of T'ang property, i.e., the first auction was held on 19th May 1992, eight and a half months after his death. Another case in 1997, the very important succession of Dora Maar, mistress of Picasso, gave rise to an unbridled competition between two companies of genealogical research who finally received a very important commission on the auction of her collection.

² **The Domains** is the D.N.I.D, French Administration of the National Domains, known as "Les Domaines". In France when a person dies without any known heir, The Domains, in most cases, request the auctioning of the property of the deceased person. In this case and since I was representing the estate of T'ang, The Domains forwarded me all their available documentation concerning the belongings of T'ang and their sale.



T'ANG HAYWEN ARCHIVES

This stamp is normally advertised and mentioned in all documents concerning the sale. It is therefore approved by the state and sometimes the result of a decision of the state, or of the family of the artist.

In the case of T'ang, the three dealers took the unilateral decision to create a stamp. Neither the state neither the auctioneer had asked, suggested or approved its creation by these three dealers. The state and the auctioneer ignored that this stamp was created. Therefore, this stamp has no legal value and is not a "studio stamp".

At first glance this stamp could seem to be a "provenance" but it is in fact misleading because the actual operation of stamping the works was not organized in a legal frame. We have no information concerning, for example, a statement written by a notary or a bailiff who would have listed and stamped the works, then written a deed documented with photographs. This notary or bailiff would have normally destroyed the stamp after applying it on the works and mention this fact in his statement. It does not mean that the three dealers are still nowadays applying the stamp. It means that nothing can be checked.

Furthermore, these three dealers participated in that sale but ignored the foundations of T'ang Haywen's work, they had no idea about his life, his acquaintances, his artistic choices. They deemed that the purchase of the works of T'ang Haywen at very low prices was a good investment. Nothing wrong with that.

But the great disorder in which the moving of T'ang's belongings from his apartment to the auction room, the very bad organization of the sales, the selling of the works by the auctioneer in indistinct lots of 10, 20 or 50 pieces created great confusion. Some friends of T'ang, were very angry about the process and interrupted one of the sales that they esteemed a "public execution".

Despite this interruption and the re-pairing of a number of diptychs by Jean-Paul Desroches, many works, diptychs and triptychs were sold *incomplete*, missing one of their part. So buyers and amongst them the dealers bought quite a few incomplete works and the three dealers who had decided to stamp their works, obviously stamped the incomplete works. Some of these works are now coming back to the market³.

But some complete works were stamped and they are indeed authentic works sometimes bearing an authentic signature of T'ang but this does not confer to this stamp any value and for the reasons laid down above, the stamp cannot be considered as a proof that a work was actually acquired during one of these sales. It is therefore impossible to say that this stamp constitutes a reliable mean of appreciation. It is therefore also impossible to prove that the sales slips handed over by Mr. Yves-Marie Leroux and still sometimes used by the seller or sellers correspond to the works offered on the market⁴.

Finally, the redaction of the stamp uses T'ang Haiwen as the name of the artist. This is a confirmation of the ignorance of these dealers concerning the life of T'ang. Indeed, T'ang corresponds to the Vietnamese transcription of the character of Zeng (曾) and Haiwen is the pinyin transcription of 海文.

Therefore, the association of T'ang and Haiwen associate together two different modes of transcription. This appears a bit odd for somebody acquainted with Chinese culture.

This could, maybe, be understandable if this had been the choice of the artist but on the contrary, T'ang as soon as he had settled in France always wrote his name: T'ang Haywen.

³ A close friend of T'ang, Jean-Paul Desroches, curator at the Chinese department of the Musée Guimet in Paris, was called by Mr. Leroux to "re-unite" the separate parts of diptychs. He could do it for a number of them but certainly not for all. Also considering that the "red collars" – traditional movers of Drouot – equally ignorant of the work of T'ang, had "kept" a great number of works of T'ang, three or four years after the sales lots of halves were proposed on the market at competitive prices.

⁴ Recently, we have also seen new "invoices" mentioning as origin the sales organized by Mr. Leroux. In several identified cases there are serious doubts as to their authenticity