

In 1988, the Taipei Fine Art Museum presented *CHINA-PARIS*, which was the first museum exhibition on modern Chinese painters who had travelled to France. *CHINA-PARIS* adopted the format of *PARIS-BERLIN* presented ten years earlier at the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris) but was essentially the first demand upon the return of these artists by their Chinese brothers. Thirty years later we know what has happened in the history of art and in the history of the market.

T'ang Haywen was invited to exhibit but he was away traveling and found too late the letters of proposal, follow-up and regrets of the curator of the exhibition, Mrs. Rita Chuang Yuan-Chien. She mentioned him in the catalogue with Zao Wou-Ki and Chu Teh-Chun as the inventor of a new expressive and abstract language because T'ang was supposed to be the eighth artist in the exhibition, but no one saw his works. Like so many other times during his life as an artist, he had ignored the "elevator" of the art world that a great museum exhibition is.

He spent "*most of his time in the exercise of his freedom*" and lived for painting. He did not want to "*paint the wind*" or resurrect the Song dynasty spirit because by setting foot on French soil in 1948, he had already reached a peak; that of his freedom. All his work is only the consequence.

Today the work has survived and offers collectors the purest Chinese version of a modernity ahead of the contemporary. And yet it had to resist oblivion, loss, adoration, misunderstanding, prejudice and then recuperation. It is possible that all these pitfalls have allowed it to wait for the right moment, the one when we would be ready to see and understand it for what it is: the free adventure of a new vision that attracts us and retains us as soon as we linger there.

For the past 25 years, this is the first time that an exhibition, this time followed by an auction, presents in France such an important collection of authentic works almost entirely dedicated to ink. T'ang painted in standard formats, to avoid the concern of the space to paint and most often in the diptych format to achieve fusion and multiplication but also because it is more practical; after all he was Chinese. Indeed, the sheets with identical formats follow one another: a single sheet of 70x50 cm or two joined in diptychs of 70x100 cm and also 29.7x21 cm and 29.7x42 cm and small formats in watercolour or acrylic sometimes containing unlimited landscapes; and also sometimes large works in a single piece. Except the rare oils on canvas, most of his works are painted on cardboard or paper and most often, although this surprises or even annoys some observers, they are not signed.

Everything that T'ang experienced in his tireless quest as a vision hunter, he passes on to us in his simple and profound representations of nature. His painting is not abstract, he rejected this qualifier because his reference, his starting point, is the reality he observes, sometimes on the motif, but which he refrains from representing. Many landscapes, summarized in a few lines placed on the empty paper (lots #1,17,18,22,27...) or filling the space with a storm of nuances (lots #8,10,30,41...). From the densest black to the most transparent grey, he masters the ink and water and the multiple effects of their encounters. With four or five strokes he creates a fruit (lot #3) and gives it its shape and almost its colour or brushes sensitive and melancholic imaginary portraits (lots #4 and 7). We know his landscape-portraits where the eyebrows are distant mountains and the eyes are bushes on the hillsides. He amuses himself with the anthropomorphic or zoomorphic visions that appear to him and brings them to life with a final brushstroke (lots #6,23). He allows his hand to go to this false clumsiness of the masters for whom painting is just another way of breathing and absorbing the world, its essence and its beings (lots #21,32); he pays homage to the landscapes of his tradition (lots #5,26,28,38...) and sees in the sky symbols of life, energy and growth (lots #15,24,42); finally, long before Hiroshi Sugimoto in his Seascapes he understands that the horizon contains the whole universe (lot #40).

It is indeed freedom, the joy of living and the joy of seeing the great ballet of the world unfold before his eyes that is the source of T'ang Haywen's work. It is necessary to make the effort to initiate ourselves and to train to watch - like him - with the eyes of an old child.

In 1967 Guy Debord, in the first lines of his essay *La Société du Spectacle*, regretted that in our modern societies "*everything that was directly experienced has moved away in a representation*". T'ang invites us to the spectacle of his visions and then

disappears. He invites us to see but above all to think, to look at ourselves and to remember in the transparent mirror of his painting.



Philippe Koutouzis 古獨奇

曾海文檔案庫 T'ANG HAYWEN ARCHIVES

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