

PRESS RELEASE

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T'ANG HAYWEN

A Chinese painter in Paris

(1927-1991)

Director of the Guimet Museum:

Yannick Lintz

Curator:

Valérie Zaleski, curator of the Chinese paintings and Chinese Buddhist art collections at the Guimet Museum

Project Manager:

Claire Bettinelli, production manager, contemporary collections and exhibitions

Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet

6 place d'Iéna 75116 Paris
Métro: Iéna (line 9), Boissière (line 6)

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www.guimet.fr

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Guimet Museum Communications

Department:

communication@guimet.fr

Nicolas Ruyssen

Communications Director

+33 (0)6 45 71 74 37 /

nicolas.ruyssen@guimet.fr

Anna-Nicole Hunt

Communications Officer

+33 (0)6 33 61 94 53 / anna-

nicole.hunt@guimet.fr

Press

Agence Observatoire-Véronique Janneau

Viviane Joëssel

+33 (0)1 43 54 87 71 / +33 (0)7 66 42 12 30

viviane@observatoire.fr

Kassandre Fradelin

+33 (0)1 43 54 87 71 / +33 (0)7 66 54 16 73

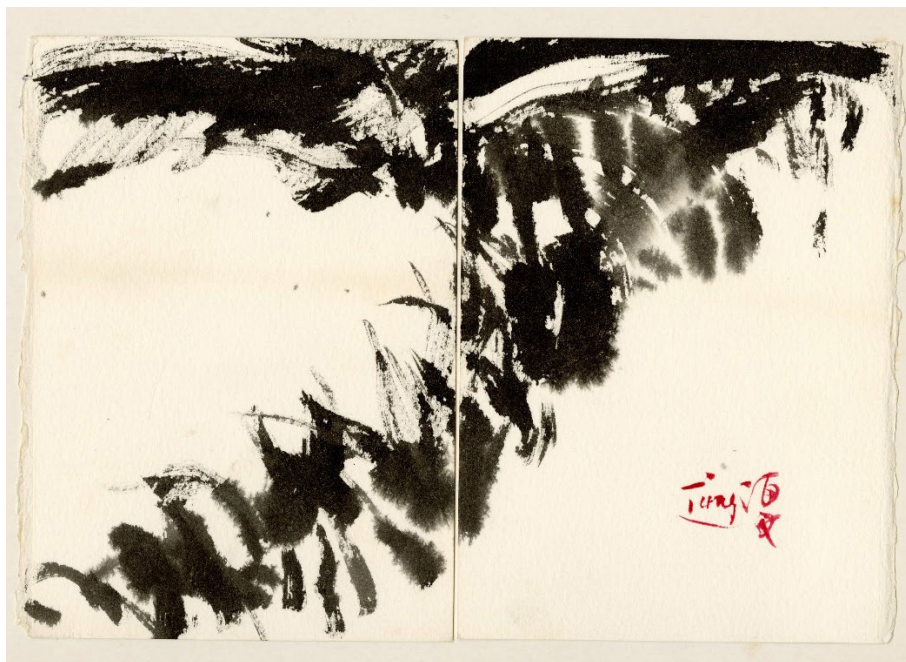
kassandre@observatoire.fr

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6 March – 17 June 2024

The Guimet French Museum of Asian Arts
Press preview Tuesday, 5 March at 5.30 pm

An exceptional exhibition showcasing the immense talent of a great Chinese-French artist and contemporary of Zao Wou-ki.



Untitled, 1988, ink on Arches paper, MA 13252 © T'ang Haywen Archives © T'ang Haywen / ADAGP, Paris, 2024

From the moment he arrived in Paris in 1948, officially to study medicine, T'ang Haywen adopted France as his new home. He discovered a country buzzing with creativity. Like other international artists, he encountered Western modernity, and just like Zao Wou-Ki (1920-2013) or Chu Teh-Chun (1920-2014), the first Chinese artists who came to Paris to study, he became one of the emblematic figures of the effervescent Montparnasse art scene.



Untitled, 1955-1960, gouache on Annonay paper, MA 13349 © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Olivier © Tang Haywen / ADAGP, Paris, 2024



Untitled, 1965, watercolour, gouache and ink on Kyro card, MA 13413 © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Olivier © Tang Haywen / ADAGP, Paris, 2024

T'ang Haywen was trained in Western painting, and there is evidence in his sketch books of regular visits to museums in Paris, including Guimet, and that he was inspired by the urban landscape, which he quickly sketched with a ball-point pen. A modern scholar, driven by an insatiable curiosity about Western art and culture, it was in Paris that he found his vocation as a painter. He was trained in calligraphy by his grandfather and had a keen interest in Taoism, a philosophy which he continued to follow, living free of material and social constraints. In 1958, he wrote to his brother: *"I have found my vocation in painting...I don't believe this will please our parents... this is a very grave matter, honestly, there can be no question of seeking success for success' sake. For success to be true, it must be completely sincere. Once a painter finds himself, then he can, and must work for others, but not before... I cannot, nor do I want to abandon this vocation."*

T'ang Haywen was a discreet artist and progressively affirmed himself as a major figure of contemporary art and Chinese modernity. In his lifetime, he exhibited work in many art galleries in France and abroad, including the Pompidou Centre in 1989. By the end of the 1990s, he had earned international acclaim.

Although he was an avid traveller, France would always be his land of choice. *Western art remained a powerful source of inspiration, yet he always stayed true to his Chinese heritage; a duality which existed throughout his life as an artist.* Having learned calligraphy from his grandfather in Vietnam, his work is a bridge connecting traditional Chinese monochrome ink with the bold bright colour of Western art, and the figurative with the abstract, or *"non-figurative"* as he preferred to describe it.

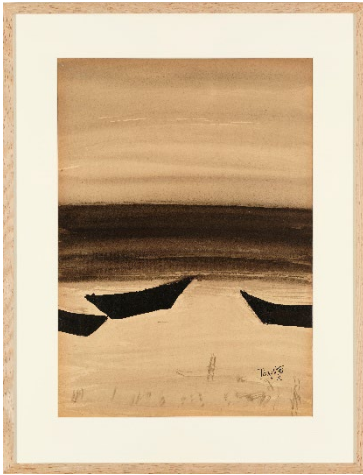
With a selection of around one hundred major works, this exhibition offers a panorama of the main stages in his career as well as the key aspects of the work of this artist who endeavoured to capture, in his own words: *"the ideal painting, combining both the visible and the imaginary."*

His first years in Paris are illustrated by several watercolour and gouache paintings inspired by great masters such as Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse and Paul Klee. He honed his own style with abstract and calligraphic landscapes in the 1960s, exploring bright colours and monochromes. The period from the early 1970s to 1983-4 is represented by polychrome or monochrome paintings in gouache or ink. It was in the 1970s that he developed his favoured format, the diptyque.

In the larger formats, T'ang Haywen was able to express his abstract landscapes in monochrome ink, while the smaller formats, folded paper, diptyques and triptyques from 1980-1985, are representative of a painter who was at the height of his art. These works express the Taoist energy and tension between empty and occupied spaces, between black and white, and between the invisible and the imaginary.



Greetings card, 1955-1960, ink on paper, MA 13395 © Tang Haywen Archives © Tang Haywen / ADAGP, Paris, 2024



Untitled, 1967, ink on Kyro card, MA 13444 © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry Ollivier © T'ang Haywen / ADAGP, Paris, 2024



Portrait of T'ang Haywen © Yonfan Manshih, 1991, copyright T'ang Haywen Archives

The exhibition features a series of rare works and archive pieces, which had until now been secretly kept in his studio. These paintings shed new light on the personal life of this fundamentally free-spirited, simple-living artist and reflect his attachment to Asian asceticism. As T'ang Haywen travelled often, he preferred to work in formats that could be transported in his portfolio. These original and touching pieces are being shown to the public for the very first time: postcards sent to his friends and acquaintances, painted ceramic tiles, souvenirs of a stay in San Francisco in 1965, small monochrome portraits and pages from sketchbooks.

The exhibition includes a large selection of work from an exceptional donation of 202 paintings and around 400 pieces from personal archives from the *Direction nationale d'interventions domaniales* made to Guimet in 2022. The pieces were the object of art trafficking: they were seized by the French government and a selection was made with the teams at the museum. Today, they are back in the limelight and help tell the tale of T'ang Haywen, a unique, contemporary post-war artist.