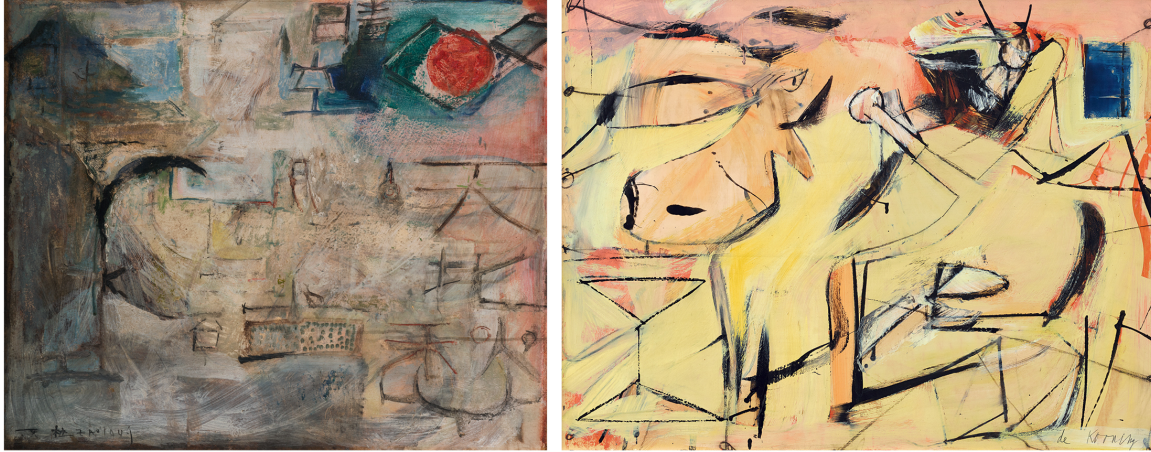


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LÉVY GORVY TO LAUNCH WITH FIRST-EVER PAIRING OF ABSTRACT LANDSCAPES BY ZAO WOU-KI AND WILLEM DE KOONING

EXHIBITION WILL TRAVEL TO CHINA

'Willem de Kooning | Zao Wou-Ki'

January 18–March 11, 2017

Lévy Gorvy

909 Madison Avenue

New York, NY 10021

Lévy Gorvy is pleased to present the first exhibition ever to pair the abstract landscapes of Chinese-French master **Zao Wou-Ki** (1920-2013) and Dutch-born American titan **Willem de Kooning** (1904-1997). With the full support of the Willem de Kooning Trust and the Fondation Zao Wou-Ki, this exhibition will inaugurate the new partnership of Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, and will be the first presentation in their gallery's expanded space at 909 Madison Avenue.

'Willem de Kooning | Zao Wou-Ki' will travel to Hong Kong.



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Although contemporaries, the two postwar masters of painting never met, and the exhibition at Lévy Gorvy marks the first time their work will be presented together. With a selection of over twenty paintings spanning from the late 1940s through the early 1980s, 'Willem de Kooning | Zao Wou-Ki' intends to bridge an East-West dialogue, placing the two artists in conversation by means of their work. De Kooning's *Sail Cloth* and Zao's *Untitled*, both created in 1949, open the exhibition and indelibly illuminate ways in which issues of surface, representation, depth, and coloration would similarly preoccupy both artists throughout their careers. Seminal large-scale canvases - including such key museum loans as Zao's *Montagne déchirée* (1955 – 56) from the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and de Kooning's *Untitled* (1962) from the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. - will be on view. And side-by-side juxtapositions will reveal striking affinities between the two artists, suggesting heretofore unrecognized connections between the ways in which de Kooning and Zao addressed composition and motif to achieve breakthroughs that remain relevant to contemporary painting.

Lévy Gorvy will present a series of programs in conjunction with 'Willem de Kooning | Zao Wou-Ki.' The gallery has published a fully illustrated hardbound catalogue featuring essays by leading scholars, including Robert E. Harrist Jr., Jane and Leopold Swergold Professor of Chinese Art History at Columbia University; and Dominique de Villepin, former Prime Minister of France. In addition, the book will contain original poems by Cole Swenson and Diane Ward, as well as a chronology contextualizing the two painters in the rich goings-on in China, Paris, and America at the time, constructed by Melissa Ward.

About the Exhibition

Zao Wou-Ki's abstract landscapes entail a rethinking of the aesthetic terms defining man's relationship to nature. Defying centuries of convention in Chinese art, Zao abandoned the subject in landscape painting while retaining a transcendental quality through his use of color, line, and scale. Conversely, Willem de Kooning arrived at the abstract landscape through a deep consideration of the figure. He began painting the female body as a kind of landscape: portraits liberated from form, with ground and body collapsing



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onto each other. Through the deployment of expressionist gestures that traverse his subjects with dividing lines and brilliant colors, de Kooning helped broaden the very idea of figurative painting.

Rather than equating the two artists, the exhibition at Lévy Gorvy seeks to initiate a dialogue between their sensibilities and approaches to the language of abstraction. Neither artist completely abandoned the representational tradition; instead, each worked abstractly within the parameters of landscape imagery. Comparing their work, the exhibition reveals a subterranean resonance that traversed the art world in the immediate postwar generation.

The contemporaneous development of the abstract landscape for Zao and de Kooning in 1953-54 is particularly striking as the point of intersection for artists born of two different cultural and art-historical backgrounds, speaking the same language across the divide that separates East from West. In a manner specific to these traditions, Zao developed his abstract painting out of an impulse to perfect the form of the landscape central to his heritage, while de Kooning arrives at the abstract landscape through a desire to do justice to the female form beyond the confines of the nude. Between Zao's evocation of the sublime in nature and de Kooning's conception of the landscape as rooted in the body, these artists simultaneously opened and redefined the spectrum of abstract landscape.

As conceived by Zao and de Kooning, the abstract landscape holds a particularly strong topicality in the world of contemporary painting. As other mediums, including sculpture, installation, and video, come to the fore in the current fabrication of artwork, the role of painting is continually called into question. Painting in the 21st century must attempt to overcome the longstanding opposition between figuration and abstraction, in order to bring fresh purpose and relevance to the medium. Such contemporary artists as Charline von Heyl, Albert Oehlen, and Harold Ancart, among others, are addressing this challenge. In the abstract landscapes of Zao and de Kooning, we perhaps discover their antecedents: two models in the compelling search to surpass of the division between the figural and the abstract.



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For additional information please contact:

Andrea Schwan

Andrea Schwan Inc.

info@andreaschwan.com

+1 917 371.5023

Above

(L) Zao Wou-Ki

Untitled 1949

Oil on Cardboard

17 7/8 x 21 1/2 inches (45.5 x 54.5 cm)

Private collection

Photograph by Patrick Goetelen

(R) Willem de Kooning

Sail Cloth 1949

Oil, enamel, charcoal, and graphite on board

27 x 32 inches (68.6 x 81.2 cm)

Private collection

Photograph by Elisabeth Bernstein

