

# The Youngest Among Us All

## Zao Wou-Ki on Joan Miró

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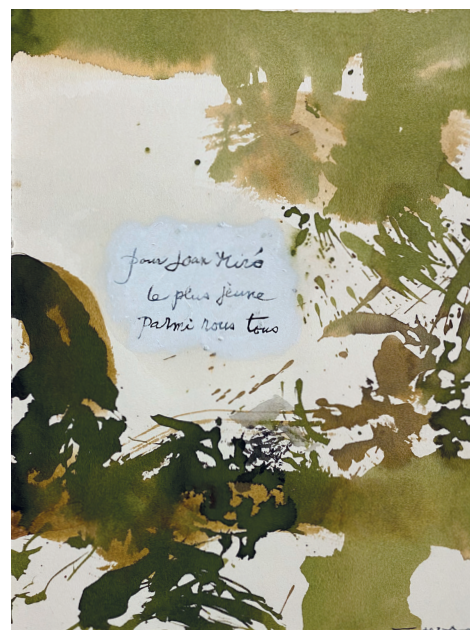
Mayoral presents a unique exhibition bringing together Joan Miró (1893-1983) and Zao Wou-Ki (1920-2013), two artists with very different backgrounds who developed numerous connections, starting with their first meeting at Galerie Pierre in 1952, who shared a love of poetry, a tremendous lyrical sensitivity to gesture, sign and light and numerous mutual friendships. For Salomé Zelic, curator of the exhibition, the starting point is a drawing that Zao Wou-Ki sent to his Catalan elder in 1978, on the occasion of his 85th birthday, with the dedication: “To Joan Miró, the youngest among us all.”

Paris, capital of the avant-gardes, became Miró's adoptive home in 1920. Zao Wou-Ki, too, fell in love with this city where the two men met. After the second world war, Miró, who continued to live in the French capital on a regular basis, became a tutelary figure for the younger generation, at the heart of their fervent exchanges. As for Zao Wou-Ki, he soon gained the support of rising figures such as Sam Francis, Hans Hartung, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, and Pierre Soulages, as well as from icons of modernity such as Picasso, Giacometti, and of course, Miró. This was the heyday of the Second School of Paris.

While Paris brought them together, it was their shared admiration for Paul Klee that consolidated their bond. For both men, Klee's work – which Miró discovered in 1924 and Zao Wou-Ki in 1951 – was both a revelation and a turning point in their move towards abstraction. Both were inspired by Klee's games with letters to create a repertoire of personal signs that helped them escape the conventional representation of reality. Where Miró brought into play imaginary ideograms based on medieval imagery and the wall paintings of Catalonia, Zao Wou-Ki drew on ancient inscriptions engraved on oracle bones and the bronzes of the Shang dynasty when creating his new visual language. In *Woman and Bird V/X* (1960), the sign is extremely abstract. Miró plays with the roughness of the canvas, using the jute as a colour in its own right as he revisits primitive images.

What united the artists beyond their difference of generation was this visual questioning, this use of the sign as a tool of expression, for its possibilities as a new language.

Another fundamental factor shared by Miró and Zao Wou-Ki in their work is their poetic sensibility. Both were surrounded by poet friends: Guillaume Apollinaire, Alfred Jarry, Blaise Cendrars, Paul Eluard, Tristan Tzara for Miró; Henri Michaux and René Char for Zao Wou-Ki. They made no distinction between painting and poetry.



**Zao Wou-Ki**  
*Sans titre*  
(1978)  
Ink wash and India  
ink on paper  
38.3 × 28.2 cm

Fundació Pilar  
i Joan Miró, Mallorca



**Joan Miró**  
*Peinture*  
*(Projet pour une tapisserie)*  
(1973-74)  
House Paint,  
and wool  
on wood  
197 × 122 cm



**Zao Wou-Ki**  
*17.02.71-12.05.76*  
(1971-76)  
Oil on canvas  
73 × 100 cm

The exhibition emphasises Miró's constant striving for renewal. The high point is a surprising canvas from 1974, *Peinture (Projet pour une tapisserie)* (*Painting [Design for a Tapestry]*), which, among other things, demonstrates his familiarity and engagement with the Action Painting of the New York School. This work attests the unfailing creativity shown by Miró in the years leading up to his last great retrospective before his death, held at the Grand Palais in 1974. In it he brings together all his influences, evoked by the drips of black ink, the discrete collage of two pieces of red wool, and a black handprint, like a symbol of the soul.

This canvas dialogues with Zao Wou-Ki's *17.02.71-12.05.76*, a work that was acquired for his personal collection by Jean Leymarie, curator of the 1974 Miró retrospective and of the major Zao Wou-Ki exhibition held in 1981. This work illustrates the artist's acute sensitivity to gesture and light.

As part of this free gesturality – we can almost picture these artists dancing as they make their work – particularly noteworthy is the use of black ink, which refers to calligraphy, but also the use of signifying emptiness, as in Zao Wou-Ki's large-format *Untitled* (2007). This piece was lent by the Musée de l'Hospice Saint-Roch in Issoudun, which received a donation from the artist's personal collection.

Here, for the first time, is an exhibition showing all the things these two artists from very different backgrounds had in common, their shared aesthetic, pictorial and poetic concerns.

#### The Curator

Having worked as an independent art critic, **Salomé Zelic** joined the South Asian Modern and Contemporary Art department at Christie's in New York as a specialist from 2017 to 2020, and spent three years at Christie's Paris in the department of Asian 20th-century and Contemporary Art where she worked closely with the foundations and experts of Asian artists who had a connection to Europe, and to Paris in particular. She worked on several projects with the artists Patrick Rimoux, Edgar Sarin, Marie-Luce Nadal and Nikhil Chopra, and on exhibitions

including *Voir Paris: Une Aventure Chinoise* in April 2017 and with the research group *La Méditerranée* of which she is a member. She has studied non-Western modern art history and markets in South Asia in particular, as well as conducted research on Bombay-based artist Shilpa Gupta.

#### MAYORAL

Gallery specialised in Modern and Post-War art founded in Barcelona in 1989. It articulates an exhibition programme focused on Informalism and Post-War art, both Catalan and Spanish, with artists such as Tàpies, Chillida, Millares, Saura, Guerrero, Zóbel, Canogar, Rivera and Francés. At the same time, the gallery also exhibits the work of key twentieth-century avant-garde artists such as Miró and Picasso.

It develops projects that are rigorously curated and grow out of an exhaustive process of research based on original documentation. The gallery relies upon the support

of the artists' families, foundations and other institutions whose mission resides in preserving and publicising the legacy of the artists they represent. Likewise, it enjoys the complicity of many collectors and museums, both public and private, when it comes to accomplishing its mission. In November 2019, Mayoral opened a second gallery in Paris. The gallery participates in art fairs such as TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York, Art Basel Miami Beach, Art Basel Hong Kong, Art Basel Miami Beach, Salon du Dessin, Art Paris, Art Cologne and ARCOmadrid.