IMPORTANT
WU GUANZHONG WORKS
FROM THE COLLECTION OF
CHU TEH-CHUN

朱德群珍藏吳冠中畫
FINE CHINESE PAINTINGS

AUCTION IN HONG KONG
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Striving assiduously for 90 Years.
Your heart, immersed in the sea of art;
Your luminance, brightens up the entire universe.
The celebrated friendship between the two iconic artists, Wu Guanzhong and Chu Teh-Chun, began in 1936. At the age of seventeen, Wu met Chu, who was a year younger, at a military camp. After Chu invited him to his college, the National Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, Wu was mesmerised by what he saw, and decided to switch his studies from engineering to arts. This momentous encounter prompted Wu to embark on an artistic journey which spanned a lifetime.

After that, they studied and painted side by side. As history unfolded, the pair faced the challenges of wartime chaos while relocating from Hangzhou to Chongqing and later Nanjing. They shared the vivid merriment and bitterness of life, working towards the same goal to study in Paris. Shortly after Wu’s graduation in 1947, he was awarded a scholarship to study in Paris. Chu finally arrived in France eight years later, only to find his dear friend had already returned to China. For the next thirty years, they were separated from each other and lost touch.

The long-awaited reunion with Chu Teh-Chun was in the 1980s, which, according to Wu’s autobiography, was extraordinarily heartwarming. In his eyes, Chu’s paintings, albeit presented in an utterly different style, still reflected the same artistic notions since his school days. Rekindled by mutual appreciation and inspiration, their bond was stronger than ever, and they continued to support each other, often meeting in China and Europe. In 2010, Wu made his final appearance at Chu Teh-Chun’s exhibition opening in Beijing, where he paid tribute to his best friend with a poem, “Striving assiduously for 90 Years. Your heart, immersed in the sea of art; Your luminance, brightens up the entire universe.” Through the brightest days and darkest nights, their admiration and respect for each other lasted a lifetime.

The following paintings are from Chu Teh-Chun’s personal collection. They were gifts or works exchanged between the pair throughout the years. Chongqing, the Mountain City was the artist’s first panoramic depiction of his recurring theme of the city, Primitive Woods was the highlight of Wu’s first exhibition in Paris, while The Lion Grove Garden and Lotus Pond are imbued with the cultural connection to their homeland. Emblematic of the enduring friendship they shared, they are also the epitome of Wu’s artistic achievement.
My friendship with Teh-Chun began in a military training camp. In the summer of 1935, Chang Kai-shek imposed a three-month military training on all high school and university students. Teh-Chun, student of the National Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, and I, an engineering student of the Zhejiang Industrial School Affiliated to Zhejiang University, were assigned to the same squad at the camp in Hangzhou. With his basketball player-like height of a Northerner, Teh-Chun was made file leader to stand at the back, while I, as a short southern fellow, was picked to bring up the rear. Throughout the three months, we trained side by side.

One Sunday, Teh-Chun invited me to visit his school. As I set foot in an art school for the first time, I feasted my eyes on the dazzling sketches, watercolours and oil paintings. I fell in love instantly and forgot about everything else. At that time, I had never seen any art exhibition. The National Academy of Fine Arts had never organised exhibitions nor presented their artworks in the city. It was an ivory tower, which was ironic. Impulsive as a wild horse, I devoted myself to my new love, ignoring my father’s disapproval, and regardless of career prospects, I abandoned my engineering studies and enrolled to study at National Academy of Art all over again. Only Teh-Chun was by my side to support me. He brushed up my painting and prepared me for the entrance exam. He even asked Professor Liu Kaiqu (from his hometown) to take special note of my exam paper, but Professor Liu advised him not to encourage anyone to take up art study, especially at the time I was already studying in a prestigious high school.

Eventually, I was admitted to the National Academy of Art in Hangzhou, and was a year behind Teh-Chun. He became my little teacher, and we would always talk about school each day. Lin Fengmian, Wu Dayu, Cai Weilian, and Pan Tianshou were the teachers we admired the most. The two of us were inseparable. Nearly every afternoon, we would paint watercolour landscapes on the bank of West Lake. Our drawing themes and styles were very similar, and this was when our earliest aesthetic taste was cultivated. At night, we would secretly practice Chinese traditional paintings by imitating works by Shi Zhiyuan and Cai Shanhua, and by drawing plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo, and chrysanthemums. Teh-Chun’s skills in painting and calligraphy were more accomplished than mine.

At that time, oil painting classes were only offered at degree level. Teh-Chun could not resist waiting and tried out oil painting on his own. The materials were expensive, and as white colour was often used, he created his own substitute by mixing zinc oxide and oil. One time, Teh-Chun offered me his paints. He told me that the white colour was in an old face cream jar and then left for the market. When he returned, he remarked on the strong fragrance in the room. It turned out that I had mixed up the jar, using actual face cream instead of the white oil acrylic. No wonder they were so difficult to work with! All because of my poor sense of smell - I often mix up jars. I also taught myself to mix oil paints! This was why my friend used his face cream jar and I used actual face cream.

We would often paint by the West Lake, where we were inseparable. Nearly every afternoon, we would paint watercolour landscapes on the bank of West Lake. Our drawing themes and styles were very similar, and this was when our earliest aesthetic taste was cultivated. At night, we would secretly practice Chinese traditional paintings by imitating works by Shi Zhiyuan and Cai Shanhua, and by drawing plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo, and chrysanthemums. Teh-Chun’s skills in painting and calligraphy were more accomplished than mine.

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When I was in Paris, I often thought of Teh-Chun and wondered if he had undergone any hardships in France. However, when we were finally able to see each other, we buried the past sufferings deep in our hearts and covered the heaviness with a thick layer of art.

In spring 1989, Seibu department store invited me to Paris to sketch the city. Accepting the offer, I stayed in Paris with my wife for a month, and spent much time with Teh-Chun. I will never forget visiting Vincent van Gogh’s grave with Xiong Bingming and his wife, or Teh-Chun and his wife taking us to see Claude Monet’s home in Giverny. These two places had not been open to the public when I was a student, and I had always regretted not being able to visit. Once I got there, I felt as if I were touching the hearts of those departed artists.

When Teh-Chun first visited Beijing, I had already moved out of HuaiHe Hall, and he could never see the new and modeled Beijing alley I insisted on in the past thirty years. I accompanied him and his friends to visit the Temple of Heaven, the Forbidden City and the Yungang Grottoes...

From 1993 to 1994, during my exhibition at Musée Cernuschi of Paris and a white family with my wife and Teh-Chun frequently. He told me that a few members of the French Academy would like to nominate him as a candidate to join the prestigious French Academy of Fine Arts. It would be a fierce competition with other notable painters, and it had always been particularly challenging for foreigners. I encouraged him to try as I would have been a huge honour if a Chinese artist was elected. In 1997, Teh-Chun initiated an illustrious new era in the history of Chinese fine art exchange when he was inducted into the Academy.

At the opening ceremony of Teh-Chun’s exhibition at the National Art Museum of China in 1998, I mentioned the poetic scene when an old man returned to his hometown after so many years, with his native accent remaining the same. This accent refers not only to his speech but also to his work, form, colour, rhythm, and affection, all particularly touching for those appreciating from his homeland. I have published numerous articles about his art, so I would not repeat here. Instead, I would like to listen what other art critics have to say. Sixty-five years have gone by, from my childhood days to Teh-Chun’s. If I were seeing my old friend again, we would be closer than ever. His face always kept each other close to our hearts.

I learnt about his family while in Hangzhou. Teh-Chun and I used to peruse artbooks every day and rate artworks like armchair critics. Today, when we got to see the actual works of the masters at the Louvre we had known so well back then, our critics have to say. Sixty-five years have gone by, from my childhood days to Teh-Chun’s. If I were seeing my old friend again, we would be closer than ever. His face always kept each other close to our hearts.
江西贵溪时，学生们住在天主堂里，我们为了节省，不敢入伙，便在一个门洞里，加上刘宝森（彦函），三人一同煮稀饭过日子。一路贫穷，一路画速写，苦学不辍。苦学的同学们不少，像董希文、李霖灿等等情况都相仿。一九四一年德群在四川青木关毕业后再留母校任助教，我于一九四二年毕业后再重庆大学建筑系任助教。相隔一条嘉陵江，我们往来不能密切了，但两件事仍紧密联系着我们。一是寻找油画材料，因当时材料奇缺，得设法从上海用各种办法转带。二是学习法文，想走前辈老师们的路，到法国勤工俭学的梦始终未破灭。一九四六年我有幸考上了公费留法，我与德群将分手了，德群很感慨，说将他的梦由我一起实现吧。世事沧桑，一九四七年我去巴黎，他后来自台湾，从此音信杳无。一九五五年他终于从台湾到了巴黎，一到巴黎他必先找我，而我则于一九五○年秋返国，似乎命运安排我们永不相见了。五十年代到一九八○年之间，北京和巴黎断了民间的鸿雁。大约一九七九年，收到德群辗转寄来的一本画集，系法国袖珍博物馆丛书系列之一，作品都是六十年代以后的抽象面貌了。虽是抽象作品，我一打开画册便感到是老友的音容。我们在国内并未作抽象画，我在法国亦未作抽象画，第一次见到德群到法国后创作的抽象画却感到似曾相识或一见如故。抽象与具象面貌虽异，而作者心脏未改……
The crowded houses, the splashes of colourful dots, and the craggy mountain paths created a magnificent, the dense rows of houses on the mountains make it one of the most unique.

The mountain city of Chongqing sat at the intersection of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers. Imposing from the waterside to the top of the mountain. Everyone made the steep climb by foot, that's why it would be painstaking and take me more than ten years to complete it.

The five years Wu Guanzhong spent in Chongqing were life-defining. Between 1940 to 1945, while advancing his studies amidst wartime hardship, he began a romantic relationship with Zhu Biqin, who later became his wife. He also developed a lifelong friendship with Chu Teh-Chun, with whom he shared a mutual dream of pursuing art in Paris. But as history and destiny would have it, Wu Guanzhong would not set foot again on the banks of the Jialing River until 1973, close to 27 years after his bid farewell to his beloved city.

In 1973, Wu Guanzhong was commissioned to paint Ten Thousand Miles of the Yangtze River. On the scroll, he depicted Chongqing city. This was the first time he had captured the mountain city in his paintings. Later on, he expanded this subject matter into individual works in both oil paintings and ink. Entitled Yangtze River Mountain Town. Along the Jialing River, or Old Chongqing, the compositions feature different perspectives of the city, with either the river in the foreground and houses piled along the bank, or clusters of buildings dominating half of the paper with a river meandering alongside. The paintings usually fit into square canvases, with very few exceeding one metre in length and width.

According to The Complete Works of Wu Guanzhong, the present Chongqing, the mountain City was painted in 1979 (the recorded dimensions of 96 x 480 cm was a typographical error, a fact confirmed by Wu’s family). This is the first panoramic depiction of his beloved city on a four-foot wide paper. In the same year, the artist had his first major touring exhibition across the country organized by the National Art Museum of China. Soon after, Southwest China Normal University in Chongqing invited him to teach in Beibei. It was around the same time he painted the massive oil painting of The Three Gorges of the Yangtze River for the Great Hall of the People. As well as two ink and colour works of the mountain city: one measures just one metre in length, currently in the collection of the China Art Museum in Shanghai. On it, the artist inscribed, “The Old Chongqing, the compositions

In the painting, the houses in the distance become abstract blocks of pale ink with succinct black dots as windows, thereby retaining specific elements of the visible world and showing Wu’s meticulous attention to detail. Built against the mountain, the piers and the city were interlinked by fleets of stars. In the painting, the steep stairs of the city were placed strategically at the center of the composition, breaking the oppressiveness of the densely packed houses. The steps ascend along the mountain slope, guiding the viewer’s gaze gradually upward. Along the steps were placed strategically at the center of the composition, breaking the oppressiveness of the densely packed houses.

Wu brought the present work to Paris as a gift to the couple. According to Wu Guanzhong’s family, this work had remained with the artist after its completion. In 1989, Wu Guanzhong travelled to Paris for a painting trip commissioned by the Seibu department store in Japan. There he spent considerable time with his old friend Chu Teh-Chun and his wife, who had been living in France since 1950s. Deeply touched by the revisions, Wu brought the present work to Paris as a gift to the couple. It became his wife. He also developed a lifelong friendship with Chu Teh-Chun, with whom he shared a mutual dream of pursuing art in Paris. But as history and destiny would have it, Wu Guanzhong would not set foot again on the banks of the Jialing River until 1973, close to 27 years after his bid farewell to his beloved city.

The next time the artist painted a similar composition would be in 1997, when he painted Chongqing of the Old Times, a more abstract work measuring more three metres in length, currently in the collection of the China Art Museum in Shanghai. On it, the artist inscribed, “The Old Chongqing, no longer as before. In my dreams, I pursue, my memories relived.” Development had transformed the city, and modern Chongqing looks entirely different from before. The old, expansive mountain city of Wu Guanzhong’s youth could only be revisited through paintings and memories.

Reference:
The Mountain City of Chongqing; 1979, sold at Sotheby’s Hong Kong, Fine Chinese Paintings, April 2011, Lot 1990

“During the Japanese occupation, I lived in the outskirts of Chongqing for five years. I have fond memories of my days in this city, a place which can be called my second home and one of my favourite subjects for painting. I often returned for sketching trips and to relive old memories.

The mountain city of Chongqing sat at the intersection of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers. Imposing from the waterside to the top of the mountain. Everyone made the steep climb by foot, that’s why they say Sichuanese are strong mountainers.

In the 1970s, I painted Chongqing in oil and ink, depicting the dense forests of traditional slit houses, the cities with black roofs and white walls. The style is somewhat between representation and abstraction – exuding a figurative impression by abstract technique. If I had to paint each and every house, it would be painstaking and take me more than ten years to complete it.

It has been twenty years since I returned to Sichuan, and things are no longer the same. The present Chongqing looks very different from how it was. When I see the old Chongqing through my old painting books, a wave of nostalgia spreads over me. I hope the city would always stay young and youthful, and not grow old as I do.”

WU GUANZHONG
“八年抗日戰爭，我居重慶郊區五年，憶及蜀中風物人情，仿佛第二故鄉，故曾多次入蜀寫生，每入蜀，情思脈脈，年光倒流。矗立在長江、嘉陵江交匯處的長江山城氣勢雄偉，鱗次櫛比的重慶的獨特風貌舉世無雙。從造型藝術角度看，其重疊、錯落、黑白相間、垂線的統一與橫線的連綿構成了無比豐富的建築雕塑感或雕塑建築感。人家密集，彩點潑灑，山徑穿鑿，是歲月營造之迷宫。山城兀立在滔滔大江之上，江中舟帆穿梭，檣桅林立，紛繁世事，從水上串聯到山巔，上上下下人人靠步行，故蜀人腳力堅強，無愧山城人。七十年代我用油畫和水墨寫生過重慶，畫那密密麻麻的古老吊腳樓之林、黑屋頂白山牆之城，作風介於具象和抽象之間，予人感覺是具象的，其實須依靠抽象的手法，如果真具象地畫一間一間的屋，則十年也無法完成。二十年沒有再去四川了，換了人間，今日重慶是何光景，該決非故人之貌了，翻閱自己畫集中的老重慶，又生懷古情結……愿她永葆青春，不隨作者同衰老。”

吳冠中
“One must express the atmosphere of a forest. Simply adding trees in the picture does not make a forest. Forest creates fascinating illusions. One can easily be lost in the tangled webs of intertwining tree branches. I want to portray forest without depicting individual trees in their representational forms — it is challenging.”

WU GUANZHONG
「林是氣氛，要表現林之氣氛，
畫面上樹加樹不等於林。
林中多錯覺，前後左右枝杈相混淆，
疏疏密密令人迷途。」

吳冠中

注：一九八零年八月，吳冠中到貴州黔東南苗族侗族自治區的雷公山一帶寫生，為尋覓最理想的原始林，不惜履險探山，險象橫生，終寫成「貴州原始林」速寫稿，寫生過程之艱巨，毋乃畫家歎謂「這輩子最後一次冒險了」！

本幅寫於一九八八年，寫於巨幅六呎整紙，應為唯一按上稿完整構圖衍發之彩墨作品，由寫生至成畫，過程竟達八年之久！畫家盡取六呎巨幅之空間，寫藤蔓交纏，枝椏交錯，喬木幢幢，密林撲面，遮天蔽日，直如一片混沌未開的原始狀態。畫家嘗謂「要表現林之氣氛，畫面上樹加樹不等於林」，故如何移植原始森林渾然天成的層次至畫面，乃至關重要。畫家以墨為主要媒介，借積疊之深淺表現野林深邃，前景以墨綫帶出枝藤交錯，蜿蜒起伏，昂揚的粗枝與纏綿的纖線縱橫穿插，竭力捕捉森林不經雕琢的粗獷美，因用色最黑，尤為顯眼。後景樹影森森，輪廊虛見，前後層疊，或郁黑，或微明，樹隙透光，營造密林深遠，此亦畫家移植速寫稿至彩墨本時，加強畫面層次的處理手法。

畫中點、綫，或流動、或跳躍，展示植物纏綿糾葛的運動軌跡，捕捉密林的抽象形象，實乃畫家無數藤、樹寫生經驗之總匯，可謂此題材邁入抽象領域之見證，同期足堪比肩者，即有〈漢柏〉及〈孔林〉等代表作，兩者皆於八、九十年代重覆寫之，橫幅巨構之〈原始林〉則似僅見此本，日後轉化為〈叢林〉、〈蘇醒〉等純乎抽象之作，則各異其趣了。

一九九三年，吳冠中獲摯友朱德群引薦，於巴黎塞紐奇藝術館辦個人展覽，乃該館繼張大千、林風眠、吳作人後，舉辦的第四位中國畫家個展。吳冠中學藝於巴黎，以創作不能脫離故鄉土壤，遂於學成後毅然回國，數十年來苦心追求融匯東方藝術的創作手法，故抵達巴黎之地展出作品，皆為原汁原味的本色，「四十年後回到巴黎，巴黎的觀眾是否認出其中的血緣呢？」為此，畫家精選六十一幅題材多樣之作品參展，大部份從未展出，少數更首度發表，本幅即屬其一。

根據畫家家屬憶述，吳冠中為答謝朱德群鼎力襄助，特意請他從展品中選取作品留念，朱德群慧眼所選，即本幅〈原始林〉。二人雖隔閡數十年，審美意趣仍契合，朱德群作品縱面貌抽象，其情調、筆墨，皆流露中國傳統筆韻墨趣，與吳冠中之藝術探求可謂殊途同歸，今二人皆成獨當一面的藝術家，以他對摯友藝事與性情了解之深，選取本幅誌念，則此作堪稱吳冠中於藝途上東尋西覓成就之最佳總結！

另，塞紐奇藝術館展覽圖錄謂本幅左上方鈐印為「無法」，實為手誤。
"This small garden is abundantly filled with stones of various shapes. If no meanings are embedded in these stones, they would simply be vast chunks of weights. However, each stone does have their distinctive traits. They could be in square or circles, concave or convex, or in forms that resemble lions, tigers, bears, leopards, or human. It is up to our imaginations to broaden our vision."

WU GUANZHONG
One of the four famous gardens of Suzhou, the Lion Grove Garden was built during the Yuan dynasty as part of the Bodhi Orthodox Monastery, and gained fame thanks to the masterpiece painted by Yuan master Ni Zan. Privately owned since the mid-Ming dynasty onward, it underwent a major renovation during the Republican period, giving the garden its current appearance.

In spring 1980, Wu took his students of the Central Academy of Fine Arts on a sketching trip in Suzhou, during which he made a series of sketches of the various gardens, such as the Humble Administrator’s Garden and the Lingering Garden. The Lion Grove Garden was created based on a sketch during this trip. The work features a closeup of the labyrinth of stones, with ancient trees and a pavilion hidden among them. A stone bridge has been squeezed into the lower portion of the work, sparing space to showcase the abstract beauty of the stones. The lines writhe and wander across the paper, forming circuitous curves and abrupt turns in various intensity. Resembling abstract sculpture, dots and blocks of colour in various saturation scatter across the painting to exude a buoyant dynamism and show the colours of rippling water streaming through stones of varying depth when illuminated by sunlight.

Wu used mere dots and lines to capture the formal beauty of the stones, which was one of the early representations of the Lion Grove Garden in his oeuvre. Later, he would repaint this subject, adding halls, pavilions, fish, and duckweed, strengthening the relationships between the image and subject, which demonstrates the artist’s endless exploration for artistic representations.

Reference:
- Sketch of the Lion Grove Garden, Illustrated in The Selected Sketches of Wu Guanzhong, Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 1983, p.23
- The Lion Grove Garden, 1987, 83.3 x 152.2 cm, sold at Sotheby’s Hong Kong, Fine Chinese Paintings, April 2011, Lot 371.

Illustrated:
- Artists, issue No. 30, Artists Publishing House, Hong Kong, February 1983, p.6
- Travelsogue of a Painter - Wu Guanzhong, Shanghai Literature and Arts Publishing House, October 1984, p.74
- Wu Guanzhong Huaji, Tianjin People’s Fine Arts Publishing House, January 1985, pl.26
- Selected Works of Wu Guanzhong, Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House and Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1990, p.102

The Lion Grove Garden was illustrated in many publications.

Additional Reference:
- The Lion Grove Garden, 1987, 83.3 x 152.2 cm, sold at Sotheby’s Hong Kong, Fine Chinese Paintings, April 2011, Lot 371.
Since the early 1980s, Wu Guanzhong had always portrayed lotus ponds with interlocking dry stems and withered lotus leaves to create an ambience of winter bleakness. The present work, painted in 1989, was executed with a contrastive composition. The lotus leaves, some plump in green and yellow, while others show reddish brown, appear to depict the lotus pond in the days during the transition of late summer to early autumn. Although the plants would at such a time gradually wilt and dry, the artist tactfully portrayed a moment of seasonal change, when the pond was filled with both fresh and dried leaves, mixing both warm and cool colour palettes. Lines were used to depict the fresh leaves, while patches of brown abstractly represented the withered ones. The artist added red fish frolicking in the water, creating a dynamic still-life imagery.

In the spring of 1989, Wu travelled to Paris on a commissioned sketching trip and spent much time with Chu Teh-Chun. The two artists, accompanied by their wives, went for a short trip to visit Claude Monet’s garden in Giverny, a place Wu had longed to visit since his youth. Enthralled by the fascinating beauty of the lily pond, he later commented, “Monet was drawn to the flowers, the grasses, the duckweed, the daylight, the shimmering water, and the landscape, all in equal measure. He painted water lilies, but they are not necessarily the focal point; he could not feel the philosophical undertone of the flowers.” Perhaps inspired by this trip, Wu took on a more harmonious representation in Lotus Pond, moving toward a style more akin to the traditional Chinese aesthetic preference. He added a four-line verse, with the first line “A pond stretches out like a crystal-clear mirror” referencing a poem by Song dynasty scholar Zhu Xi. The complementary manner of poem and painting imbues the work with a grace often found in classical Chinese paintings.

Reference: