





ZHANG HE

Opposite
With the Wind II, oil on canvas, 48 × 36 in

Front Cover
Bouquet, oil on canvas, 60 × 72 in

**ODON
WAGNER**
CONTEMPORARY

198 Davenport Road, Toronto, Ontario M5R 1J2
416.962.0438 or 800.551.2465
info@odonwagnergallery.com
odonwagnergallery.com

ART DEALERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION DES MARCHANDS D'ART DU CANADA

THE SECRET LIFE OF ENERGY: NEW WORKS BY ZHANG HE

By Donald Brackett

"Wonder is not only our starting point; it can also be our destination."

Sharman Russell

Energy. The source of all things, material and immaterial. If energy (chi) has a signature, it could resemble the abstract calligraphic dance of paint in the hands of He. If the creative principle or force behind nature were potentially an algorithm, a program for infusing the formless with structure, then its designer's autograph might resemble the vibrant paths of these bold images. Both "Rejoicing" and "Becoming", which might be different words for the same phenomenon, seem to be signed by a free form force of nature.

At the abstract or atomic level, energy is a trickster, what indigenous peoples call a shapeshifter: one second it's a leaf, the next minute it's a tree, the next century it's a mountain. He's paintings feel like a portrait of the trickster in action, and they give what used to be called action painting a new lease on life, a secret life. There is an atomic ambiguity at work here, and whether they metaphorically depict trees, flowers, tidal waves or volcanic eruptions, as "Abundance", "Bouquet", "Between Waves" or "Fireworks" all seem to do, they each share the element of exploding into an eternity of colour.

Consider for a moment the rich potential of two surreal sciences: erotic botany, or the intimate study of the porno-blossom; and crypto-botany, or the exploration of mythical and non-existent plants. Now imagine paintings that appear to depict the secret inner life of flowers and to quietly steal into their leafy bedrooms during their silent romantic romping. Now look at the vividly riotous yet somehow elegantly sedate paintings of Zhang He. You get the picture, literally and figuratively. They possess an abstract eroticism.

To properly witness his ecstatically embracing flower shapes in their clustering clouds of damp colour is to almost blush at having interrupted a private rendezvous between roots, soil and sunlight. You can almost feel his brushstroke petals breathy quivering. "Abundance", "Fruition" and "Peaks" for example, all give us an organic snapshot of energetic growth occurring before our eyes, or even inside our eyes.

Even though Zhang He is of Chinese ancestry (in fact he's also the namesake of a legendary second century general) and ikebana is of Japanese ancestry (the ancient art of meditative flower arrangement) the parallel between this painter and the deep contemplation of petals in space strikes me as a profound one. "State of Becoming" is perhaps the ideal title for this whole suite of encounters with brief infinities of experience, while "With the Wind I" and its companion piece suggest that we can see our evolving mind actually being transmitted through liquid time in paint.

His depictions are, of course, not literal in the manner of conventional still lifes, and as abstract images they remind us that even abstraction has to be derived from something; in this case, from nature and its organic program for initiating the endless dance of forms. Even if their pictorial theme is not flowers per se, they nevertheless invite us into a site of stillness, one that unearths something unnamable, maybe even unknowable. In "Touch I" and "Touch II", forms without identities jostle with each other for domination of the void. But this void is not empty, it's the exact opposite of empty in fact.

This void is so full it can barely contain itself. So it doesn't.

These paintings quietly approach their seemingly floral forms and eventually get so close up that we can begin to actually hear the grinding mechanism of photosynthesis as it goes about its arcane business of converting light from the sun into chemical energy that later can be released to fuel the organism's activities. Like us, and every other living thing perhaps, the main activity depicted is that of energy transformation, and thus each of his pictures seems to provide a kind of sedimentation of the mind of its maker. After all, what better definition for paint could there ever be than that of chemical energy? And here we can witness the secret life of energy.

Just as ikebana is contrary to the idea of floral arrangement as an assortment of blooms and instead emphasizes shape, line and form, created in a kind of meditative silence, these paintings also occupy a realm where silence is essential. But that doesn't mean they're actually quiet, again they're quite the opposite in fact, since they scream at the top of their pigment: look at this quickly, before it disappears from view forever. As one title even hints for us, the works are in "Full Reach", as in fully blooming in space, and they continue to reach out until they eventually cease to be at all.

For me, the ideal way to view these poetic and fertile ruminations on almost pregnant plant forms is to start with the ones that appear to be contained in vases, however rudimentary their structural suggestion, and then move on towards the ones which eschew the container in favour of overall florid surfaces and undifferentiated subject matter. Are there really any flowers here at all, or are we just witnessing the wind colliding with light and colour and exploding like the juice of dreams across our retinas? The answer, as always, is yes to both. That awesome answer is equally embedded in the quaternity of "Every Breaking Wave" for instance, and it is largely about intervals, the intermediate, the interstitial, and the in-between zones of our lives as lived. This is phenomenology writ large.

Meanwhile, the marvelous miniature world that these paintings seem to evoke for me, that of ikebana, the literal meaning of which is "keeping living alive, arranging by giving life" is also accompanied by another sensory experience which at first glance may appear oddly unrelated: Jazz. I can't help feeling that the sensations of formal colour being arranged in these "pictures of being" are closely aligned with some of the free form jazz compositions of contemporary musicians such as Ornette Coleman or Sun Ra. Sound is referenced often here, as in "Between Symphonies", "In Melody" and "Inner Quiet", but this is a quiet so loud it is almost deafening.

This musical analogy is also not meant in any literal or programmatic way, as in trying to tell a story through images or sounds (they are quite beyond mere narrative impulses) it's only that the everywhere-at-once imagery of He's furiously beautiful images re-unmind me of that often breathtaking nowness embedded in Ornette's music. Once again, paintings can reveal themselves to be a mysterious form of frozen music: one which we listen to with our eyes, and of course, with our hearts.

What are they saying? Among other things, they're saying Yes! But more importantly than saying, they're showing something to us: that energy is always in a state of flux, that material things are an illusory reflection of an immaterial dimension. That, in the end, is the secret meaning of their Yes.



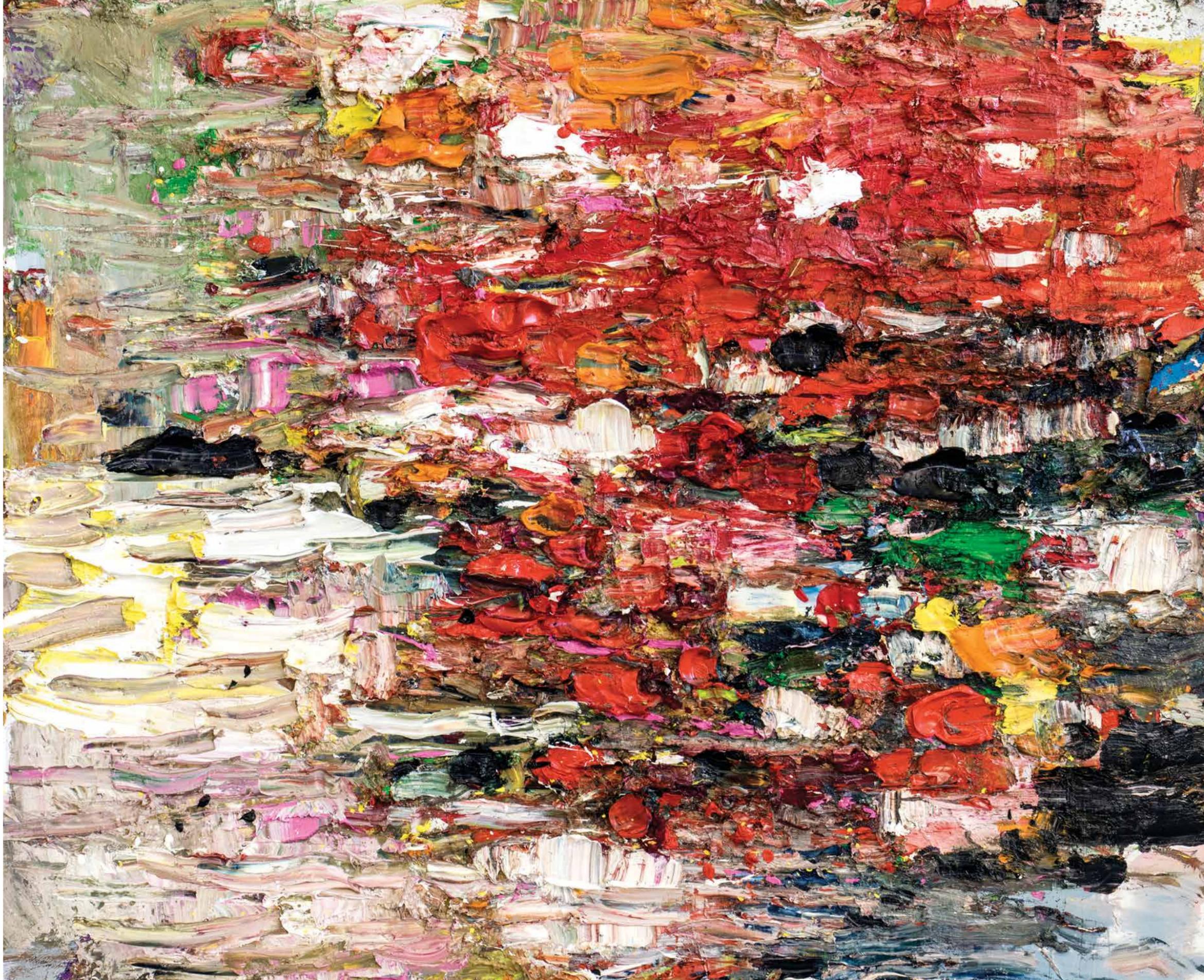
Abundance, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in



Fruition, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in

Dropping You Off in Sunshine, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 in





Rejoicing,
oil on canvas, 60 × 72 in



Touch II, oil on canvas, 30 × 24 in



Touch I, oil on canvas, 30 × 24 in



Fireworks, oil on canvas, 60 × 42 in



Inner Quiet, oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in

State of Becoming, oil on canvas, 48 × 48 in



Every Breaking Wave, oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in





In Full Reach, oil on canvas, 70 × 62 in

ZHANG HE

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

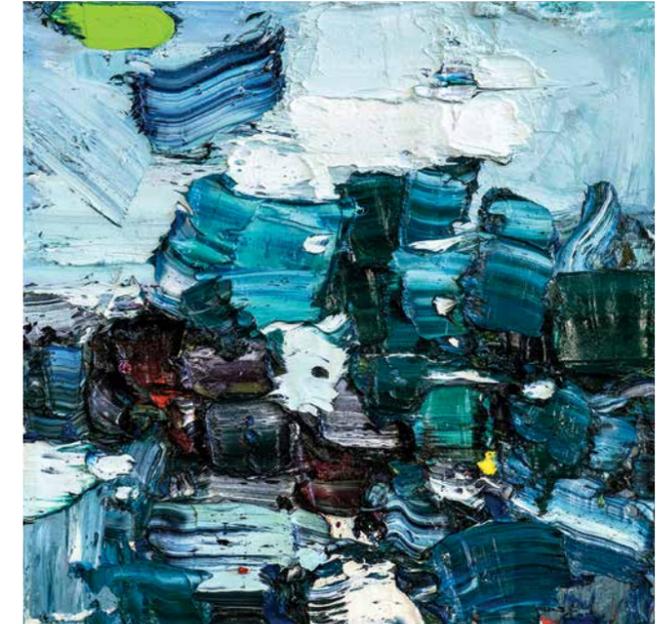
- 2016 Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2013 Chun, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2011 Gallery DeNovo, Ketchum, Idaho, USA
- 2010 John Scotti Jaguar- Land Rover: New model exhibition 2011, Montreal, QC
Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2009 Artbank Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2008 LuXun Art Institute, Shenyang, China
Galerie D'este, Montreal, QC
- 2007 Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2007 Galerie Pangée, Montreal, QC
- 2003 HAN ART, Montreal, QC
- 2002 Gallery DeNovo, Ketchum, ID
- 2002 Galerie au Fond de la Cour, Paris, France
- 1999 Musée du Québec, Québec, QC
- 1991 Galerie Jordan, Montréal, QC
- 1991 Loranger Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 1990 Chinese Canadian Art Gallery, Toronto, ON

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2004-15 Art Toronto, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2015 Z Art Space, Montreal, QC
- 2011 LuminArte Gallery, Dallas, TX
Chinese Artist Contemporary Arts Exhibition-I
Thailand National Gallery
International Art Meeting-Collective Art Show,
Florence, Italy
- 2010 International Biennale Artist MIAMI,
Nina Torres Fine Art Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2009 Biennale Internazionale dell'Arte
Contemporanea, Florence, Italy
Continuum: Abstraction from Canada,
Sunshine Art Museum, Songzhuang,
Beijing, China
Art Westmount, Montreal, QC
- 2008 Shanghai High Noon Art & Culture Centre,
Shanghai, China
- 2007 Group Show, Galerie d'Este, Montréal, QC
- 2006 Textures, Elliott Louis Gallery, Vancouver, BC
- 2004 Abstractions of Spring, Gallery DeNovo,
Ketchum, ID, USA
- 2002 Entitlement, Association of Contemporary
Chinese Canadian Artists, Toronto, ON
- 1995-97 China Culture and Art Now Embassies,
Cultural Houses
- 1992 China Culture and Art "National Art Exhibition"
Shanghai, China
- 1989 China Culture and Art "National Oil Painting
Exhibition" Beijing, China
- 1987 China Culture and Art "National Youth Art
Exhibition" Donbei, China
- 1987-95 China Culture and Art various expos in Japan,
Korea, Taiwan, and China

NOTABLE COLLECTIONS

- Aldo Group, Montreal, QC
- Association du Nouveau Monde, Hong Kong
- Barometer Capital Management, Toronto, ON
- Bertrand Deslauriers, Montréal, QC
- Cormark Securities, Toronto, ON
- Elements, Toronto, ON
- Grant & Sadvari, Toronto, ON
- Graphic Design Studio Paul Tom Inc., Montreal, QC
- Hot & Spicy International, Montréal, QC &
Toronto, ON & Singapore, China
- Howard Szalavetz Properties, Montreal, QC
- HUI Architecte, Montréal, QC
- IACO International Aviation Corp., Montréal, QC
- L'Équipe Uomo, Montréal, QC
- Lise Watier International, Montréal, QC & Paris, FR
- Ludwig Post Gmbh, Germany
- Monit International, Montréal, QC & Miami, FL
- Musee des Beaux-Arts de Montreal, QC
- Pfiffner Management, Montréal, QC &
Zurich, Switzerland
- Proment Corporation, Montréal, QC
- Studio Versatile Ltée, Montréal, QC
- Swatow Group, Montréal, QC
- Ta Yu Association Seoul, South Korea



Above
Warm Skies, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in

Back Cover
Blue Symphonies, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in

CREDITS

Curatorial: Odon Wagner, Rafael Wagner, Tenya Mastoras
Layout: Tenya Mastoras
Introduction: Donald Brackett, Vancouver-based
art critic and curator
Design: Mike Zikovitz, Freewheel Design
Printing: Solisco Quebec

For all works in exhibition, please visit odonwagnergallery.com
198 Davenport Road, Toronto Ontario M5R 1J2 Canada
416-962-0438 or 800-551-2465 | info@odonwagnergallery.com

ISBN: 978-1-927447-22-2 National Library of Canada "Zhang He"
© Odon Wagner Gallery, 2016



**ODON
WAGNER**
CONTEMPORARY