



**DEJI ART MUSEUM**  
**德基艺术博物馆**

**The Deji Art Museum Presents**

**“Nothing Still About Still Lifes: Three Centuries of Floral Compositions”**

**the Inaugural Edition of the "World of Flowers" Exhibition Series**

**From the Museum's Modern and Contemporary Art Collection**

**Nanjing, China, August 8, 2023**—The Deji Art Museum is pleased to announce the opening of “Nothing Still About Still Lifes: Three Centuries of Floral Compositions,” the inaugural edition of the “World of Flowers” exhibition series from the Deji Art Museum’s modern and contemporary art collection. Focusing upon the progression of global modern and contemporary art from the second half of the 19th century to today, this exhibition shows over one hundred works with floral compositions by nearly one hundred Chinese and Western masters starting with Impressionism, challenging traditional views on floral still lifes with a fresh transcultural and transdisciplinary perspective. Drawing upon nearly three hundred years of Chinese and Western history, the exhibition aims to contextualize changes in artistic style within the narratives of flower species circulation through global trade. Thus, this exhibition anchors the artistic production of still lifes within the greater landscape of political, economic, scientific, technological and cultural development that has nurtured rich dialogues between China and the Western world over the centuries. Through the dialectical relationship between “stillness” and “movement,” the exhibition looks back upon the special significance of floral still lifes in Chinese and Western art history, exploring the vital force within these works that inspires our perception and imagination today.

The “World of Flowers” collection of modern and contemporary artworks from the Deji Art Museum has been established over ten years of systematic acquisition, with modern and contemporary Chinese and international floral still life works forming the main body of the collection. “Nothing Still About Still Lifes: Three Centuries of Floral Compositions” is the first exhibition curated from the “World of Flowers” by Dr. Joachim Pissarro, Professor Emeritus at Hunter College of the City University of New York and former curator at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. Exhibited artists include Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, Piet Mondrian, Giorgio Morandi, René Magritte, Georgia O’Keeffe and other milestone figures of Western art, members of the first and second generations of Chinese artists to study abroad such as Sanyu, Pan Yuliang, Wu Dayu, Wu Guanzhong, Zao Wou-Ki and Chu Teh-Chun, modern art pioneers from other Asian countries such as Lê Phổ, and finally major figures in contemporary art such as Andy Warhol, Yayoi Kusama, David Hockney, Jeff Koons, Yoshitomo Nara, Takashi Murakami and Damien Hirst.



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### Major exhibited works include:

- **Claude Monet, *Fleurs dans un pot (Roses et brouillard)*, 1878**

One of only four still lifes made by Monet in 1878 after having returned to the subject matter (including the *Chrysanthemums* now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris), this work shows Monet's application of Impressionist plein air landscape technique to still life, relying upon unique color and light effects to depict the flowers' dynamic life force. The word play on *brouillard* in the French title, meaning both gypsophilia flowers and fog, allows for a dialogue between this still life painting and the place outdoors where the flowers were first grown.

- **Pablo Picasso, *Vase de fleurs*, 1901**

A rare early still life work from a crucial moment in Picasso's artistic development, *Vase de fleurs* was painted in the same year as his first solo exhibition in Paris, and was included in his 1932 major retrospective exhibitions in Paris and Zurich. This work reflects the influence of post-impressionism and other artistic styles upon his work, with the background's blue tones foreshadowing the artist's famous "Blue Period."

- **Piet Mondrian, *Chrysanthemum*, 1909**

As pioneer of the school of geometric abstract painting, Mondrian painted a great number of single floral still lifes at different stages of his career, surpassing his abstract geometric works in number. Through intensive observation and depiction of flowers, Mondrian devoted himself to the exploration of the structure, color and spirituality of nature while gradually abandoning a naturalistic style and developing his own pure abstract form. Chrysanthemums are amongst the flower varieties that Mondrian most loved to depict. This *Chrysanthemum* from 1909 is close in form and year of creation to the New York Guggenheim Museum's *Chrysanthemum* (1908-09), with the latter most likely being a drawing study for the 1909 *Chrysanthemum* shown in this exhibition.

- **René Magritte, *La naissance des fleurs*, 1929**

As an important member of the surrealist movement, Magritte had a talent for creating multiple associations and significations through unexpected juxtapositions. *La naissance des fleurs*, one of the Magritte's few works whose title is written on the painting, was a gift from the artist to Dalí's sister. Magritte both combines and exchanges this floral still life motif with two of his other frequent visual signatures—wood grain and the sky, subverting and reflecting upon the traditional relationship between images and their meaning, with an aesthetic impact on the viewer that goes beyond experience.



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- **Pan Yuliang, *Bouquet de chrysanthèmes roses*, 1944**

Pan Yuliang belonged to the first generation of female Chinese artists to study abroad. She was determined to bring Western painting and Chinese tradition together, creating a unique personal style and lauded by contemporaries as “first-rate amongst Chinese artists painting in Western technique.” *Bouquet de chrysanthèmes roses* is a work dating from Pan Yuliang’s return to Paris during China’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the brutal Nazi occupation of Paris in which the artist used the chrysanthemum’s elegant nobleness as a symbol to express a spirit of unwavering fearlessness. The chrysanthemum in the painting is uprooted all while remaining full of splendor, embodying the artist’s fearlessness, far from home yet staying strong in face of difficulties, while belying her deep affection and concern for her family and the homeland.

- **Wu Dayu, *Flower in Vase*, 1950s**

Wu Dayu belonged to the first generation of Chinese artists to study abroad in France, and was one of the founders of modern Chinese painting, known as the “father of Chinese abstract art.” Wu Dayu combined schools of modern Western painting with traditional Chinese painting styles, and still lifes depicting flowers in a vase were a recurring subject matter throughout his entire life and serve as a major leitmotiv reflecting evolutions in his artistic style. The brushstrokes in *Flower in Vase* are both pure and expressive, blurring the border between realism and abstraction, and this work bears important witness both to the artist’s stylistic shift to abstraction in the 1950s as well as to the nascent stage of modern Chinese abstract art.

- **Zao Wou-ki, *The Lillies*, early 1950s**

This work by Zao Wou-Ki, a member of the second generation of Chinese artists to study in France, is an important example of evolution in his style. During a 1951 voyage to Switzerland, Zao Wou-Ki was inspired by Paul Klee’s work and took distance from his pre-1950 style tending towards Expressionism, thereby entering his “Klee period.” In this period of Zao Wou-Ki’s work, paintings with flower subject matter are extremely rare. *The Lillies*, all while carrying on the traditional Chinese use of lines, reflect even more his continuation and revival of traditional Chinese bird and flower motifs, and can be considered a work representative both of Zao Wou-Ki’s harmonious blend of Chinese and Western aesthetics and his combination of traditional elements and modernism.

- **Wu Guanzhong, *Lilac*, 1991**

Wu Guanzhong was an artist from the second generation of Chinese to study in France, devoting himself throughout his entire life to exploring both oil painting with Chinese characteristics and the modernization of ink painting. *Lilac*, a work from the pinnacle of Wu Guanzhong’s career, dates from the year he was made officer of the French Ministry of Culture’s *Ordre des Arts et Lettres*. Wu Guanzhong made very few floral still lifes in his life. In 1991, he had stopped painting due to immense sorrow at his wife’s hospitalization for cerebral thrombosis, but Wu Guanzhong’s creative desire was rekindled once he saw his wife’s early painting studies of lilac flowers. Lilac flowers represent sorrow, first love and romance, and the artist expresses forty-five years of deep feelings between husband and wife through this painting.



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- **Jeff Koons, *Wall Relief with Bird*, 1991**

Flowers, as an image and a medium, are a major leitmotiv in Jeff Koons' work. A work that is part of his "Made in Heaven" series and influenced by the rich artistic traditions rooted in the Baroque, Rococo and Romantic periods, *Wall Relief with Bird* was realized by German and Italian artisans with traditional polychromed carving technique. With this brightly colored and captivated flower sculpture, Koons depicts the natural world as an idealized paradise, celebrating abundance of love, life and eternity while foreshadowing the artist's subsequent classic works using real flowers as medium, including *Puppy* (1992).

- **Yayoi Kusama, *Flower*, 2008**

Flowers are one of Yayoi Kusama's most beloved images, stemming from her childhood visions of flowers talking to her and tablecloth flower patterns coming to life, multiplying, and engulfing her. These visions showed up through Yayoi Kusama's distinctive spots and net structures in her paintings as early as when she was ten years old, gradually making her able to transform this indomitable and powerful force into inspiration that was reflected in an immersive and strange world. In her 2008 work *Flower*, flower images have been severed by a net structure into fine fragments, yet are still fully present. Dots are scattered like cells, transmitting the mysterious power of life and nature while possessing the melancholic beauty of ephemeral blooming.

The Deji Art Museum carries on the deeply-rooted tradition of Nanjing as a city where different civilizations exchange and interact with each other, and where different visions on nature and cosmology form and transform, placing importance on the dialogue consciousness within still life works connecting China, Asia and the rest of the world. This exhibition examines the complex relationship between floral still lifes, specific historical contexts and Zeitgeist within the past three hundred years of cultural dialogue between China and the world, revealing the important journey of flowers and floral-themed art as a means of exchange surpassing time, space and cultural boundaries between China and the West. The exhibition also explores the limitless vitality within artworks, bringing new light upon pressing issues facing humanity today such as global dynamics, the ecological crisis and the relationship between technology and civilization.

Ai Lin, director of the Deji Art Museum, stated: "We are very pleased to present the first exhibition in the "World of Flowers" series from the museum's modern and contemporary art collection, sharing the fruits of the Deji Art Museum's systematic collection and research activities over the past years. We hope to enrich and expand upon traditional art history narratives with plural and contemporary perspectives, giving the public an all-new art experience and cultural knowledge. We aim to continue our core mission of 'bridging art across cultures and time,' unceasingly sharing our collection's richness with the public through this series of exhibitions."



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Curator Dr. Joachim Pissarro stated: “I am delighted to be able to present this exhibition in collaboration with the Deji Art Museum. The Deji Art Museum is to my knowledge the only institution to have placed such a focus on the specific theme of “flowers,” and a museum that creates such resonance with a theme is unique in the world as an institution. It offers an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine the genre, uncovering still life’s hidden vitality and eternal dynamic. In this exhibition, we challenge the traditional way of understanding and presenting floral still lifes. With an accessible yet profound approach, this exhibition brings the audience inside the history of floral still lifes, tracing the changing objective and subjective representations of flowers within our inner perception.”

At the same time, the Deji Art Museum invites scholars of different disciplines from inside and outside China to pursue specialized research in connection with the collection of “World of Flowers” from the Deji Art Museum’s modern and contemporary art collection, exploring the transformative power to connect, inspire, and uplift shared between flowers and art through publications, interdisciplinary academic forums and public educational programming.



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### About the Deji Art Museum

Founded in 2017, the Deji Art Museum is a private art museum approved by the Jiangsu Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau. Located in Deji Plaza on the central cultural axis of Nanjing, one of China's "Four Great Ancient Capitals" and a major metropolis in Eastern China, the Deji Art Museum is committed to building a comprehensive art institution and cultural platform that bridges art across cultures and time, embracing art's transformative power to connect, inspire, and uplift. With its global vision, contemporary perspective, and regional cultural reflection, the Deji Art Museum is dedicated to catalyzing exchange and connections between China, Asia and the entire world, presenting its rich and pluralistic research and exhibition program to the public with openness and creativity. With a collection of over ten thousand artworks including ancient Chinese art and both Chinese and international modern and contemporary art, the Deji Art Museum is home to a uniquely local vision of art conservation reflecting Nanjing's great cultural heritage.

### About Joachim Pissarro

#### Curator, "Nothing Still About Still Lives: Three Centuries of Floral Compositions"

Joachim Pissarro (b. 1959) is an art historian, theoretician and curator. He has taught at Yale University, Osaka University and Sydney University, before becoming the Bershad Professor of Art History at the Hunter College of the City University of New York. He has held curatorial positions at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven and the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In 2013, Pissarro joined Terry Riley and John Keenen to create the company PARALLEL which focuses on a symbiotic alliance of architectural and curatorial practices. His latest book *Aesthetics of the Margins / The Margins of Aesthetics*, Penn State University (with David Carrier), follows *Wild Art*, Phaidon, 2013. His more recent exhibitions include: *Crystals in Art: Ancient to Today* in 2019, *Pissarro à Eragny* at the Musée du Luxembourg in 2017. He co-curated with Bernard Picasso *Olga Picasso* – an exhibition that traveled from the Musée Picasso in Paris to the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, and the Picasso Museum in Málaga. In September 2021, Pissarro curated the exhibition: *Jeff Koons: SHINE* for Palazzo Strozzi in Florence. In 2021 Pissarro founded the Global Museum Strategies Group, LLC (GMSG) with Philippe de Montebello and Jennifer Stockman, focusing exclusively on museum-related projects.