

## Media Factsheet

### The Hong Kong Jockey Club Presents – *A World Within: The Art and Inspiration of Irene Chou*



#### Introduction

One of the most inventive artists at the forefront of Hong Kong's New Ink Painting Movement, Irene Chou (Zhou Lüyun; 1924-2011) had a dynamic career spanning from the 1950s to early 2000s. She expanded the bounds of convention and developed an abstract visual language that reflected her spiritual universe. With over forty works, this exhibition explores the eclectic and visionary world of Irene Chou through her decades of experimentation, introspection and self-discovery. This exhibition is the third instalment in Asia Society Hong Kong Center's 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese Female Artist Series and is made possible by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. It is in-house curated by Joyce Hei-ting Wong, with Dr. Mayching Kao as academic advisor.

#### Highlights:

##### Chamber 1 – Discovering the Meaning of Art

In the 1960s, Irene Chou came across *The Meaning of Art* (1931) by the British critic Herbert Read, which made her realize that “art is expression—nothing more and nothing less.” With this newfound understanding, she expanded from the Lingnan style and started to experiment with diverse materials including mixed media collage, watercolors, acrylics and oils on paper. As she tried to express herself through her painting, her subjects became mostly drawn from her domestic life. She held her first solo exhibition in September 1968 and began to pursue a career as an artist. Highlights in this chamber include ***Untitled (Mantis on Ladies Stocking)*** (1960), ***The Fire*** (1960s), ***The Universe Lies Within I*** (1996) and ***Life is a Many Splendored Thing No.5*** (2006).

##### Chamber 2 – Her World Within

In 1966, Irene Chou met Lui Shou Kwan (1919-1975), the pioneer of the New Ink Painting Movement, who most deeply altered her attitude towards art. Inspired by his teachings, Chou painted many studies of trees and lines in the late 1960s to mid-1970s. It was in her line paintings that she developed her most significant motif—the sphere. The late 1970s for Chou was a period of personal tragedies with her diagnosis of cerebellum atrophy, the passing of Lui in 1975 and the death of her husband in 1978. She painted many “dark paintings” featuring the sphere that reflect solemn introspection and her own unique artistic voice. Highlights in this chamber include ***Remembering Mr. Lui*** (1970s), ***Concentration*** (1973) and ***My Inner World I*** (1976).

##### Chamber 3 – Duality and Balance

After the passing of her husband, Irene Chou began to live on her own and turned her apartment into a studio. For the first time, she could indulge in painting and focus on self-cultivation. Her reading of Chinese philosophy since the 1960s took a deeper effect. Notably, Laozi's *Dao De Jing*, made her embrace the idea that the universe is governed by complementary opposites of *yin* and *yang*. The balance of duality became her creative force. She believed that only when one achieves spiritual harmony, can one produce true art that reflects the genuine self. Highlights in this chamber include ***Heartbeat*** (1980), ***The Universe VI*** (1997) and ***As You Like It*** (1999).

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#### Chamber 4 – A World in Motion

In the 1980s, Irene Chou discovered the writings by Southern Song philosopher Lu Jiuyuan (1139-1192). Lu's famous saying, "The universe is my mind; my mind is the universe," greatly enlightened her and she turned to the themes of creation, infinity and the cosmos to explore and express her inner self. This new direction was halted when she suffered a stroke in 1991. The accident almost ended her career, but she managed to regain mobility through a diligent practice of *qigong*. Chou continued to paint large-scale universe paintings well into the 2000s, and these became her most distinctive works that synthesize all the hallmarks of her style. Highlights in this chamber include *Genesis* (1980s), *Vortex* (1991) and *Purple Universe* (1996).

**Annex** – The paintings in the annex are extensions of each thematic chamber.

#### About the Artist:

Born and raised in Shanghai during the tumultuous years of the Second Sino-Japanese War and Chinese Civil War, Irene Chou (1924-2011) received bilingual modern education and attended the prestigious Shanghai St. John's University. Chou worked as a journalist for Peace Daily upon graduation and only began practicing art formally in the 1950s after she moved to Hong Kong. She first studied under the Lingnan School master Zhao Shao'ang, before learning ink painting from Lui Shou Kwan in the 1960s. Under the influence of Lui's innovative teaching and friendship, Chou developed a highly original abstract visual language informed by modern themes, Western techniques and art movements as well as her unique outlook on life. The artist suffered a stroke in 1991 that nearly ended her career; however, she was able to recover mobility through her qigong practice. Irene Chou's artistic trajectory is marked by many distinct phases, and her painting was rejuvenated with new life and virtuosity after her stroke and relocation to Australia.

The artist's achievements are recognized by her numerous awards, such as the Pacificulture Asia Museum Fine Art Award in 1972, Hong Kong Urban Council Award in 1983 and Hong Kong Artist of the Year Award in 1988. Chou was also widely exhibited internationally, consecutively included in the London Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition in the 1970s, and was chosen to represent Hong Kong in the First Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art held at the Queensland Art Gallery in 1993.

#### About The Exhibition

##### *The Hong Kong Jockey Club Presents – A World Within: The Art and inspiration of Irene Chou*

September 25, 2019 – January 5, 2020

**Free admission**

#### Venue:

Chantal Miller Gallery,  
Asia Society Hong Kong Center,  
The Hong Kong Jockey Club Former Explosives Magazine,  
9 Justice Drive, Admiralty, Hong Kong

Tuesday – Sunday: 11am – 6pm

Last Thursday of the month: 11am – 8pm

Closed on Mondays, Christmas Day and New Year's Day

Last admission: 30 minutes before closing

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### The Hong Kong Jockey Club Presents – *A World Within: The Art and Inspiration of Irene Chou*

#### Jockey Club Art Education and Female Empowerment Series Highlight Programmes

#### Education program Highlights:

##### **Lecture Series**

A series of public lecture about the life and art of Irene Chou, Hong Kong Ink art, and art in mental wellness.

**Date: September 30, 2019**

**Speaker: Johnson Chang , Leung Kui-Ting , Professor Eva Kit Wah Man , Joyce Hei-ting Wong**

##### **Open Studio Series: Shapes of Lines**

Sunday Open Studio Series invites visitors to be inspired by the exhibition and create their own art work in response to the works. Open Studio will run on four Sundays during the exhibition period, with each workshop dedicated to different themes. Basic art materials will be supplied and educators will be present to provide assistance. Participants are welcome to submit their finished art works to the *Joy of Art: Irene Chou Response Show Art Open-call*.

**Date: November 3, 2019**

##### **Family Fair: HAPPINESS & WELLNESS**

Family Fair: HAPPINESS & WELLNESS, a family fair that using art to rise our awareness of mental wellness. Activities include arts & craft stations, workshops, laughter yoga, and exhibition tour for public to use art to soothe the negative emotions, give voice for yourself, and to find mental wellness and spiritual happiness.

**Date: November 24, 2019**

##### **Art Open-call and Exhibition Joy of Art: Irene Chou Response Show**

To encourage participation in art creation and promote art, all ages of visitors are invited to give in to their imaginations and engage in a dialogue with Irene Chou's work and her world. Winning and selected works will be exhibited in the Asia Society Hong Kong Center's Chantal Miller Gallery.

**Submission period: September 24, 2019 – December 31, 2019**

**Exhibition period: January 19, 2020- February 2, 2020**

For more information on exhibition and other education programs, please visit the Exhibition website at <https://asiasociety.org/hong-kong/exhibitions/hong-kong-jockey-club-presents-world-within-art-and-inspiration-irene-chou>