



**Tang Chang: The Painting that is Painted with Poetry is Profoundly Beautiful**

May 8–August 5, 2018 | Public opening reception: Monday May 7, 2018, 7 pm to 8:30 pm

*First U.S. exhibition of self-trained firebrand who worked on the margins of both the Thai and international art scenes*



The University of Chicago’s Smart Museum of Art presents the first solo exhibition outside of Thailand of work by the self-trained artist Tang Chang (1934–1990, also known as Chang Sae-tang). The exhibition *Tang Chang: The Painting that is Painted with Poetry is Profoundly Beautiful* traces the development of Chang’s singular style of abstraction and his eventual rejection of painting in favor of “poetry-drawings.”

On view from May 8 to August 5, 2018, the exhibition showcases large-scale paintings, works on paper, and poetry-drawings with English translations and explores the connection between painting and poetry in Chang’s artistic practice. The paintings date from between the late 1950s, when Chang stopped using brushes in favor of using his body to make abstract paintings that were at once gestural and calligraphic, and the mid 1970s. During this period, Chang also began to draw poems, repeating words across the page into patterns and shapes. The exhibition is the first full project organized for the Smart Museum by Orianna Cacchione, Curator of Global Contemporary Art.

“Tang Chang’s work has fascinated me since I first encountered it in Shanghai.” said Cacchione. “There’s this tension between the free-form, gestural energy of his paintings and the rigid, repetitive nature of his poetry that provides a really rich ground for this exhibition to explore and offer new insight into Chang’s unique artistic practice, influences, and concerns.”

“This exhibition is a wonderful example of how the Smart Museum aspires to be an engine for expanding narratives and rethinking histories through the lens of art objects and artistic practice,” said

Alison Gass, Dana Feitler Director of the Smart Museum. “As a university museum, we are positioned to add new chapters to the global history of art by investigating and sharing the significant contributions relatively unknown and understudied artists have made.”

*Tang Chang* features over sixty works that demonstrate Chang’s innovations in gesture, form, text, and image across different media. An accompanying brochure features a timeline of Chang’s life and Thai history and an original essay by Cacchione that traces the artist’s relationship with the Thai art scene and examines affinities and divergences between his work and international forms of gestural abstraction and concrete poetry.

The opening of the exhibition and the Museum’s major collection reinstallation *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground* will be celebrated during a public reception on Monday, May 7, from 7 to 8:30 pm. The Smart will present additional free public programs throughout the run of the exhibition, including family days and a painting and poetry collaboration with the Poetry Foundation on May 16 and 23. A complete list of programs is available at <https://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar>.

### **About Tang Chang**

Tang Chang was one of the first abstract painters to work in Thailand. Self-trained, his earliest artworks were commissioned portraits. In the late 1950s, Chang developed a highly gestural form of abstract painting, using his hands and arms to aggressively apply paint to large canvases. In 1968, he self-published his first book of poetry, revealing a new style formed by writing single words over and over again into shapes and forms on the page. Using simple, vernacular language, Chang was credited with creating a new style of Thai poetry. Throughout the 1970s, Chang translated Chinese literature and philosophy into Thai. In 1985, Chang opened a small museum, the Poet Tang Chang’s Institute of Modern Art, in his house just outside of Bangkok and began mentoring young artists. In recent years, Chang’s work has been studied and documented by scholars including David Teh, Mary Pansanga, Clare Veal, and Chanon (Kenji) Praepipatmongkol, and has been included in group exhibitions at Para-Site in Hong Kong, the Shanghai Biennial, and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin.

The exhibition’s subtitle is a line taken from Chang’s journals.

### **Support**

Support for this exhibition has been provided by Gay-Young Cho and Christopher Chiu. Additional support has been provided by the Museum’s SmartPartners.

The exhibition is presented in the Robert and Joan Feitler Gallery and Joel and Carole Bernstein Gallery.

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**Images (left to right)**

Tang Chang, *Untitled*, c. 1963, Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Thip Sae-tang.

Tang Chang, *Untitled*, c. 1975, Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Thip Sae-tang.

**About the Smart Museum of Art**

As the fine arts museum of the University of Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art is home to thought-provoking exhibitions and an exquisite collection of more than 15,000 objects, including modern masterpieces, millennia-old Chinese artworks, rich examples of Renaissance painting, and provocative works of contemporary art. The Museum offers distinctive programs that inspire visitors of all ages to experience the dynamic role of the visual arts in our world. The Smart first opened in 1974.

**Mission**

The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago opens the world through art and ideas.

**Smart Museum of Art**

The University of Chicago  
5550 S. Greenwood Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60637

773.702.0200

smartmuseum.uchicago.edu

[smart-museum@uchicago.edu](mailto:smart-museum@uchicago.edu)

**Hours**

Tuesday–Sunday, 10 am–5 pm

Thursday evenings until 8 pm

Galleries are closed Mondays and holidays.

Admission is always free. All are welcome.