



## **The neglected memory of artist Zhang Daqian in Brazil**

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Over the nearly five decades since his last solo exhibition in Brazil, the Chinese painter, calligrapher and poet Zhang Daqian (1899-1983) was subjected to an involuntary and gradual process of obliteration in the Brazilian art scene, despite its growing popularity on the international scene of the fine arts. The destruction of his iconic Eight Virtues Garden, a Chinese-style site where he lived in Mogi das Cruzes, is one of the best-finished examples of the process of effacement of the artist's memory in Brazil.

Named by painter Xu Beihong (1895-1953) as one of the greatest Chinese painters of the past 500 years, Zhang Daqian has risen in popularity in the art market in recent decades. In 2011 and 2016, the Sichuan painter reached the top of the ranking of the most valued artists in auctions worldwide, ahead of exponents of Western visual arts such as Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol.

During the period in which he lived in Brazil, he exhibited with great repercussion in noble cultural spaces, such as the São Paulo Museum of Art, the São Paulo Biennial, the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo and the National Museum of Fine Arts, in Rio de Janeiro. During this period, the Chinese master was revered and praised by prominent names in the Brazilian cultural environment, such as Assis Chateaubriand (1892-1968), Ciccillo Matarazzo (1898-1977), Quirino da Silva (1897-1981) and Jordão de Oliveira (1900-1980).

Even though he was not an academic in the strict sense of the word, Zhang was recognized by the Brazilian academy for his outstanding work upon receiving the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* from the University of Brazil, currently the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, in 1963. From the Brazilian Academy of Fine-Arts, he won the title of honorary member in 1966. He was also indirectly responsible for the dissemination in Brazil of studies about China at the university and of Chinese-language journalism for immigrants.

Despite living in Brazil between 1954 and 1973, only two museums currently have his works: the Pinacoteca Ruben Berta, from Porto Alegre, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Pernambuco, from Olinda. Both paintings had fallen into obscurity when deposited in the storage area of the respective institutions, being maintained for decades as paintings without known authorship. “Stroll Along the River Enjoying the Plum Blossoms” and “Swiss Landscape” could only be recognized again as the only examples of Zhang's oeuvre in Brazilian museums from investigations undertaken since the 2000s.

The obliteration in Brazilian memory of his contributions to the exchange between Brazil and China largely reflects the phenomenon of Western misunderstanding about the place of Chinese art and culture in the contemporary world in contrast to the ascending protagonism of China in the economic and geopolitical spheres.

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