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SUNDARAM TAGORE HONG KONG PRESENTS SPIRITUAL ART BY SOHAN QADRI AND ZHANG YU

Exhibition dates: February 9 – March 18, 2012

Opening cocktail reception: Thursday, February 9, 7 – 9 pm



Left: Zhang Yu, *Fingerprints-2005.6-2*, 2005, Xuan paper, ink and wash, 37.8 x 47.2 inches
Right: Sohan Qadri, *Homa IV*, 2010, ink and dye on paper, 55 x 39.5 inches

Hong Kong, January 5, 2012 — Sundaram Tagore Hong Kong brings together two artists noted for their deep spirituality for the first time: Chinese artist Zhang Yu, a pioneer of contemporary experimental ink painting, and Indian artist Sohan Qadri, who critic Donald Kuspit calls “...the pre-eminent aesthetic mystic of modernism.” The exhibition includes works from Zhang’s *Fingerprint* series and a number of the last works produced by Qadri, who died in early 2011. All works are on paper, the favorite medium of both artists.

Zhang and Qadri are deeply influenced by Buddhism, and the very act of painting, for both, is part of a meditation. They both create abstract works that are intensely focused on the creative process and the embodiment of their philosophical and spiritual states of being.

Sohan Qadri was a poet, painter and Tantric yogi. His luminous, dye-infused works on heavy paper explore the notion of emptiness or voids. Qadri rhythmically serrated and punctured the surface of paper as part of his meditation practice. Relying on a language of orifices and elongated paths or lines, he abandoned representation in search of transcendence. He was particularly inspired by *Vajrayana* or Tantric Buddhism, which emphasizes the notion of *sunyata* or emptiness. Qadri’s minimalist compositions on paper are symbolic of this empty space or void from which seeds—the punctures—arise. The seeds are primordial symbols representing the self in the universe, the notion of creation, and a sexual union.

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Qadri would bathe paper in acid-free water. Once it was swollen with liquid, he would rhythmically score the surface with various gouging and cutting tools, and then apply inks and dyes. Using a thick intaglio paper, and carving it in stages, he achieved a sculptural effect. Imbued with vibrant hues, the serrated surfaces possess a strong sense of energy and rhythm. In Qadri's hands, the very nature of paper was transformed from a flat, two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional medium.

Sohan Qadri was born in 1932 in Punjab, India. He received his MFA from the Government College of Art in Shimla, India. In 1965, he left India and traveled through East Africa, North America, and Europe. He eventually set up a studio in Zurich before settling in Copenhagen where he lived for 40 years.

Qadri has had numerous exhibitions across the United States, Europe, Asia and Africa. His works are in the collections of the Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts; the Rubin Museum of Art, New York; and the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. His paintings are also in notable private collections, including those of Cirque du Soleil, Heinrich Böll, and Dr. Robert Thurman.

Zhang Yu has been pushing the language of art beyond its boundaries since the beginning of his career. His work developed in accordance with his intention to return to the simplicity and originality of ink painting: In earlier series, such as *Divine Light*, he made use solely of rice paper and ink monochrome. With the *Fingerprint* series, which he's been working on in intervals since the early 1990s, he takes this act of reduction even further by using his finger instead of a painting tool to apply the ink on his scrolls and by limiting his colors to shades of red, white and black. Although different artists over the centuries have used their fingers to paint, this technique was never an orthodox one, and Zhang Yu is paving a way for truly contemporary ink painting.

While creating the *Fingerprint* series, Zhang engages in a meditative process by repeatedly pressing his right index finger on rice paper. He leaves thousands of overlapping fingerprints on the paper, creating a unique visual effect. The fingerprints are transformed from a mark of human identification into universal symbols of beauty and infinity. The artist takes advantage of the plasticity of the rice paper and the exertion of fingerprints to form dents and change the appearance and structure of the paper. The traces that he leaves on the paper resemble bas-reliefs and record the act of painting in an immediate manner.

Zhang Yu was born in 1959 in Tianjin, China. He graduated from the Tianjin Academy of Arts and Crafts in 1988. Since the beginning of the 1980s, Zhang has been a key figure in contemporary experimental ink painting and has contributed to its development by editing, publishing, curating and organizing activities in the field. He is respected both as a painter and as a theorist. Zhang is presently associate professor and dean of the Artistic Design Department at the Tianjin Traffic Vocational College.

Zhang has had numerous exhibitions across the United States, Europe and Asia. His works are in many notable public collections, including those of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark; and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp, Belgium.

The book *Sohan Qadri: The Seer* has just been published by Skira. This 142-page monograph, which includes 80 color images of the artist's work from the 1950s until 2011, is the most complete record to date of Qadri's long and distinguished career. Essays by scholars Partha Mitter, Donald Kuspit, Tushara Bindu Gude, and a foreword by the Royal Ontario Museum curator Deepali Dewan, shed new light on Qadri's influences and his important contribution to contemporary art.

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