Phoenix Art Museum exhibits modern Chinese art that capture the power to heal
Visions of Humanity presents 1960-1980s art of post-Cultural Revolution China, December 15- April 14

PHOENIX (November 1, 2012) – Beginning December 15, 2012, Phoenix Art Museum will present Visions of Humanity: 20th Century Art from the Gerry and Leslie Jones Collection, focusing on the work of post-Cultural Revolution Chinese painters of the 1960-1980s, who survived that turbulent, violent period to later thrive in the creation of new works that pushed the boundaries of art in China and redefined Chinese painting. The Jones collection provides a window into a time of Chinese history when artists working solely for themselves, without hope of an international audience, developed a new artistic language for their homeland, depicting life and culture, as it existed in the world around them.

In the 1960s, the Chinese Cultural Revolution was fueled on the drive of destroying old customs, culture, habits and ideas. Beginning with the destruction of artwork and historical artifacts representing centuries of imperial rule, the mechanism of the Cultural Revolution also destroyed the lives of many people. Visions of Humanity picks up in the 1960s, during the Cultural Revolution’s most turbulent era, but with a larger focus on the period of time following the Revolution, in particular the 1980s, when new governmental policies created an space that would allow painters to flourish, and create a new hope for the people, and ultimately becoming a new generation of artists for new audiences, both domestic and international.

“What is most distinct about the art of this period is not just what it depicts, but whom it depicts,” says Janet Baker, PhD, the curator of Asian Art at Phoenix Art Museum, who organized this exhibition. “The artists of this time developed a new artistic language for their homeland, and that meant depicting ordinary people, something that was highly uncommon prior to 1950. These subjects include workers, soldiers, peasants, children, elderly persons, and marginalized ethnic groups. Differing from the idealized depictions of party propaganda, the shift to these subjects indicates a profound shift in Chinese culture and socioeconomics, as well as a major transformation in Chinese visual art.

Gerry and Leslie Jones, who lived in China throughout the 1980s, have carefully and sensitively built the collection. Through special permission granted by the Ministry of Culture, the Joneses had the rare privilege of visiting the private homes and studios of artists across China, enabling them to building their rare collection of modern Chinese art from the work of artists who had not previously imagined their work would ever be seen outside of their own small circle of friends and family. For Gerry Jones, who first visited China during World War II, this was a life-changing, and life-fulfilling experience. He developed a lasting passion for the beauty and heart of these rare works, and describes it thusly, “Seldom in recent history have a people suffered so much and yet produced such artistic beauty.”

Beyond the Gallery
In addition to a 30 minute film shown in the gallery through the duration of the exhibition, which features an interview with the Jones, who highlight some of their experiences and provides greater historical context, collector Gerry Jones will also lead a gallery talk in Orme Lewis Gallery on January 2, 2013 at 12 pm, highlighting his most treasured pieces in the exhibition. The gallery talk is open to the public and included in the price of admission.

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About Phoenix Art Museum
Phoenix Art Museum has provided access to visual arts and educational programs in Arizona for more than 50 years and is the largest art museum in the Southwestern United States. Critically acclaimed national and international exhibitions are shown alongside the Museum’s permanent collection of more than 17,000 works of American, Asian, European, Latin American, Western American, modern and contemporary art, and fashion design. The Museum also presents festivals, a comprehensive film program, live performances and educational programs designed to enlighten, entertain and stimulate visitors of all ages. Visitors also enjoy vibrant photography exhibitions through the Museum’s landmark partnership with the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona. To learn more about Phoenix Art Museum, visit PhxArt.org, or call the 24-hour recorded information line at (602) 257-1222.

Image Credit: Chen Shihe, Small Lane in Suzhou. Oil on canvas, 50”x 42.” Collection of Gerry and Leslie Jones.