



Fine Asian Works of Art (521)

Wed, 16th May 2018, London

Lot 83

Estimate: £30000 - £50000 + Fees

JIANG ZHAOHE (1904-1986) PORTRAIT OF IVAN TITKOV, 1956

ink on paper, signed 'Zhao He' with one seal of the artist 'Zhao He', dated 1956, with dedication to 'Comrade Ivan Titkov visiting Beijing', framed and glazed

50x40cm (sight)

Provenance:

Gifted by Jiang Zhaohe to the Russian artist Ivan Titkov (1905-1993), thence by direct family descent.

Note:

The painting is accompanied by a note written by Ivan Titkov: 'Jiang Zhaohe - a world renowned artist and the author of many paintings about the struggle for peace, the struggle against the militarists. In 1956, while I was on a business trip with comrade M. Mochalov, I. Sevastyanov and M. Menshikov, Jiang Zhaohe painted my portrait and presented it to me in memory of our friendship. Here it is in front of you.'

Token of Friendship - Jiang Zhaohe's Portrait of Ivan Titkov

With the enormous volume of economic and cultural transfers between China and the West today, it has almost become forgotten that only decades ago, China was all but completely shut to the Western world. Between the founding of the Communist Republic in 1949 and the economic reforms in the late 1970s, China's only contact with the 'West' was with countries of the Eastern Block, in particular the Soviet Union. For Chinese artists, encounter with Russian and Eastern European artists was their only window to the art of the outside world.

Many friendships were forged in the 1950s, when state-organised mutual visits between Chinese and Soviet artists were especially frequent. The friendship between Ivan Titkov (1905-1993), 'People's Artist of Siberia' and Jiang Zhaohe (1904-1986), the 'Chinese Rembrandt', is a good example. When Titkov visited Beijing in 1956, heading a delegation of Novosibirsk artists, and met with Jiang, then a member of the Chinese Artists' Association, they immediately recognised how much they had in common: both came from humble circumstances and turned as young men to art as their calling; both endured the hardships of war which informed their art; both shared in their paintings a deep sympathy for the human condition.

Jiang's portrait of Titkov was completed during this visit. From Jiang's favourite three-quarter angle, it shows an artist at the height of his accomplishment looking determinedly into the distance. Confident, full of entrepreneurial energy, whilst exuding a deep humanity and compassion, the subtleties of this painting show how well Jiang understood his sitter and friend. Almost fifty years later, on Titkov's 100th birthday in 2005, this portrait would occupy a central place in his retrospective in Novosibirsk, reminding people of the great

socialist-humanist artist as seen through the eyes of a Chinese painter.

Jiang Zhaohé is called the father of modern Chinese figure painting for introducing Western pictorial realism, notably three-dimensionality and modelled form, into traditional Chinese brushwork. His paintings, which at a distance look like pencil drawings, are actually carried out in fine washes of ink on Chinese xuan paper, a highly unforgiving medium. Apart from reforming the traditional technique, Jiang is most celebrated for his commitment to recording the suffering of the deprived and oppressed. His masterpiece 'Refugees', portraying men, women and children displaced by the Sino-Japanese war, upset the Japanese occupiers so much that it was confiscated from exhibition twice.

Ivan Titkov's paintings, similar to Jiang Zhaohé's, are characterised by the love for his people and ancestral land, in his case Siberia. In a career that spanned nearly seven decades, he devoted himself to depicting the diverse ethnicities, cultures and landscapes of this vast territory. His works, suffused with poeticism and romanticism, are painted hymns to the land of Siberia. Titkov was also a committed art teacher and initiator of the creation of regional art galleries in Siberia, the reason why he was called 'the patriarch of Siberian culture' by one art critic. Interestingly, after meeting Jiang Zhaohé in Beijing, Titkov would sometimes turn to Chinese subjects, painting actors of Peking Opera and immortals from Chinese legends.

The portrait of Ivan Titkov by Jiang Zhaohé is a token of their friendship. Kept in Titkov's family until now, it will be offered for sale at the present auction.