

UN ART AUTRE

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26 APRIL – 5 JULY 2019

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Joan Mitchell, Patricia Matisse, May Zao, Jean Paul Riopelle, Pierre Matisse, and Zao Wou-Ki at Chez Margot, Golfe-Juan, 1962

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*Art autre* translates as ‘art of another kind’ and was used to describe the dominant trend of abstract art in the middle of the twentieth century characterised by an improvisatory approach and highly gestural technique. The term was coined by the French critic Michel Tapié in his 1952 book *Un art autre*.





# FRIENDSHIP IS A SOLITUDE SPLIT IN TWO

ELIZABETH BUHE

Jean Paul Riopelle arrived in Paris from Canada in 1947 and Zao Wou-Ki from China in 1948; Shirley Jaffe from Washington, D.C., and Al Held from New York in 1949; and Claire Falkenstein and Sam Francis from San Francisco in 1950. Frenchman Pierre Soulages had been painting in the Parisian suburb of Courbevoie since 1946. Though conventional wisdom holds that in the aftermath of the war the capital of the art world shifted from Paris to New York, many artists moved in the opposite direction, finding their way from the Americas to Paris. Some had fought in Europe, while others trained but never saw battle. Francis, Jaffe’s husband, and Held all travelled thanks to the American G.I. Bill, which provided government funds for soldiers to pursue their education, and many did so abroad. While she would not return for extended visits until 1955, Joan Mitchell recalled arriving by Liberty ship at the French port of Le Havre in 1948 to the devastating sight of a coast lined with sunken war boats.<sup>1</sup>

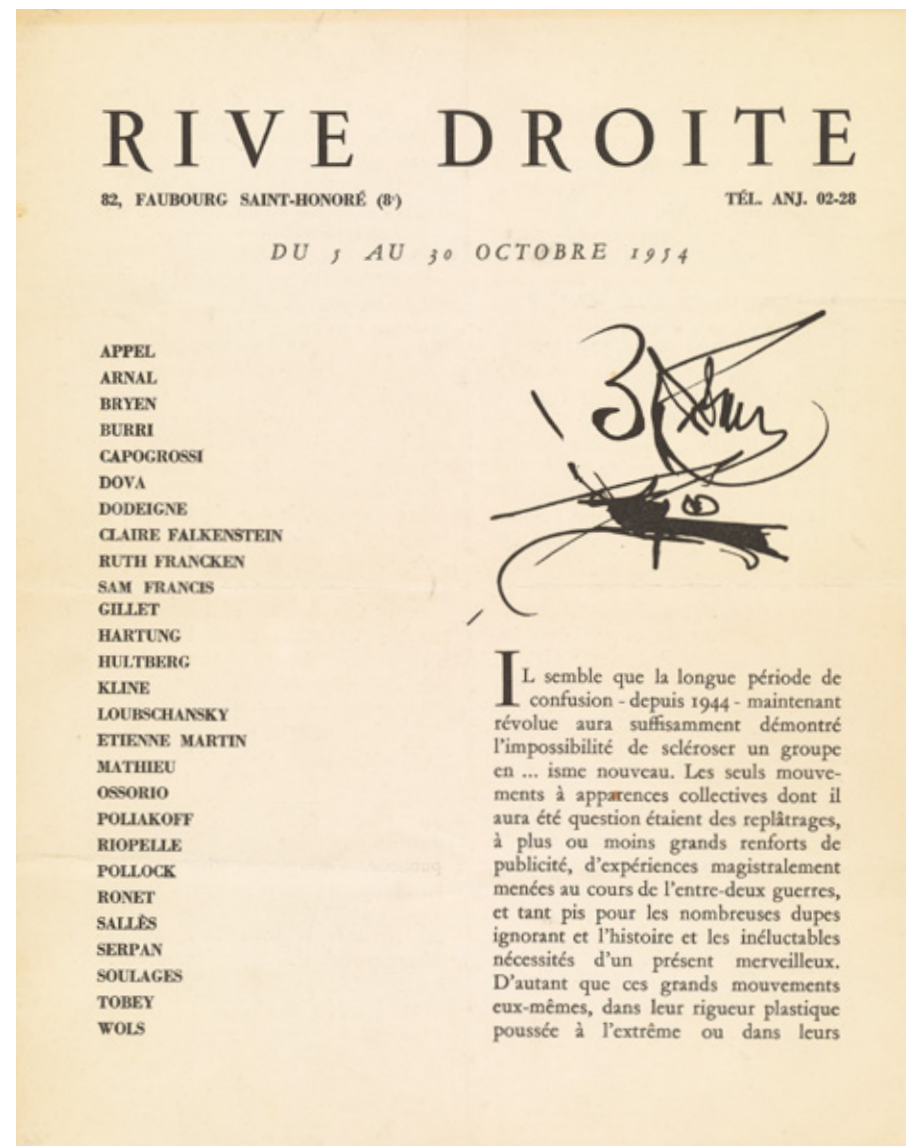
Though their studios were ‘raw and rough’—cold, damp, and, in Francis’s case, lit by a single twenty-five-watt bulb—Paris nevertheless offered a vibrant backdrop for a new kind of artistic production necessarily distanced from whatever they had left behind.<sup>2</sup> However bleak and economically depressed this postwar city may have seemed, for these artists it was a site of possibility. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, Paris was a landscape atop which their friendships wove a shimmering, ever-shifting matrix of connections, each interpersonal alliance extending like a gossamer thread between two nodes.

Stretching through the winding streets of Paris, this spiderweb of artistic partnerships might cohere into something like the abstracted map that appeared in a two-page pamphlet accompanying a 1954 group exhibition in Paris in which Francis, Riopelle, and Soulages all exhibited paintings (fig. 1). In it, gently arcing lines connect names of individual artists plotted across a flat plane. In the upper right quadrant, Hans Hartung, Franz Kline, Soulages, and Riopelle extend along stacked dots and hatches in the contour of an S, while Francis moors its swirling cartography in a boomerang shape at middle. To the left, Jackson Pollock and Otto Wols are connected by a fluid snake of dashes. The map’s coiling curves and oblique intersections seem to mark out the general plan of Paris, with the Seine as fluvial artery and with smaller isle-like landmasses at city centre. But it is difficult to discern much else about its logic, and this seems to be precisely the point.

Indeed, how does one circumscribe, much less map, a friendship? The 1954 exhibition had been organised by critic, collector, and curator Michel Tapié, who in the early 1950s attempted to bring together a diverse group of abstract artists under the rubric of ‘*un art autre*’—‘another art’ defined against prewar traditions of abstraction. Francis and Riopelle were central to Tapié’s endeavour to illustrate a new space in painting, a space that was somewhere between two- and three-dimensional and consisted not of forms as such but was more like a repository for colliding energy forces. This new space was both located within the confines of the painting’s stretcher bars and conceived of geographically, as an internationalist enterprise that







1. Pamphlet for the exhibition *Individualités d'aujourd'hui* at Galerie Rive Droite, Paris, with a text by Michel Tapié, 1954

traced the movement of artists across the Atlantic in an effort to recover Paris's lost prestige as the centre of a cosmopolitan art world.

Tapié saw in Riopelle's work lattices of colour-light, and in Francis's canvases near-emptiness.<sup>3</sup> In a variety of exhibitions—*Véhéquences confrontées* (1951), *Un art autre* (1952), *Opposing Forces* (1953), *Individualités d'aujourd'hui* (1954), *Tendances actuelles* (1955)—Tapié showed a shifting roster of artists that included Francis, Riopelle, Soulages, Pollock, Falkenstein, Ruth Francken, Mark Tobey, Georges Mathieu, Henri Michaux, Jean Dubuffet, and others. Falkenstein, who at this point was producing airy, trellised sculptures of wrapped copper wire, recalled that Tapié was 'like a miner, digging out artists who were expressive of his attitude'.<sup>4</sup> But even for Tapié, whose curatorial efforts plainly necessitated grouping artists under the single banner of his new term, *art autre*, it was difficult to arrive at stable definitions. The ambiguity of the exhibition map and his notoriously prolix essays privilege states of flux over fixity.

For all the key actors it does name, Tapié's map omits just as many. Primary among these were the writers: the poets, critics, and playwrights who shared the artists' painting studios, drank and discussed philosophy and painting together, and wrote about their work. These circles of sociability were fortified by deep bonds of friendship. And, like any, they were subject to personal fragility and the limits of human desire. A core group coalesced around Riopelle and Francis (fig. 2) in the early 1950s, and later around Mitchell and Riopelle. This was after the latter ignited their decades-long relationship once Mitchell began to spend longer periods in Paris from 1955 onward. She eventually elected to stay for good, purchasing property in Vétheuil, a commune northwest of Paris, in 1967. Some of their closest interlocutors were the critic Georges Duthuit, the writer Samuel Beckett, and the poet Frank O'Hara. This essay is about the relationships between these friends. It is also about in-between-ness and interweaving as such: as invisible ties between people, and as useful ways to understand the paintings themselves.

\* \* \*



2. Francis and Riopelle, Paris, 1953





5. Jean Paul Riopelle. *Abstraction (Orange)*. 1952. Oil on canvas, 58½ × 77 inches (97 × 195.5 cm). Museu Coleção Berardo

Mitchell, Riopelle, and Francis hailed from different worlds that merged in 1950s Paris. Mitchell (1925–1992), junior to Riopelle and Francis by three years, found her way to Paris via New York. There, she exhibited regularly at the Stable Gallery and achieved renown among a group of downtown painters in the wake of the gestural abstraction of elders like Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline. Raised on Chicago’s Gold Coast, Mitchell gained a foundation in the arts through museum visits with her father and connections to the Chicago literary scene through her mother, the accomplished poet Marion Strobel. A travelling fellowship won in her final year at the Art Institute of Chicago sent her briefly—though delayed by postwar conditions—to Europe before she settled in New York in 1949. For his part, Francis (1923–1994) had found painting in 1945 as a form of occupational therapy following a sustained bout of tuberculosis while in the American military reserves. Raised in a suburb of San Francisco, he trained with Bay Area artists, though New York loomed large, incarnated in the figures of Clyfford Still and Mark Rothko, who were then teaching at the California School of Fine Arts. Francis began working abstractly in 1947, and in 1950, with a roll of canvases under his arm, he embarked by ocean liner on a journey to Paris, where he remained until 1957. Riopelle (1923–2002) found his path to Paris through Surrealism, almost immediately falling in with André Breton after settling in the French capital in 1947. Back in Montreal in 1948, he was a member of the avant-garde Automatist group, gaining notoriety for signing his mentor Paul-Émile Borduas’s *Refus global* manifesto that same year. Within five years, Riopelle was at the height of his fame.

Riopelle and Francis met in the early 1950s, shortly after Francis’s arrival in Paris. The Canadian artist recalled seeing at the Musée d’art moderne ‘a painting that pleased me... . I looked at the name and I said, “Maybe one day we’ll meet.” A year later I met Sam.’<sup>5</sup> Francis produced his first mature canvases in 1949. Thus the works that Riopelle would have seen were Francis’s monochromatic, luminous veils of cell-like forms with modulated edges that seem to squirm and twinkle like a pulsing mass. Often in dirty whites, pale pinks, or smoky blues that stain the canvases’ thinned ground layers, some early paintings recorded Francis’s gesture in short, bowing brushstrokes. In *Amerika (Grey Blue)* (1952), these swarms of painted marks pressurize into a hovering smog that simultaneously swells in ascent and trickles downward. Riopelle, on the other hand, was producing canvases heavily accreted with paint in vibrant crimsons, canary yellows, fern greens, and glaring whites. Built up with the highly controlled strokes of a loaded palette knife, the canvases are often unified by slender skeins of paint dripped across their chromatically variegated surfaces, as visible in the thin white veining of *Abstraction (Orange)* (1952) (fig. 5). Despite the evident differences in their painting styles, Riopelle and Francis were united by a mutual and lifelong respect.

Each painter brought his own set of acquaintances. Through Francis, Riopelle met the American expatriate crowd that counted Jaffe, Held, Seymour Boardman, Kimber Smith, and Norman Bluhm among its key members. As this list suggests, the artistic makeup of metropolitan Paris was not particularly French. It was instead—numbering in its ranks between four and six hundred Americans—distinctly international. While the American artists mixed easily with French intellectuals, they did not often socialize with French artists. Francis and Tapié were themselves great travellers and would go on to spend much time working alongside artists in Japan. It was in this environment of clinking glasses and pluming cigarettes that Mitchell first met Riopelle. After Mitchell disembarked in Paris in the summer of 1955, Jaffe lured her from the comfort of her hotel to a Saint-Germain-des-Prés café already populated by Riopelle, Francis, and Bluhm. That meeting launched Mitchell’s and Riopelle’s long and oft-turbulent romantic entanglement, which endured until 1979.<sup>6</sup>

For his part, Riopelle introduced Francis to a cohort of Parisian intellectuals who had already become instrumental in promoting his artwork, especially Tapié, Georges Duthuit (fig. 4), and Duthuit’s protégé Pierre Schneider. Duthuit, in particular, offered the young artists a point of access to the established French art world. Son-in-law of Henri Matisse by marriage to his daughter Marguerite, Duthuit was by all accounts a spirited man of letters with a fierce intellect and tireless appetite for art, both intellectually and as a collector. He acquired canvases from some of these painters’ first Parisian exhibitions, including Francis’s inky, weeping *Deepened Black* (1950/51) for his mother-in-law, Amélie Matisse. A specialist in arts of the medieval Mediterranean and Byzantium, Duthuit also studied indigenous masks from the shores of present-day Canada and had spent the war years in New York, where he became a fixture at the Museum of Modern Art. Back in Paris, artists passed through his office doors on the rue de l’Université, located just across the river from the Louvre. As Francis (fig. 5) recalled,

I painted every morning and in the afternoons I would talk with friends at the Café du Dragon on rue Dragon. Georges Duthuit was there, Patrick Waldberg, Samuel Beckett, who invited us one evening to see the first rehearsal of his play *Waiting for Godot*... . France for me was, first of all, that group! This marvellous contact with men and creators. Café culture is a tangible reality that doesn’t exist in the United States, not even in New York. The café is marvellous: you walk in, sit down, talk, you leave, no one asks anything of





4. Riopelle and Georges Duthuit in front of *Pavane* (1954), c. 1954



5. Francis (front) with Georges Duthuit at a Paris café, early 1950s

you but a sign of friendship on coming and going. It is a prodigiously rich intellectual mass without equal. The marvellous memory of that period is that, each day, I was in contact with totally different people like Georges Duthuit, the last dandy of Paris.<sup>7</sup>

We are left to imagine the precise texture of these intellectual exchanges. No doubt they discussed the transatlantic comings and goings of fellow painters, the borrowing and renting of studios, and forthcoming exhibitions at Galerie Nina Dausset, Studio Paul Facchetti, Galerie Rive Droite, or Galerie de Babylone. ‘The postman showers us with invitations to a dozen openings,’ Duthuit recalled, ‘dense crowds hasten to the *rendez-vous*.’<sup>8</sup> Some were pulled toward the heady existentialism of philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote about human consciousness as present through absence. In a torn and war-weary world, Sartre believed that the universe was godless and that the alienated individual must act to change her own destiny. Captivated by these intellectual currents, Francis wrote home to his parents that he was ‘living in Sartre’s sphere of influence here in the Latin Quarter’, engrossed in his plays *The Flies* (1943) and *No Exit* (1944).<sup>9</sup>

Duthuit brought the keen intellect of the Irish novelist Samuel Beckett into this fold. Not yet famous as a playwright, Beckett had taken up writing about art and, as a means of earning a living, translating much of Duthuit’s prose from French into English, often without attribution. Thanks to this link with Duthuit, Beckett regularly joined at the local cafés and, at a table shared with Francis, Riopelle, Alberto Giacometti, Bram van Velde, André Masson, and sometimes even the elder Matisse, ‘drank them under the table each night.’<sup>10</sup> Without telephones, the artists would cross town to knock on each others’ apartment doors or expect to find each other at local cafés.

In 1953, the curtain rose in Paris on Beckett’s seminal *Waiting for Godot*, a play that posed humanity’s trust in religion against the choice to stop waiting and construct meaning each person for herself through experiencing the tangible world. Riopelle, Francis, Held, Schneider, and Duthuit attended the opening together. In the later 1950s, Beckett, who was in Schneider’s words ‘extremely taken by Joan and petrified by a kind of admiration’, would become a close friend of Mitchell’s.<sup>11</sup> The two loved to discuss colour, and they shared a further link through Mitchell’s firebrand ex-husband Barney Rosset, founder of Grove Press in New York, who became Beckett’s lifelong publisher.

Despite their collaboration, Beckett and Duthuit had differing views on painting. For Duthuit, who spoke of art in terms of the impact it had on its eventual viewers, ‘a painting has value only through the state of mind it puts you in, by the orientation it gives to your thought, by the impetus it transmits to your actions.’<sup>12</sup> In other words, what was important was the connection between the artwork and the world outside it, or the way painting connected to the felt domain of experience.

Duthuit’s emphasis on painting’s effect on its audiences forever to come represented a sharp departure from the process-based interpretation of abstraction that was emerging in America at this same moment. The critic Harold Rosenberg proposed painting as an ‘arena in which to act’, stressing an artist’s choices with his brush in the act of making.<sup>13</sup> The paint-splattered canvas thus became a record of heroic individuality. Duthuit’s interest, by contrast, was not the single artist’s existential anguish but the collective space contemporary abstraction could be said to create. Duthuit focused on the way painting defined space. In the Renaissance, linear perspective had established painting as a window onto a fictive world that was located behind the painting’s flat surface. As a result, the lived space in front of and around the painting was deemphasized. Against this Western tradition of illusionism in painting, Duthuit sought to return contemporary art to a pre-Renaissance conception of lived space, in which the space *in front of* the painting counted for more than the fictive space behind it.

It was precisely this space between observer and painting that Duthuit found in Byzantine mosaics, in Matisse’s art, and in the new canvases of the most ardent advocates of a new school of abstraction, Francis and Riopelle.<sup>14</sup> For Duthuit, their paintings melted the boundary between painting and onlooker, generating an invisible continuum between subject and object. His writing, influenced by the philosophy of phenomenology, sought to merge the perceiver and the thing perceived. In texts on both artists that he reworked and republished for many years, Duthuit professed that Riopelle’s brushstrokes were ‘not seen, but sensed’, and that his paintings ‘strove for the Eden of pure sensation’.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, in Duthuit’s hands, Francis’s paintings mirrored the corporeality of the human body. The young painter sought to lend ‘lightness and transparency to our terrestrial bulk’ with canvases whose ‘tenuous meshes’ net the air in the ‘infinitely fine-drawn tissues of these hyper-sensitive, fragile and translucent lungs’.<sup>16</sup> Under discussion was the almost energy-charged space between painted surface and attentive viewer. In these and other texts, we find evidence of ephemeral conversations between friends that went otherwise unrecorded or were long since forgotten.

Perhaps it is here, then, in the breathless prose of Duthuit, that we return to our shimmering network of relationships and to the in-between-ness among friends through which ideas about painting and philosophy flowed freely. How better, after all, to work out postwar painting’s relationship to the social world of shared human experience than in the convivial atmosphere of that social world? It was exactly in these terms that Riopelle conceived of his rapport with a small family of comrades and colleagues around him.



Looking back on those early years in Paris, Riopelle reminisced: ‘Beckett and I... Giacometti and I... What did I want from them? What were they seeking from me? “To share a little life.”... . Life is nothing more than this stubborn desire to share the existence of another; to be accorded just a bit of this life so different from one’s own, so like it as well... . We are always alone in the world.’<sup>17</sup> Is this anything more than a hopelessly general statement that could apply equally well to the special bond between any friends? Or can we find in it something specific to the networks of sociability that Riopelle, Francis, and Mitchell forged in the 1950s, and, even further, specific to the sometimes philosophical bent of the topics they discussed? Riopelle returned to this notion, expressing it more directly and more poetically still: ‘friendship is a special kind of solitude, a solitude split in two.’<sup>18</sup>

Though he cited only his male peers Beckett and Giacometti by name, Riopelle may well have had Mitchell in mind when he gracefully yoked friendship with solitude. This hypothesis is made all the more plausible when one considers that he issued this statement in fall 1992, the very season Mitchell yielded to the lung cancer that had rapidly consumed her that year. By that date, the two artists were long since separated. But that is not to diminish the power of their decades-long alliance, characterized by turbulent rivalry and passion. Their worlds intersected: they shared friends, professional colleagues, and they exhibited together in such shows as *Abstract Impressionism* in 1958 and *Documenta II* in 1959. They travelled together to places such as France and Long Island. In 1959, Mitchell and Riopelle sailed the Aegean with Georges and Marguerite Duthuit, their son Claude Duthuit, and Riopelle’s daughters (fig. 6). Cramped quarters, strong self-will, and rising tensions on the boat led to the painters’ definitive break with Riopelle’s long-time supporter.

Theirs was a messy entanglement, and the effects of the Mitchell-Riopelle relationship on each artist’s work are still open to interpretation. Though both were resolutely committed to abstraction before they met, their artistic approaches converged somewhat in the late 1950s. Riopelle may have contributed to Mitchell’s heavier use of white paint in the 1950s, and a 1956 letter to Mitchell while she was away painting in New York reveals Riopelle admitting with apparent pride that he had ‘become your model student’ and that his recent works ‘resemble your paintings, my love.’<sup>19</sup> In 1959 they moved in together in a studio apartment on rue Frémicourt, while Riopelle kept a studio in the Parisian suburb of Vanves. And when Mitchell moved to Vétheuil, Riopelle was not far behind, setting up a studio in scrap metal warehouse nearby. They remained physically proximate even as the emotional distance between them grew, leading to their definitive separation in 1979.

Let us now return to, and linger a while longer on, Riopelle’s elegant turn of phrase, ‘friendship is ... a solitude split in two’, whose meaning slips just beyond grasp. Pressed by an interviewer, Riopelle was disinclined to elaborate; ‘I like it when things are hard to define.’<sup>20</sup> But what might this phrase have to tell us? Reordering its words aids in proving something like its inverse: ‘solitude is a friendship split in two’ more straightforwardly suggests that we are alone once we take leave of a friend.<sup>21</sup> Revisiting our original formulation, we begin to see that the concept of solitude loses its meaning when fractured in two. The mere acknowledgement of friendship as a condition of possibility renders solitude as such impossible. Being alone is inseparable from togetherness—perhaps inconceivably so. Circulating within Riopelle’s sentiment, then, is an awareness of the way we consciously experience those around us, the way we consciously experience ourselves, and the entwining of the two.

Taken alongside the intellectual tenor of the artistic-philosophical relationships sketched above, Riopelle’s notion of a diminished distance between people suggests that existence intertwines and melds into one. It echoes Duthuit’s dissolution of barriers between painting

and onlooker in the creation of a continuum of social space, a space that is whole, communal, durational, and full of sensation. Like an aura, the space of painting encroaches on or overlaps the space of oneself. Things pass into us, and we pass into things.<sup>22</sup> In-between-ness and interweaving accrue meaning.

Understanding painting as relational—which is to say, like an alliance between two friends—requires admitting that it implies space beyond the physical boundary of the canvas. We can see quite clearly how this is the case. Looking, for example, at Riopelle’s *Horizontal Black and White Painting* (1955) (p. 53), we see a marquetry of thick paint textured by short swipes of the palette knife covering the surface, anchored by a thorny matrix of diagonal black shards near the centre. Thin passages in primarily white paint weave behind and in front of this dark matrix, gaining in density and brilliance as they build toward the top of the composition. There, they read like a thick cloud of mist erupted from the geyser-like depths of the amassed paint below, propelled upward beyond the edge of the canvas to shower the beholder. This reading of Riopelle’s paintings’ extra-pictorial nature goes some way toward understanding the artist’s claim that his abstractions were not reductions or distillations of nature. ‘I move towards’, Riopelle insisted. “Abstraction”, “to abstract”, “to extract from”, ... my approach is the exact opposite. I don’t take *from* Nature, I move *into* Nature.”<sup>23</sup>

We might say something similar of the relationship between space and the phenomenal world in Mitchell’s and Francis’s abstractions. Francis made his late 1950s works like *Untitled* (1958) (p. 31) during a period of significant air travel. A pilot himself, Francis had taken two trips around the world in 1958 and 1959. The airy passages of warm white in works from



6. Mitchell and Riopelle sailing near Greece with the Duthuits (not pictured), 1959



this period call to mind the sky glimpsed between clouds, while their constellations in royal blue, fiery orange, and sunny yellow recall landmasses or inlets seen aerially, as if from an airplane’s height. The paintings therefore present an image of the world as filtered through bodily sensation, rather than one that objectively transcribes a snapshot of the visible. And, in a similar manner, Mitchell’s paintings in glistening whites and pale greys feature twirling near-black strokes that seem to capture the energy of urban centres like New York rather than imaging the city as such. In *Untitled* (c. 1956) (p. 39), one even senses the flow or circulation implied by Tapié’s visualization of friendships in the Galerie Rive Droite map. Mitchell often spoke of the sensory origins of her canvases, declaring that she painted from ‘remembered feelings of [landscapes], which of course become transformed. I could certainly never mirror nature. I would like more to paint what it leaves me with. All art is subjective, is it not?’<sup>24</sup>

Thus for Francis, Mitchell, and Riopelle, the sensory dimension of human experience had a formative role in the constitution of painting: perception bridges the gap between subject and object, entwining the two. This interweaving and in-between-ness—what Riopelle called ‘the repercussions of my relations with reality’—characterized Riopelle’s connection to his paintings and the conditions of their conceptualization. While preparing for a new painting, he might get ‘an idea of colour that appears suddenly’, it comes as no surprise to hear, ‘while having a drink with friends’.<sup>25</sup>

TEXT NOTES

1

Linda Nochlin, ‘Oral history interview with Joan Mitchell, 1986 Apr. 16’, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-joan-mitchell-12185#transcript>.

2

Paul Cummings, ‘Oral history interview with Al Held, 1975 Nov. 19–1976 Jan. 8’, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-al-held-12773#transcript>.

3

Arnold Rüdlinger and Michel Tapié, *Tendances actuelles* 3 (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1955), n.p.

4

Paul Karlstrom, ‘Oral history interview with Claire Falkenstein, 1995 Mar. 2–21’, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-claire-falkenstein-12659#transcript>.

5

*ean-Paul Riopelle: d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*, exh. cat. (Saint-Paul-de-Vence: Fondation Maeght, 1990), 99. ‘En traversant les salles, j’ai vu au mur un tableau qui m’a plu. J’ai regardé le nom et j’ai dit: “on se rencontrera peut-être un jour.”’

6

Nochlin, ‘Oral history interview with Joan Mitchell’.

7

Francis quoted in André Parinaud, ‘Sam Francis: La création est une méditation courte et ardente’, *Galerie jardin des arts* 199 (1980): 33. ‘Je peignais tous les matins, et les après-midi je discutais au café du Dragon dans la rue du même nom avec des amis. Il y avait là Georges Duthuit, Patrick Walberg [sic], Samuel Becket [sic] qui nous invita un soir à voir la première répétition de sa pièce ‘En attendant Godot’... . La France pour moi c’était d’abord ce group-là! Ce merveilleux contact avec des hommes et des créateurs. La civilisation du café c’est une réalité tangible qui n’existe pas aux États-Unis, même pas à New-York. Le café c’est merveilleux: on entre, on s’assoit, on discute, on sort, personne ne vous demande rien, qu’un signe d’amitié, en allant et venant. C’est une messe intellectuelle qui est sans équivalence et d’une richesse prodigieuse. Le merveilleux souvenir de cette période c’est que, chaque jour, j’étais en contact avec des gens tout à fait différents comme Georges Duthuit, dernier dandy de Paris.’

8

Georges Duthuit, ‘Painting in Paris Today’, [trans. Samuel Beckett], *The Listener* 50, no. 1274 (30 July 1955): 188.

9

Francis to Samuel and Virginia Francis, 7 December 1950. Sam Francis Foundation, California.

10

Alan Jones, ‘Beckett and His Friends: A Writer among the Artists’, *Arts Magazine* 66, no. 2 (October 1991), 28.

11

Pierre Schneider to Patricia Albers in a 2006 telephone interview. Quoted in Patricia Albers, *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 280.

12

Georges Duthuit in an undated letter to Samuel Beckett. Quoted in Rémi Labrusse, ‘Beckett et la peinture: le témoignage d’une correspondance inédite’, *Critique* 46, no. 519–20 (August–September 1990): 671. ‘Un tableau n’a de valeur qu’à travers l’état d’esprit où il vous place, par l’orientation qu’il donne à votre pensée, par l’impulsion qu’il communique à vos actes.’

13

Harold Rosenberg, ‘The American Action Painters’, *Art News* 51, no. 8 (December 1952), 22.

14

Georges Duthuit, ‘Painting in Paris Today’, 188.

15

Georges Duthuit, ‘A Painter of Awakening—Jean-Paul Riopelle’, *Canadian Arts* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1952), 26.

16

Georges Duthuit, ‘Sam Francis, Animator of Silence’, [trans. Samuel Beckett], *Nimbus* 2, no. 1 (August 1955): 42.

17

Gilbert Érouart, *Riopelle in Conversation* (Ontario: Anansi, 1995), 15–16. Riopelle was quoting Françoise Sagan on Marcel Proust.

18

Ibid., 17.

19

Riopelle to Mitchell in a letter of 10 January 1956. Quoted in Michel Martin, ‘Mitchell / Riopelle: Painting Bears Witness’, in *Mitchell / Riopelle: Nothing in Moderation*, exh. cat. (Quebec City: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2017), 26.

20

Ibid., 17.

21

Yseult Riopelle recalls that her father, reluctant to allow visiting friends leave, intentionally made them miss their planes on more than one occasion.

22

These terms are from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 123.

23

Érouart, *Riopelle in Conversation*, 35, 25. In Érouart, this passage is translated as ‘I don’t take anything *from* Nature, I move *into* Nature.’ However, the passage is more accurately translated as quoted in the text above. I thank Yseult Riopelle for this information.

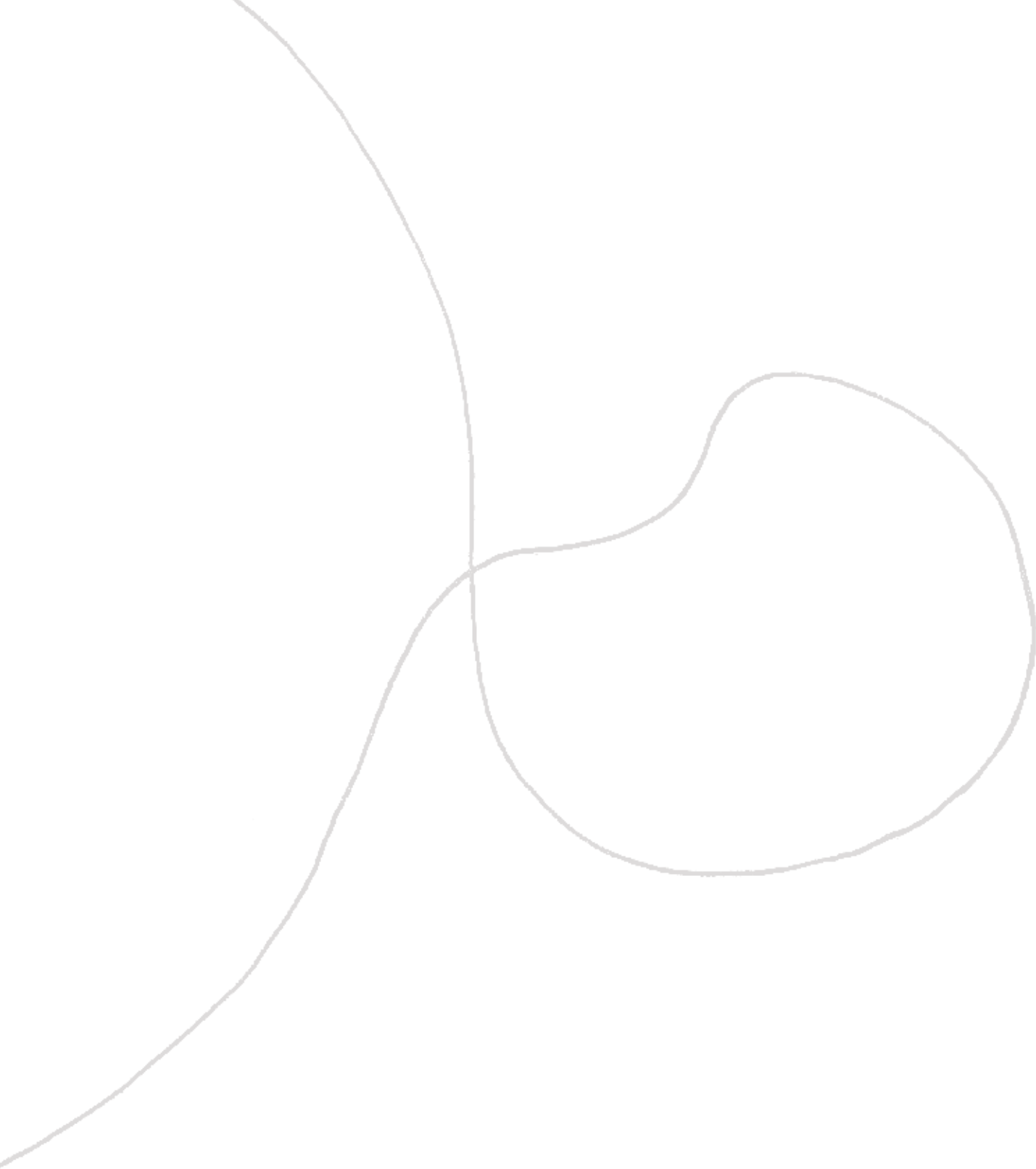
24

Joan Mitchell quoted in John I. H. Bauer, *Nature in Abstraction: The Relation of Abstract Painting and Sculpture to Nature in Twentieth-Century American Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1958), 75.

25

Riopelle quoted in *Jean-Paul Riopelle, d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*, 24. ‘Mes tableaux sont les effets, les contrecoups de mes rapports avec la réalité, avec la nature, avec ce que je vois, avec la vie; ils témoignent de ce que j’ai pu percevoir et sentir, et aussi de ce qui se passe en moi au moment même où je peins et qui n’a peut-être plus de rapport avec mon point de départ, avec tel souvenir de voyage ou telle idée de couleur surgie en prenant un verre avec des amis – Ça dépend, ça dépend de tellement de choses.’





UN ART AUTRE







FRANCIS



**ARCUEIL 1956/58**

Oil on canvas, 80¾ × 76 inches (205.1 × 193 cm)  
Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St Louis,  
Gift of Mr and Mrs Richard K Weil, 1962





**COMPOSITION C. 1957-58**

Oil on canvas, 15¾ × 31½ inches (40 × 80 cm)  
Henie Onstad Kunstsenter collection, Høvikodden, Norway





**UNTITLED 1958**

Gouache on paper laid down on canvas, 59½ × 79¼ inches (151.1 × 202.6 cm)  
Private Collection





**UNTITLED 1959**

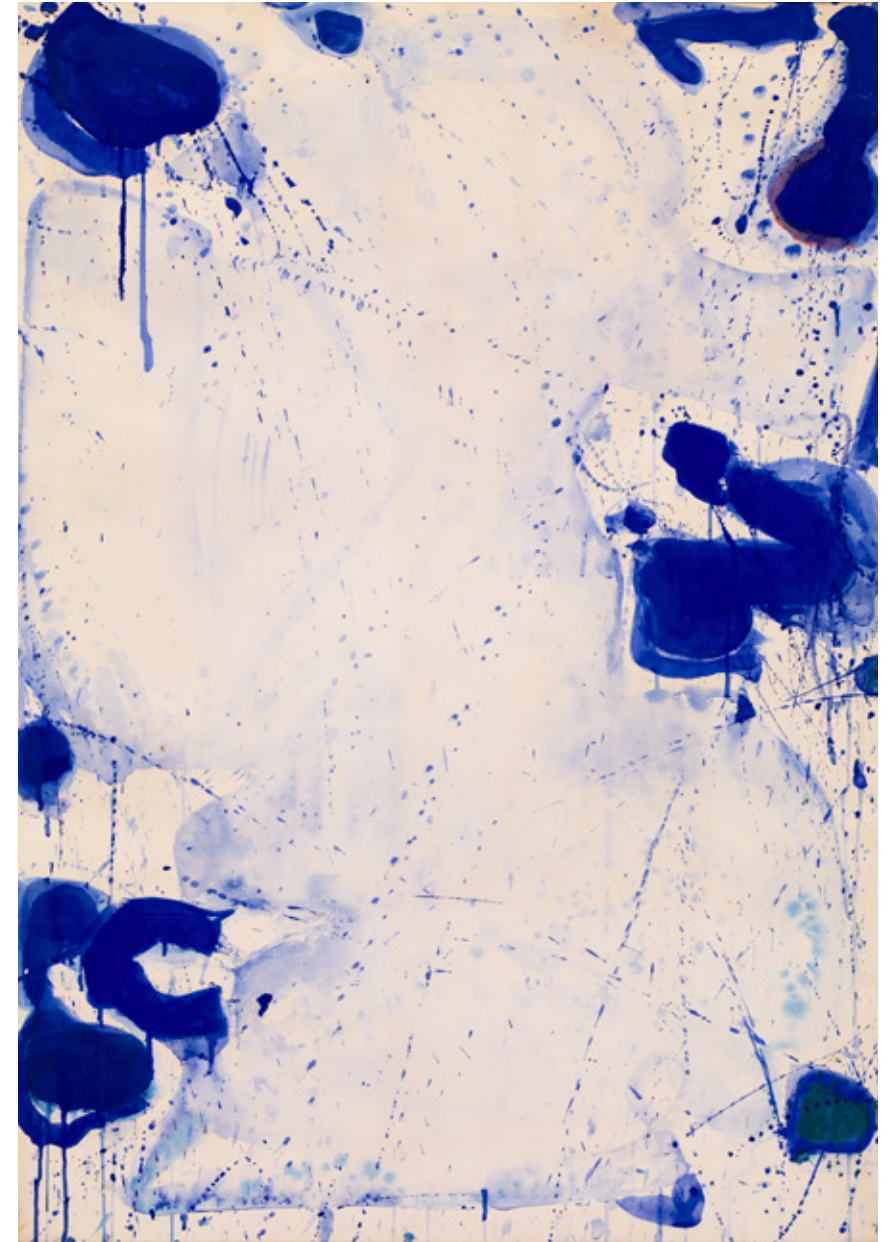
Tempera on paper,  $30\frac{7}{8} \times 22\frac{15}{16}$  inches (78.5 × 58 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe





**BLUE SERIES, NO. 1 1960**

Gouache on paper, 41½ × 29½ inches (105.4 × 74.9 cm)  
Private Collection







**MITCHELL**



**UNTITLED C. 1956**

Oil on canvas, 74 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 74 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches (190 × 190 cm)  
Private Collection





**UNTITLED 1957**

Oil on canvas, 69 × 58 ½ inches (175.2 × 148.5 cm)  
Private Collection, Santa Barbara





**UNTITLED C. 1958**

Oil on canvas, 21 × 20¼ inches (53.3 × 51.4 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe





**UNTITLED 1961**

Oil on canvas, 37 × 36 inches (94 × 91.4 cm)  
Private Collection, Los Angeles





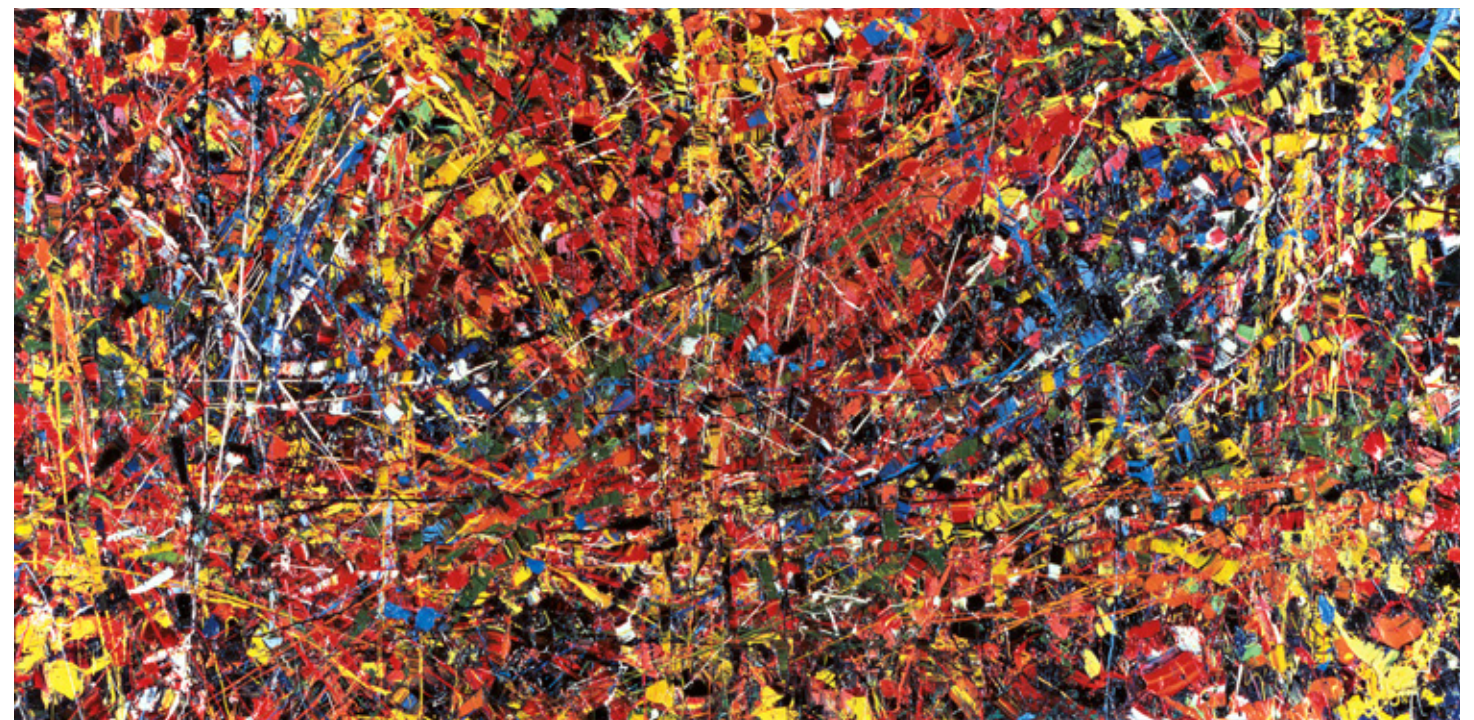


RIOPELLE



**ABSTRACTION (ORANGE) 1952**

Oil on canvas, 38 $\frac{7}{16}$  × 77 inches (97 × 195.5 cm)  
Museu Coleção Berardo





**UNTITLED 1953**

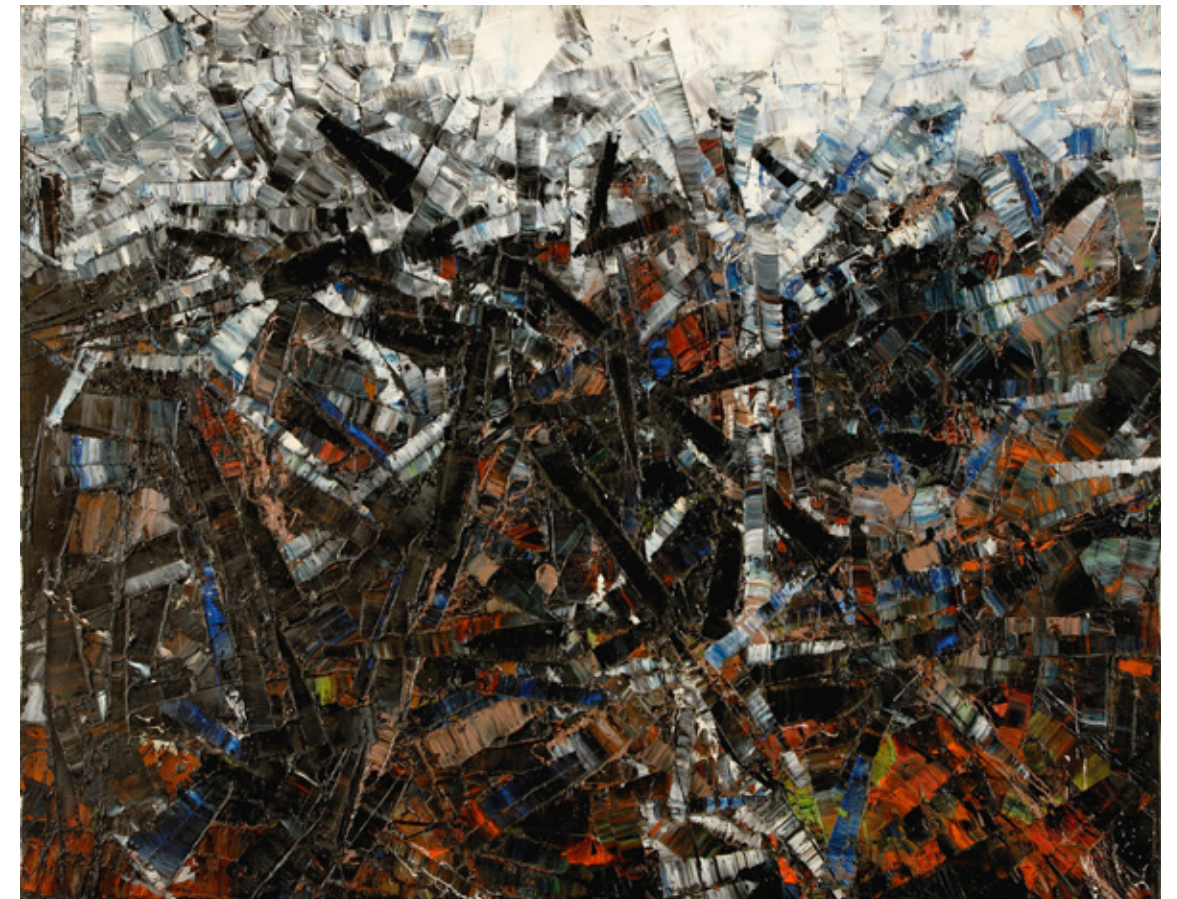
Oil on canvas, 28¾ × 21¼ inches (73 × 54 cm)  
Private Collection





**HORIZONTAL, BLACK AND WHITE 1955**

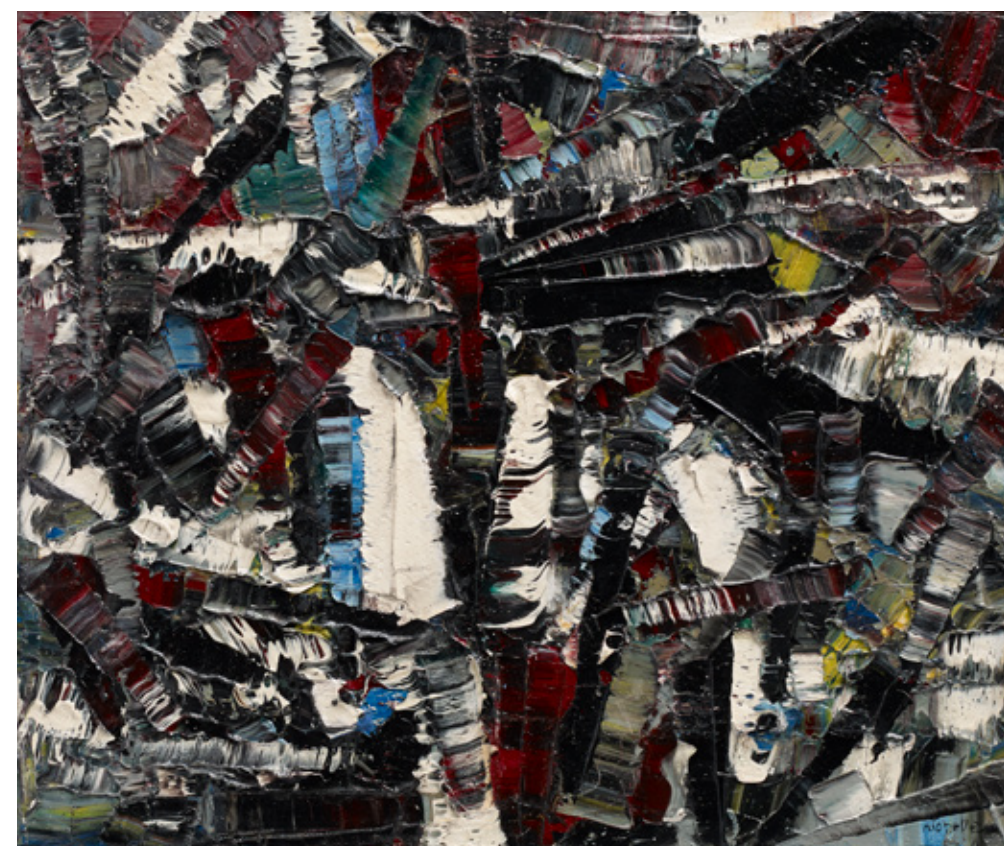
Oil on canvas, 28¾ × 36¼ inches (73 × 92 cm)  
Henie Onstad Kunstsenter collection, Høvikodden, Norway





**L'HEURE FEU FOLLET 1956**

Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 21 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches (45.5 × 55 cm)  
Private Collection





**UNTITLED 1959**

Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 31 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (59.5 × 81 cm)  
Private Collection







**SOULAGES**



**PEINTURE 73 × 54 CM, 28 MAI 1954 1954**

Oil on canvas, 28¾ × 21¼ inches (73 × 54 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe





**PEINTURE 195 × 130 CM, 5 FÉVRIER 1957 1957**

Oil on canvas, 76 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 51 $\frac{1}{16}$  inches (195 × 130 cm)  
Private Collection





**PEINTURE 195 × 155 CM, 7 FÉVRIER 1957 1957**

Oil on canvas, 76¾ × 61⅞ inches (195 × 155 cm)  
Private Collection, Los Angeles





**PEINTURE 162 × 130 CM, 6 OCTOBRE 1963 1963**

Oil on canvas, 63 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 51 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches (162 × 130 cm)  
Private Collection





**PEINTURE 150 × 162 CM, 12 MAI 1965 1965**

Oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 63 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches (130 × 162 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe







**ZAO**



**28.05.65 1965**

Oil on canvas, 25<sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 36<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (65 × 92 cm)  
Private Collection





**16.09.69 1969**

Oil on canvas,  $31\frac{7}{8} \times 51\frac{1}{16}$  inches (81 × 130 cm)  
Private Collection





**10.04.70 1970**

Oil on canvas, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 21 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (46 × 55 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe









# ADIEU TO NORMAN, BON JOUR TO JOAN AND JEAN-PAUL

FRANK O'HARA

It is 12:10 in New York and I am wondering  
if I will finish this in time to meet Norman for lunch  
ah lunch! I think I am going crazy  
what with my terrible hangover and the weekend coming up  
at excitement-prone Kenneth Koch's  
I wish I were staying in town and working on my poems  
at Joan's studio for a new book by Grove Press  
which they will probably not print  
but it is good to be several floors up in the dead of night  
wondering whether you are any good or not  
and the only decision you can make is that you did it

yesterday I looked up the rue Frémicourt on a map  
and was happy to find it like a bird  
flying over Paris et ses environs  
which unfortunately did not include Seine-et-Oise  
which I don't know

as well as a number of other things  
and Allen is back talking about god a lot  
and Peter is back not talking very much  
and Joe has a cold and is not coming to Kenneth's  
although he is coming to lunch with Norman  
I suspect he is making a distinction  
well, who isn't

I wish I were reeling around Paris  
instead of reeling around New York  
I wish I weren't reeling at all  
it is Spring the ice has melted the Ricard is being poured

we are all happy and young and toothless  
it is the same as old age  
the only thing to do is simply continue  
is that simple  
yes, it is simple because it is the only thing to do  
can you do it  
yes, you can because it is the only thing to do  
blue light over the Bois de Boulogne it continues  
the Seine continues



Mitchell and Riopelle, Chicago, c. 1957

the Louvre stays open it continues it hardly closes at all  
the Bar Américain continues to be French  
de Gaulle continues to be Algerian as does Camus  
Shirley Goldfarb continues to be Shirley Goldfarb  
and Jane Hazan continues to be Jane Freilicher (I think!)  
and Irving Sandler continues to be the balayeur des artistes  
and so do I (sometimes I think I'm "in love" with painting)  
and surely the Piscine Deligny continues to have water in it

and the Flore continues to have tables and newspapers  
and people under them  
and surely we shall not continue to be unhappy  
we shall be happy  
but we shall continue to be ourselves everything  
continues to be possible  
René Char, Pierre Reverdy, Samuel Beckett it is possible isn't it  
I love Reverdy for saying yes, though I don't believe it





Soulages and Zao, Hawaii, 1958

## KOREAN MUMS

JAMES SCHUYLER

beside me in this garden  
are huge and daisy-like  
(why not? are not  
oxeye daisies a chrysanthemum?),  
shrubby and thick-stalked,  
the leaves pointing up  
the stems from which  
the flowers burst in  
sunbursts. I love  
this garden in all its moods,  
even under its winter coat  
of salt hay, or now,  
in October, more than  
half gone over: here  
a rose, there a clump  
of aconite. This morning  
one of the dogs killed  
a barn owl. Bob saw  
it happen, tried to  
intervene. The airedale  
snapped its neck and left  
it lying. Now the bird  
lies buried by an apple  
tree. Last evening  
from the table we saw  
the owl, huge in the dusk,  
circling the field  
on owl-silent wings.  
The first one ever seen  
here: now it's gone,  
a dream you just remember.

The dogs are barking. In  
the studio music plays  
and Bob and Darragh paint.  
I sit scribbling in a little  
notebook at a garden table,  
too hot in a heavy shirt  
in the mid-October sun  
into which the Korean mums  
all face. There is a  
dull book with me,  
an apple core, cigarettes,  
an ashtray. Behind me  
the rue I gave Bob  
flourishes. Light on leaves,  
so much to see, and  
all I really see is that  
owl, its bulk troubling  
the twilight. I'll  
soon forget it: what  
is there I have not forgot?  
Or one day will forget:  
this garden, the breeze  
in stillness, even  
the words, Korean mums.



# THE PAINTER

JOHN ASHBERY

Sitting between the sea and the buildings  
He enjoyed painting the sea's portrait.  
But just as children imagine a prayer  
Is merely silence, he expected his subject  
To rush up the sand, and, seizing a brush,  
Plaster its own portrait on the canvas.

So there was never any paint on his canvas  
Until the people who lived in the buildings  
Put him to work: "Try using the brush  
As a means to an end. Select, for a portrait,  
Something less angry and large, and more  
subject  
To a painter's moods, or, perhaps, to a  
prayer."

How could he explain to them his prayer  
That nature, not art, might usurp the  
canvas?  
He chose his wife for a new subject,  
Making her vast, like ruined buildings,  
As if, forgetting itself, the portrait  
Had expressed itself without a brush.

Slightly encouraged, he dipped his brush  
In the sea, murmuring a heartfelt prayer:  
"My soul, when I paint this next portrait  
Let it be you who wrecks the canvas."  
The news spread like wildfire through the  
buildings:  
He had gone back to the sea for his subject.

Imagine a painter crucified by his subject!  
Too exhausted even to lift his brush,  
He provoked some artists leaning from the  
buildings  
To malicious mirth: "We haven't a prayer  
Now, of putting ourselves on canvas,  
Or getting the sea to sit for a portrait!"

Others declared it a self-portrait.  
Finally all indications of a subject  
Began to fade, leaving the canvas  
Perfectly white. He put down the brush.  
At once a howl, that was also a prayer,  
Arose from the overcrowded buildings.

They tossed him, the portrait, from the  
tallest of the buildings;  
And the sea devoured the canvas and the  
brush  
As though his subject had decided to re-  
main a prayer.



Pierre Soulages, 1955





# CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

MATTHEW J. HOLMAN

This chronology is intended to cast light on the exhibitions, manifesto statements, events, collaborations, and biographical details relevant to the exhibition *Un art autre*, and to provide a sense of the diversity of art and art making associated with ‘other art’, predominantly in Paris, in the postwar period. It is not meant to be a comprehensive account, and while efforts are made to trace the international context of artists associated with *art autre*, particular attention is given to the life and career of Sam Francis, Joan Mitchell, Jean Paul Riopelle, Pierre Soulages, and Zao Wou-Ki, with a focus on the important decade of the 1950s.



# 1945

In the immediate aftermath of World War Two and the Liberation of Paris, the collective exhibition *Art concret* focused on the internationalism of abstract art and looked to reassert the French capital's credentials as the cosmopolitan hub of modernist art. Artists represented in the exhibition included Otto Freundlich, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Sonia and Robert Delaunay, and Alberto Magnelli. The catalogue recalled Theo van Doesburg's '*Art concret*' manifesto (1930), which linked abstraction to artistic liberty: 'Concrete painting, not abstract, because nothing is more concrete, more real than a line, a colour, a surface. It is the concretisation of the creative spirit.'



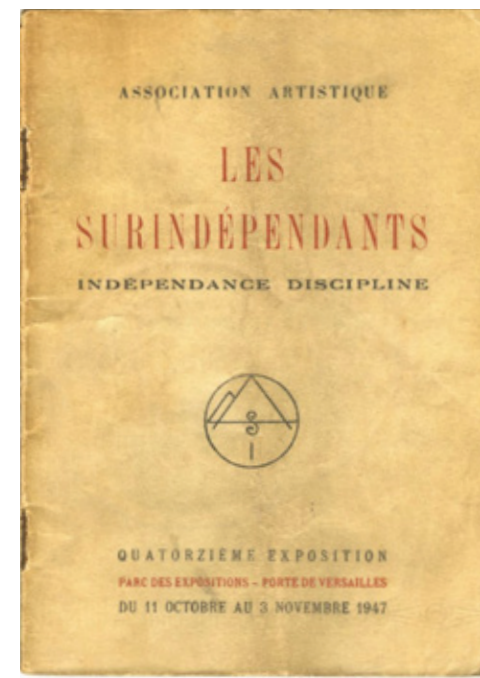
Theo van Doesburg, *Art concret*, Germany, 1930

# 1946

Several curatorial attempts—including *Cent chefs d'oeuvre de l'École de Paris*, Galerie Charpentier, and *Exposition internationale d'art moderne*, Musée d'Art Moderne—were made to revitalise Parisian modernism and redefine the École de Paris. Arnold Rüdlinger, the influential director of the Bern Kunsthalle, organised the *Exposition de peinture contemporaine: École de Paris*. Each of these shows attempted, in its own way, to demonstrate that Parisian artistic communities had survived the depravations of war and occupation.

Canadian artist Jean Paul Riopelle visited Paris for the first time, keen to immerse himself in this centre of artistic, cultural, and intellectual activity. He was drawn to artistic styles resistant to the legacies of Cubism, and to the *abstraction lyrique* of painters like Nicolas de Staël and Georges Mathieu. In October, Riopelle married Françoise Lespérance, his childhood sweetheart, who would become one of the pioneers of contemporary dance and choreography in Quebec and founder of Montreal's Modern Dance School in 1959. In 1947, the Riopelles settled in Paris. When asked why he had made the move, Riopelle said, 'It's a question of language, first of all,' before demonstrating his democratic attitude toward sociality: 'I don't spend time only with artists. I prefer people I meet in the street. The storekeeper on the corner can be my best friend... . There are other kinds of Frenchman that come along afterwards, but I need contact with the street.'

# 1947



Catalogue for *Les Surindépendants*, Parc des Expositions — Porte de Versailles, Paris, 1947

Jean Paul Riopelle met the dealer Pierre Loeb, of Galerie Pierre, who acted as an important intermediary within the postwar Parisian art scene. It was Loeb who introduced Riopelle to the city's Surrealists, split between those loyal to André Breton, the movement's founder, and those committed to the international left and the French Communist Party. In 1947, Riopelle co-signed Breton's manifesto *Rupture inaugurale* and, on Breton's invitation, was included in that year's *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* at Galerie Maeght. In the catalogue essay, Breton described Riopelle's work as 'the art of a master trapper': 'What wins me over to the idea of a trap, which I guardedly accept, is that they are also traps for traps. Once

these traps are trapped, a great degree of freedom can be attained.' Riopelle, in turn, noted his own somewhat precarious status within the exposition: 'I am participating as a foreigner... . I am particularly a foreigner when it comes to the "monolithic trends" that France currently favors.'

While he enjoyed the widespread critical support of Parisian tastemakers, not only Breton but also Georges Duthuit (Henri Matisse's son-in-law) and Pierre Schneider, Riopelle consistently positioned himself as an outlier within the École de Paris.

With fellow Canadian émigré Fernand Leduc, Riopelle organised the group show *Automatisme* at the newly established Galerie du Luxembourg (20 June–13 July). The Automatists, an eclectic constellation, have been described as 'the first lyrical abstract group in the world that was neither Parisian nor from New York City, but was Quebecois'. In addition to painters, like Roger Fauteux, the group included dancers, critics, dramatists, photographers, psychiatrists, and poets.

The professional career of the French artist Pierre Soulages began with the display of three of his paintings at the *Salon des surindépendants* (Parc des Expositions, Paris). Soulages had returned to Paris the previous year and set up a small studio in Courbevoie. The immediate postwar period would prove formative for the artist.



# 1948

The Quebecois Automatist group, including Jean Paul Riopelle and his mentor Paul-Émile Borduas, co-sign *Refus global* (Total refusal), an anti-religious, anti-establishment manifesto rooted in the European avant-garde. Published by Maurice Perron and launched on August 9 at the Librairie Tranquille in Montreal, the manifesto outlined their iconoclastic aesthetic programme: ‘We refuse to be confined to the barracks of plastic arts—it’s a fortress, but easy enough to avoid. We refuse to keep silent... . We will not accept your fame or attendant honors. They are the stigmata of shame, silliness and servility... . We reject all forms of INTENTION, the two-edged, perilous sword of REASON.’

In the summer, Chicago-born artist Joan Mitchell sailed for France on the Liberty ship *SS Ernie Pyle*. For thirty dollars a month, she rented a one-room flat on the ancient rue Galande in the fifth arrondissement of Paris. Despite enjoying a view of Notre-Dame and benefiting from an expatriate American community that included Philip Guston and Ellsworth Kelly, Mitchell was dismayed by the city’s febrile atmosphere. She wrote to her then husband, Barney Rosset, the radical publisher and founder of Grove Press: ‘I don’t know why I came in the first place and I haven’t all this Promethean strength one is supposed to have and I don’t know how to paint.’ Later in the year, however, she returned to Paris, and was encouraged by a doctor at the American Hospital to spend time on the Côte d’Azur for health reasons. Mitchell and Rosset then spent a year at Le Lavandou in Provence, where Mitchell produced a number of paintings showing her early-career interest in the abstract landscape, a painterly subject that she would return to throughout her life.

The Chinese-born artist Zao Wou-Ki, whose forename means ‘no limits’, settled in the Montparnasse district of Paris, where he would become neighbours with Alberto Giacometti and close friends with artist Hans Hartung and poet/painter Henri Michaux. Bernard Dorival, in the preface to Zao’s solo exhibition at Galerie Creuze in May 1949, celebrated his works’ emotional depth and cosmopolitan style: ‘Chinese in spirit, modern and French in some of their aspects, Zao Wou-Ki’s paintings realize a most enjoyable synthesis, and show that their author is a born painter from whom both his country and ours can expect a great deal.’

Pierre Soulages showed five oil paintings and eight works on paper in the *Gross Ausstellung Französischer Abstrakter Malerei*, a major exhibition of abstract art in West Germany, the first of its kind. He received significant critical acclaim, and his *Brou de noix* (1947–48) was featured on promotional material for the exhibition.

The short-lived avant-garde group CoBrA (1948–51; led by Karel Appel, Constant, Ernest Mancoba, and Asger Jorn) published their manifesto ‘La cause était entendue’ (The case was settled) in Paris. Influenced by Surrealist automatism, Marxism, and the aesthetics of *art informel*, which drew extensively on children’s art, CoBrA emphasised individual expression but through a collective programme. Christian Dotremont created the acronym for the group’s name from the principal members’ home cities: Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam. Curated by Willem Sandberg, their first major exhibition, *International Experimental Art*, was held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the following year.

# 1949

Jean Paul Riopelle held his first European exhibition, titled *Riopelle à La Dragonne*, at Galerie Nina Dausset, Paris (23 March–23 April).

André Bloc and Edgard Pillet founded *Art d’aujourd’hui* (Art of today), which published between 1949 and 1955, as a tribune for the ‘synthèse des arts’, and predominantly promoted geometric abstraction in the tradition of de Stijl.

1949 was an important year for the thirty-year old artist Pierre Soulages, capped by his first solo exhibition at Galerie Lydia Conti in Paris. A key moment in his career, the novel ways in which Soulages used knife and spatula instead of the traditional brush were commended by various advocates of postwar modernism and the École de Paris, including Michel Ragon, Michel Tapié, and Charles Estienne. The same year also saw his first public collection purchase, by the Musée de Grenoble. ‘The early pictures from the second half of the 1940s to the mid-1950s are characterized by more or less broad lines’, wrote art historian Hermann Arnhold for an exhibition catalogue of Soulages’ work at the Westfälisches Landesmuseum Münster in 1994, ‘which are linked in brown and black paint diagonally, vertically and horizontally, placed on a light background, whereby the line direction sometimes goes from straight to slightly curved or semi-circle.’

In September, the first edition of *Dau al Set* (‘seventh face of the dice’ in Catalan) was published in Barcelona by poet Joan Brossa. *Dau al Set* was resolutely anti-Franco, sought to promote a countercultural movement in Catalonia, and drew inspiration principally from Surrealism and Dadaism. Artists associated with the movement, including Antoni Tàpies, Joan Ponç, and Modest Cuixart, were exhibited at Cercle Maillol, Barcelona (17 December 1949–2 January 1950). *Dau al Set* was the most important avant-garde collective in Spain until the El Paso group was founded in Madrid in 1957 with a manifesto that set out their internationalist and *informel* agenda.

In October, the Artists’ Club opened at 39 East 8th Street in New York. Regular attendees included Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, and Joan Mitchell. The club became an infamous forum for aesthetic discussion and debate among the Abstract Expressionists and a platform for group exhibitions.



*Art d'aujourd'hui*, no. 2, Paris, 1949



# 1950

On 20 May, a group of American abstract artists, then given the moniker ‘The Irascibles’ or the ‘Irascible 18’, put their names to an open letter addressed to Roland L. Redmond, president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, protesting the exhibition *American Painting Today, 1950*. Speaking on behalf of ‘all the advanced artists of America’, the signatories directed their principal grievance at the perceived conservatism at the Met and its lack of support for the avant-garde. In its issue of 15 January 1951, *Life* published Nina Leen’s iconic photograph of the group, in which Hedda Sterne was the only woman artist present (despite others, such as Louise Bourgeois, also having signed the letter).

After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, Sam Francis moved to Paris, where he would remain until the end of 1960. Energised by the loosely defined networks of American artists in Paris, which now included Al Held, Francis developed a highly lyrical interpretation of Abstract Expressionist style and was subsequently described by *Time* magazine as ‘the hottest American painter in Paris these days’. In 1956, Francis moved to a large barn-like studio in the Arcueil district of the city, where he created a number of paintings indebted to Claude Monet’s water lilies.

Michel Tapié used the term *art informel* (meaning ‘unformed art’) for the first time, describing the work of Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze (or Wols). Although largely unknown during his lifetime, the German painter and photographer has since been recognised as a major contributor to lyrical abstraction and the *tachiste* movement. Wols was also a favourite of Jean-Paul Sartre, who claimed that the artist’s visual medium and harsh treatment of material represented the ontological anxieties Sartre had outlined in his existentialist philosophy.

Various artists including Hedda Sterne, Mark Tobey, and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva were shown in the exhibition *Young Painters in the United States and France* at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York (23 October–11 November).



Invitation to *Véhémences confrontées*, Galerie Nina Dausset, Paris, 1951

# 1951

On 4 January, Pierre Loeb accompanied Henri Michaux to Zao Wou-Ki’s Paris studio. While it was alleged that Loeb left without saying a word, just three months later the gallerist bought some eleven of Zao’s works and began representing him in the city. In June, Zao’s first solo show was held at the Galerie Pierre to much critical acclaim. Zao and Loeb would continue to work together until 1957.

Michel Tapié and Georges Mathieu curated a major survey of gestural and lyrical abstraction, *Véhémences confrontées* (8–31 March), at Galerie Nina Dausset, Paris. Seeking to link American action painting formally and philosophically with recent developments in western Europe, the exhibition’s promotional material claimed that ‘for the first time in France, an encounter between the extreme trends of non-figurative American, Italian and Parisian painting’ was on show. In the catalogue, Tapié insisted on the importance of ‘authentic artists’ of ‘exceptional individuality’ who had incorporated styles consistent with the ‘violence of the gesture’.

Italian-American art dealer Leo Castelli and the committee of the Artist’s Club in New York collaborated on the important exhibition *9th St. Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture* at 60 East 9th Street (21 May–10 June). Displaying over sixty works, almost all associated with Abstract Expressionism, what would become mythologised as the ‘Ninth Street Show’ was a catalytic moment. In an interview with Barbara Rose in 1969, Castelli recalled the genesis of the exhibition and mused on its enduring significance: ‘It came into being as an outgrowth ... of feelings the American painters had in connection with their position toward the European painters. It was sort of an outburst of pride in their own strength.

And we considered this almost as the first Salon des Indépendants; this is what I called it as a matter of fact.’

In June, *Art d’aujourd’hui* published a special issue with the theme ‘Paris–New York 1951’.

In October, Paul Facchetti opened his eponymous Paris gallery, which became an important space for the display of avant-garde art associated with *art autre*.

In November, Tapié organised *Signifiants de l’informel* (Signifiers of the informal), which expanded upon the Dausset exhibition earlier in the year and featured Karel Appel, Willem de Kooning, Jean Dubuffet, Jean Fautrier, Sam Francis, Georges Mathieu, and Henri Michaux.

*American Vanguard Art for Paris Exhibition* opened at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York (26 December 1951–5 January 1952), and travelled the following spring to Galerie de France, Paris (26 February–15 March 1952). Twenty artists were shown, including Philip Guston, Hans Hofmann, Mark Tobey, Ad Reinhardt, and Jackson Pollock. In a review of the show in the *New York Times*, Howard Devree wrote that ‘since the close of the war the number of exhibitions of American art abroad has grown rapidly... . The latest event to be arranged in this marked turning of the tide is an exhibition entitled *American Vanguard Art for Paris Exhibition*.’



# 1952

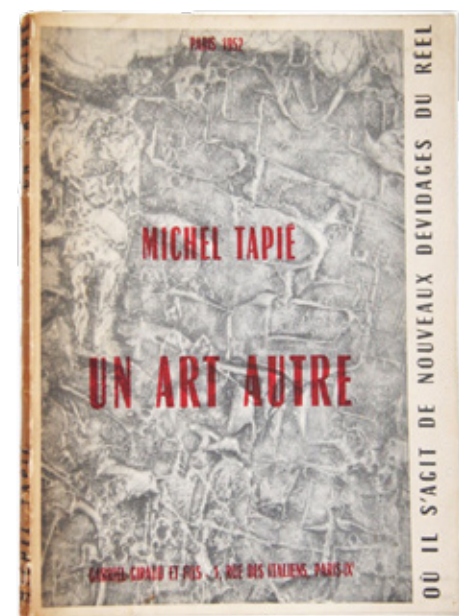
Charles Estienne organised *Peintres de la Nouvelle École de Paris* (Painters of the New School of Paris), held at Galerie de Babylone, Paris (5 January–12 February).

Joan Mitchell had her first solo show in New York, at the New Gallery (14 January–2 February). The exhibition showcased sixteen paintings, including *Cross Section of a Bridge* and *Untitled* (both 1951), and was warmly received by critics. In *Art Digest*, Paul Brach wrote: ‘The debut of this young painter marks the appearance of a new personality in abstract painting. Miss Mitchell’s huge canvases are post-cubist in their precise articulation of spatial intervals, yet they remain close in spirit to American abstract expressionism in their explosive impact.’ Later in the year, Mitchell moved to a studio in the East Village at 60 St. Mark’s Place and became closely associated with the circle around the poet and curator Frank O’Hara, including James Schuyler and John Ashbery. Inspired by O’Hara’s

poem of the same name, Mitchell would produce *To the Harbormaster* (1957) and, as an elegy after his death in 1966, *Ode to Joy (A Poem by Frank O’Hara)* (1970–71).

The term *art autre*, which translates from French as ‘other art’ or ‘art of another kind’, was first used by Michel Tapié in his 1952 treatise of the same name. Used synonymously with *art informel* (another Tapié construction) and *tachisme* (from *tache*, meaning ‘blot’ or ‘stain’, coined by Charles Estienne), *art autre* described the dominant style of lyrical abstraction that privileged improvisatory technique and the gestural application of paint, especially by artists who exhibited primarily in the Montparnasse district of Paris after the city’s liberation in 1945. This trend in abstract art was seen as the European strand of American action painting. The critics positioned *art autre* against the refined traditionalism of the École de Paris, the cold formalism of geometric abstraction or *art concret*, and the committed socialist realism of artists allied with the French Communist Party, like André Fougeron.

Assisted by Alfonso Ossorio, Tapié curated *Jackson Pollock, 1948–51*, at Studio Facchetti. In Pollock’s maiden Paris solo show, Tapié championed the artist as the gestural abstract painter par excellence and drummed up support for his work through his extensive Parisian networks. Tapié put on two more shows at Studio Facchetti in 1952: *Signifiants de l’informel II* (Signifiers of the informel II), opening on 6 June, and *Un art autre*, on 17 December.



Michel Tapié, *Un art autre*, Paris, 1952

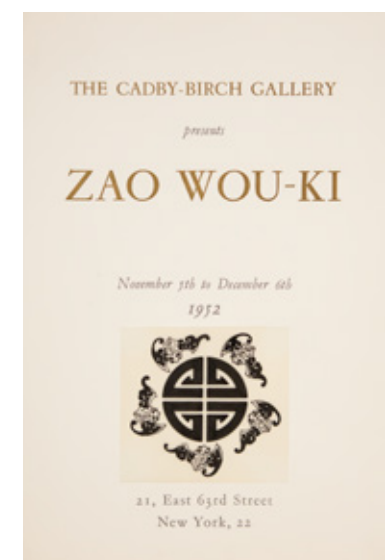
# 1953

Members of the British Independent Group, led by Toni del Renzio, organised *Opposing Forces* at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts (28 January–28 February). Michel Tapié and Peter Watson selected the seven artists: Sam Francis, Georges Mathieu, Henri Michaux, Alfonso Ossorio, Jackson Pollock (who was shown for the first time in the United Kingdom), Jean Paul Riopelle, and Iaroslav Serpan. In the exhibition committee’s invitation to ICA members, the importance of this show was clearly stated: ‘These seven painters are not a group but they all share in an attempt to do something entirely new—an extremism which has never before been seen in England.’ In a characteristically lyrical accompanying article on Francis’s paintings, Georges Duthuit wrote that the ‘diet [Francis] proposes is, at its most substantial, semi-liquid; a solution of nebulae permeated with the palest honey, the rippling effervescence of spring water seeping through a golden sand, a snowy sherbet tinged with rose, an oriental brew limpid above its ground of lichen and trembling mosses and the faint gleam of porcelain’.

Galerie Pierre and Galerie Craven hosted the exhibition *Peintures récentes de Riopelle* (Recent paintings by Riopelle) (8–23 May). Riopelle was by now well known for his ‘mosaics’, an allover style that was created by covering the entire canvas with a marquetry of thick impasto, paint crests, and fine peaks. Pigment was applied straight from the tube, worked over with a knife, and strewn by flicked splatters to form a textured, uneven, and fiercely chromatic pictorial surface.



Riopelle in his studio on rue Durantin, Paris, 1952



Catalogue for Zao’s exhibition at the Cadby-Birch Gallery, New York, November 1952, with an introduction by Henri Michaux





Riopelle in his studio, Paris, c. 1953

## 1954

James Johnson Sweeney, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's second director, curated *Younger European Painters: A Selection* (2 December 1953–21 February 1954). While Sweeney was being creative with his description of 'young' (some of the exhibited artists were over fifty), the survey represented the 'variety and vitality' of European artists, who were 'asserting themselves in a way they had not for the past thirty years'. Following the exhibition, the Guggenheim purchased Riopelle's *Blue Night* (1953) for its collection, although not everyone was impressed. The critic Otis Cage, in a somewhat chauvinistic turn indicative of the contemporary American–European artistic rivalry, argued, 'The fresh impulses, the new directions, are on this side of the water. The younger Europeans realize that, even if Sweeney does not.'

The Association française d'action artistique sponsored the exhibition *French Painting Today; Peintres vivants de l'École de Paris*, which toured Australia. This show promoted the cosmopolitan character of abstract-tendency work by artists including Hans Hartung, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Pierre Soulages, and Zao Wou-Ki.



Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Jacques Germain, Georges Mathieu, Pierre Loeb, Jean Paul Riopelle, and Zao Wou-Ki, 1953



Invitation to Riopelle: *First American Exhibition*, Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1954

In January, the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York exhibited *Riopelle: First American Exhibition*. The show's catalogue included an essay by Georges Duthuit, translated into English by the Irish playwright and intellectual Samuel Beckett, with whom Jean Paul Riopelle was good friends. Entitled 'A Painter of Awakening: Jean Paul Riopelle', the essay included densely lyrical criticism with observations that linked Riopelle's practice to 'the immediacies of earth, of nerves, of epidermis, [which] unfold and flower as one'.

The second incarnation of the Kunsthalle Bern's *Tendances actuelles de l'École de Paris* (the first was in 1952) opened on 6 February. The European character of postwar abstraction was emphasised: Pablo Palazuelo (Spain), Stanley William Hayter (England), Hans Hartung (German-French), Richard Mortensen (Denmark), and the French artists Jean Piaubert, Serge Poliakoff, and Pierre Soulages were among those shown. The third manifestation of the series would take place the following January, when nine paintings by Riopelle were shown alongside works by Wols, Henri Michaux, and Sam Francis.





Soulages in his studio on rue Victor Schoelcher, Paris, 1954

Samuel Kootz, the major art dealer, collector of transnational abstraction and champion of the work of French artists in the 1920s, staged the first of several one-man exhibitions on Soulages in April and May. ‘I have been enormously satisfied with the paintings you sent me’, wrote Kootz in a letter to Soulages, ‘I believe they do you great credit. In this, I find all our American painters agree, as well as the collectors and museum directors like [James Johnson] Sweeney and [Alfred] Barr, both of whom like the show immensely. I feel very strongly this exhibition will entrench your reputation here in New York.’ Soulages continued to show with the Kootz Gallery throughout his early career in New York, and was represented there in 1955, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1961, 1964 and 1965.

Tapié curated the group show *Individualités d’aujourd’hui* (Today’s individualities) at Galerie Rive Droite (5–30 October).

Patti Cadby Birch presented a third and final show of Zao Wou-Ki’s work after two ‘so exciting and so successful’ exhibitions of the artist from 1952 at her The Cadby-Birch Gallery in New York, in November and December. *Zao Wou-Ki* comprised twelve paintings and the artist was praised in the catalogue by Bernard Dorival, influential curator at the Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris, as ‘one of the most exquisite painters of our time and the most original.’

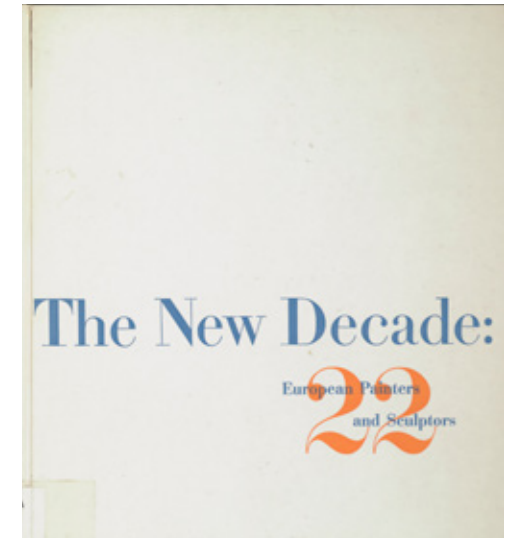


Michel Tapié, Claire Falkenstein, Sam Francis, and Giuseppe Capogrossi at Galleria di Spazio, Rome, 1954

The Belgian-born poet and artist Henri Michaux was granted French citizenship. Michaux was best known for the paintings he produced while hallucinating on mescaline, works that are characterised by their squiggly patterns that intimate the expanded sensorial experiences of their composition. Widely respected, too, for his poetry, which was often Surrealist in flavour, Michaux was recognised as one of the least lyrical of contemporary French poets, instead favouring a more fragmentary and disruptive style.

Zao Wou-Ki was chosen by Jean Cassou, the influential French poet, curator and director of the Musée National d’Art Moderne, to take part in the French representation of the third Bienal São Paulo. Cassou was keen to rejuvenate Paris’ reputation as a cosmopolitan hub of modernist art practice, a centre where artists immigrated from around the world, and it was a significant endorsement of Zao’s role within Parisian artistic community. Later in the year Zao participated in the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, where he received an honorable mention.

Instructed by her therapist to avoid spending another summer in the Hamptons and to take a break from her tempestuous affair with artist Mike Goldberg, Joan Mitchell (now divorced from Rosset) visited Paris once again. It was this summer that Mitchell met Jean Paul Riopelle, with whom she would have an intense, on-and-off love affair for nearly twenty-five years. Although recent critical and curatorial attention has appraised the mutually creative, collaborative energy between the artist-companions—most recently in the exhibition *Mitchell / Riopelle: Nothing in Moderation* that opened at the Musée national des beaux-



*The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955

arts du Québec (12 October 2017 – 7 January 2018) and travelled to the Art Gallery of Ontario (18 February–6 May 2018) and the Fonds Hélène & Édouard Leclerc pour la Culture in Landerneau, France (16 December 2018 – 22 April 2019)—more work is left to be done. David Moos notes: ‘Despite copious biographical and art world intersections between the itineraries of the two painters, it is remarkable that in most scholarly studies of Riopelle and Mitchell there is little and in many cases no significant mention of the other.’ Mitchell decided to move to Paris, with an atelier on rue Jacob, while maintaining her studio on St. Mark’s Place in the East Village. Later in the year, she showed at the *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

In December, at his gallery in the Fuller Building on East 57th Street, Pierre Matisse organised the group show *First Showing of Recent Works: Dubuffet, Giacometti, Marini, Miró, Riopelle*. The exhibition



# 1956



Riopelle and Zao, 1955

displayed four paintings by Riopelle, including *Untitled* (1955).

From 10 May to 7 August, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, exhibited *The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors*, curated by Andrew Cardiff Ritchie. The largest share of exhibited artists were French (seven), with three Germans, five Britons, five Italians, a Dutchman, and a Portuguese. In the catalogue foreword, Ritchie was concerned above all with the political dimensions of figuration and abstraction, at a time when ‘realism’ was indelibly linked with the Communist doctrine of socialist realism and the legacies of Fascist heroic realism, and abstraction with so-called free societies under capitalism. Ritchie noted ‘signs of sober hope ... when seen against a decade of anxiety, not to say despair’, as the younger artists of a ‘more stable, unified continent’ were working on a ‘serious reappraisal of pre-war art movements and ... searching for new points of departure’.

Curator Dorothy C. Miller featured Sam Francis in her major MoMA exhibition *12 Americans*, alongside Grace Hartigan, Larry Rivers, and James Brooks, among other artists. While she was careful to trace Francis’s notoriously peripatetic life, Miller stressed the homegrown origins of his practice: ‘[Ernest] Briggs and Francis, both native Californians, left San Francisco for New York and Paris, respectively, but not before they had felt the impact of work by [Clyfford] Still, [Mark] Rothko and others teaching at the California School of Fine Arts.’ In *12 Americans*, Francis was represented by five works: *Blue-Black* (1952), *Big Red* (1953), *Black in Red* (1953), *Gray* (1955), and *Red in Red* (1955).



*12 Americans*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1956

# 1957

Zao Wou-Ki travelled to New York for the first time, where he was introduced by Pierre Soulages to Samuel Kootz, owner of the city’s Kootz Gallery which had moved into a larger studio at 1018 Madison Avenue the previous year. Zao and the Kootz Gallery signed a contract which meant that Kootz became the artist’s exclusive agent in the United States, and guaranteed purchases of between fifteen and twenty oil paintings per year.

Under these terms, Kootz became an early promoter of Zao’s Hurricane Period (1959-1972) and staged solo exhibitions for the artist each year from 1959 to 1961. Kootz would promote Zao until the sudden closure of his gallery in 1966, and Zao continued to be represented by the Galerie de France in Paris. In New York, he met important figures in the New York School who became friends and peers, including Franz Kline, Philip Guston, and Adolph Gottlieb. Accompanied by Soulages and his wife Colette, Zao continued his formative travels in the United States and visited Washington D.C., Chicago, and San Francisco.

In the October issue of *Art News*, the renowned critic Irving Sandler published the article ‘Mitchell Paints a Picture’, in which, accompanied by the photographer Rudy Burckhardt, he observed Joan Mitchell in her studio, ‘on the fourth floor of a lower East Side walk-up’. Mitchell was then working on what would be tentatively titled *Bridge*, begun on unstretched linen canvas, a work-in-progress she would soon decide to abandon. She also worked on

*George Went Swimming at Barnes Hole, but It Got Too Cold*, her lyrical abstract landscape based on a memory of an East Hampton beach and her late poodle, Georges du Soleil. Sandler began by sharing Mitchell’s distrust of artistic categories and so-called schools of art—‘Joan Mitchell is a painter who hates aesthetic labels’—and then situated her within ‘the methods of Gorky, de Kooning, Kline, et al.’, with whom she shared ‘a feeling of familiarity ... a kindred involvement with space’.



Sam Francis with Michel Tapié (in shadow) in Francis’ Tokyo studio, 1957





Francis in his Arcueil studio painting *Untitled* (1958), Paris, 1958

## 1958



Zao and Soulages playing chess, Tokyo, 1958

In January, Pierre Soulages travelled to Japan for the first time, with his wife Colette and Zao Wou-Ki, following their trip to the United States together. Soulages was widely respected in Japan at this time, having been awarded the Minister of Education Prize for Fine Arts at Japan's fourth *International Art Exhibition* in 1957 and he immersed himself with the various avant-garde communities in Tokyo, Kyoto and Nara. One such interaction, the roundtable discussion *Japanese Calligraphy and French Painters*, published in the journal *Bokubi* in May 1958, also featured Zao, critics Tsutomu Iijima and Itsuji Yoshikawa, and calligrapher Shiryu Morita. While the discussion was varied and eclectic, particular attention was paid to the formal relationship between the richly textured, monochrome paintings of Soulages' signature style and Japanese avant-garde calligraphy. Zao then travelled to Hong Kong, where he stayed for six months, visited his mother and met Chan May-Kam, who would become his second wife. Whilst Zao was away, Samuel Kootz visited his studio in Paris, accompanied by Gildo Caputo and Myriam Prévot.

*The International Art of a New Era: Informel and Gutai* was shown at the Osaka International Festival, Japan (12–20 April), and represented American, French, and Japanese artists including Conrad Marca-Relli, Georges Mathieu, Joan Mitchell, Jackson Pollock, Antoni Tàpies, and Yoshihara Jir. The Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai (Gutai Art Association), founded by Yoshihara in 1954 in Osaka, was the country's most influential postwar avant-garde group. The collective was guided by an ethic of inclusivity and respect for the creativity of others, as demonstrated by Yoshihara's *Please Draw Freely* (1956), which invited visitors to paint and draw on an interactive painting. In the 'Gutai Art Manifesto' (1956), Yoshihara wrote that 'Gutai aspires to present exhibitions filled with vibrant spirit, exhibitions in which an intense cry accompanies the discovery of the new life of matter.'

The Musée des beaux-arts, Brussels, exhibited the major survey *50 ans d'art moderne* (17 April–21 July) as part of the 1958 Brussels Expo, including works by Karl Appel, Willem de Kooning, Jean Dubuffet, Sam Francis, Arshile Gorky, Hans Hartung, Asger Jorn, Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Jean Paul Riopelle, and Pierre Soulages. The geographical scope of the show was unprecedented, comprising 348 works by 240 artists from 36 countries, and was an early precursor of 'global' art exhibitions, inspired by critic and diplomat André Malraux's cross-cultural treatise 'Le Musée imaginaire' (1947).

On 11 June, *Abstract Impressionism: An Exhibition of Recent Paintings* opened at the Arts Council Gallery, London. Claude Monet's late paintings, characterised by an allover chromatic style with energetic brushstrokes, represented a formal link between the naturalism of early



# 1959

Impressionism and the fierce abstraction of New York School painting. In the same year, Lawrence Alloway and Harold Cohen moved the show to the Art Galleries in Nottingham (19 February–19 March), drawing on critical and artistic precedents such as Louis Finkelstein, Thomas B. Hess, and Barr, to further demonstrate this relationship. In the catalogue, Alloway argued that ‘nature may be in memory and not physically present at the time of painting: Riopelle, for example, painted a series of snow pictures after a visit to Austria. However, allusions to nature, though important, are not allowed to disrupt the autonomy of the paint.’



Zao Wou-Ki, 1958

MoMA’s International Program sent its major survey of largely Abstract Expressionist painting, *The New American Painting*, to Paris’s Musée national d’art moderne (16 January–15 February). This travelling show had begun at the Kunsthalle Basel, opening on 19 April 1958, and visited Milan, Madrid, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Brussels before being shown in Paris and finally at the Tate Gallery in London. Dorothy C. Miller directed the exhibition, in collaboration with curators from the International Program, including Frank O’Hara, whose memorial retrospective for Jackson Pollock was shown in parallel in some cities. The exhibition caused no small amount of controversy. In his review for *Le Monde*, André Chastel wrote that, ‘In Europe we have returned by more or less brutal stops and starts to the notion of the “object” and to the privileges of the *painting* as such; in the United States, ingenuous even in their surrealist revolt against the oppression of the mechanistic civilisation and its utilitarian nonsense, men have discovered the facility and the strangeness of the very act of painting.’

In August, O’Hara wrote the poem ‘Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul’, composed on the occasion of Norman Bluhm’s departure for Paris and the imminent arrival of Joan Mitchell and Jean Paul Riopelle in New York. The poem hybridised American and French artistic and national identities, and imagined sequences of continuation and mobility in a characteristically ebullient sentiment: ‘but we shall continue to be ourselves everything / continues to be possible.’

# 1960

The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, organised *School of Paris, 1959: The Internationals* (5 April–17 May), which featured works by Karel Appel, Hans Hartung, André Lansky, Jean Paul Riopelle, Gérard Schneider, Pierre Soulages (the only French-born artist represented), Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, and Zao Wou-Ki. In Soulages’s statement for the catalogue, he made the case for a de-politicised and universal national school of art: ‘The preservation of national characteristics in abstract and non-figurative painting is virtually impossible and contrary to the concepts of universality which underlie this art... Artists are valid only when they have gone beyond their historical framework and their provincial characteristics. An art is valid insofar as it is universal.’

Under the direction of Jean Fournier, Galerie Kléber displayed the group show *Itinéraire d’un jeune collectionneur, 1948–1958* (Journey of a young collector, 1948–1958). Important French artists associated with the critic Charles Estienne, such as Jean Degottex and René Duvillier, were displayed.



Francis in his Chelsea Hotel studio, New York, 1959



Mitchell with her Skye terriers Isabelle and Bertie in her studio-apartment on Rue Frémicourt, Paris, c. 1960

Michel Tapié published his important treatise *Morphologie autre* with Edition Pozzo, Turin, in which he further developed the aesthetic ideas set out in *Un art autre* (1952).

In February, Jules Alvard and François Mathey curated the exhibition *Antagonismes*, at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, and showed Joan Mitchell. Later in 1960 Mitchell was exhibited as part of *Neue Malerei: Form, Struktur, Bedeutung* at the Städtische Galerie München, Munich.

Mitchell had her maiden solo European exhibitions: the first, at Galerie Neufville, Paris (5 April–1 May), was organised by art dealers Beatrice Monti and Lawrence Rubin; the second, later in May, opened at Monti’s Galleria dell’Ariete in Milan. The following year, partly due to the success of this exhibition, Mitchell received the Milanese award Premio Lissone. In 1960, she also contributed to the Tiber Press’s publication series celebrating the dynamic relationship between New York School painters and poets, producing five colour silkscreens for a collaborative



## 1961



Frank O'Hara and Joan Mitchell in Mitchell's studio-apartment on Rue Frémicourt, Paris, c. 1960

book entitled *The Poems* with John Ashbery. The publication series also paired Frank O'Hara with Mike Goldberg, James Schuyler with Grace Hartigan, and Kenneth Koch with Alfred Leslie.

The first retrospective of work by Pierre Soulages opened at the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hanover (12 December 1960–22 January 1961) and then travelled to the Museum Folkwang, Essen; Gemeente Museum, The Hague; and Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich. Soulages was also shown at the year's *Antagonismes* (Antagonisms) at the Musées des arts décoratifs, Paris, that also included Karel Appel, Pierre Alexchinsky, Jean Degottex, Jean Dubuffet, Jean Fautrier, Sam Francis, Hans Hartung, Franz Kline, Georges Mathieu, Jean Paul Riopelle, Mark Rothko, and Zao Wou-Ki.

In July and August, Jean Paul Riopelle and Joan Mitchell were shown at the recently established Galerie Bonnier in Lausanne. The exhibition, *Maussion, Miotte, Mitchell, Mubin, Riopelle, Saura, Tumarkin*, brought together artists associated with postwar lyrical abstraction. Included was the lesser-known Israeli artist and set designer Igaël Tumarkin, as well as Antonio Saura, affiliated with the El Paso collective, who had been displayed the previous year in Frank O'Hara's major MoMA survey, *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture*. Mitchell was represented by three paintings, all entitled *Composition* and made in 1960. Riopelle also showed a work with the name *Composition* (1953–54) and four paintings from the preceding three years: *Chevauchée* (1958), *Foison* (1958), *Tumulte* (1959), and *Water Mill* (1960).



Francis in his Arcueil studio, Paris, 1960

## 1962

Jean Paul Riopelle exhibited his sculptures and modelling at Galerie Jacques Dubourg, Paris (22 February–22 March). Later in the year Riopelle was awarded the Guggenheim International Award.

## 1963

Fresh from his success at the Venice Biennale the previous year, *Jean Paul Riopelle: Painting and Sculpture* opened at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (10 January–3 February), before travelling to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Art Gallery of Toronto, and the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.



# 1964

Two major retrospectives of the work of Maria Helena Vieira da Silva were shown, at the Musée de Grenoble, France, and the Museo Civico, Turin, Italy. Her architectonic paintings, which explored the multiplicities of perspectival viewpoints, often using a plumb line, differed from her peers’ gesturally abstract canvases in their almost mathematical mode of composition. Two years later Vieira da Silva would be the first woman to receive the French Government’s Grand Prix National des Arts, after becoming a naturalised citizen in 1956.

Supported by his friend André Malraux, the French minister for cultural affairs under General de Gaulle, Zao Wou-Ki became a naturalised French citizen. Zao had first met Malraux two years earlier when the artist was encouraged by a publisher to illustrate Malraux’s *La tentation de l’Occident* (The Temptation of the West) with ten lithographs. Zao may have been personally drawn to the subject matter of Malraux’s first major publication, an exchange of letters between a young Chinese visiting Europe and a young Frenchman visiting China in the 1920s.

# 1965

Henri Michaux refused the French National Prize for Literature, demonstrating his conflicted relationship with his adopted country. Feeling separated from his home country and his mother tongue (his family spoke the Belgian dialect of French, Walloon, and he attended a Flemish-speaking school), Michaux often poeticised a sense of spatial isolation and ambivalence in his poetry, as in ‘Peace in the Breaking’:

[...] native land that offers  
that doesn’t use my two hands  
but that grinds up a thousand hands  
that I recognize yet do not know  
that embraces me and through mixing  
subtracts me from myself, opens me up,  
and assimilates me

John Ashbery published an article on Joan Mitchell, ‘An Expressionist in Paris’, in the April issue of *Art News*. Writing at the time of Mitchell’s solo exhibition at the Stable Gallery in New York and sensitively reading several of her ‘remembered landscapes’, such as *Calvi* and *Girolata* (both 1964), Ashbery reflected on his friend’s personal and artistic experience of Parisian life through the French term *apatride* (‘stateless’): ‘Joan Mitchell is one of the American artists who live in Paris for extra-artistic reasons and who are different in that way from the Americans who went to live there before the last war. They are not expatriates but *apatrides*.’ In ‘American Sanctuary in Paris’, written in the same year at the end of his decade living in the French capital, Ashbery discussed the liberating potential of isolating oneself in the city: ‘American artists no longer come to Europe to study... . New York is the capital of the contemporary art world, and it is the French who are now beginning

# 1966

their *Wanderjahre* in New York or Los Angeles... . Americans who still continue to live and work in France ... prefer France for reasons of privacy and isolation.’

On 9 June, Galerie Maeght’s show *Riopelle* opened, marking the start of Jean Paul Riopelle’s long professional relationship with the gallery. In Paris, Riopelle’s career would flourish through the support of Aimé Maeght, who also represented friends Georges Braque and Alberto Giacometti. Riopelle benefited from the Fondation Maeght’s communal work space and printing arm, Arte, where he experimented with lithographs and etchings. As he explored new printing techniques and shared studio space with Alexander Calder and Jean Miró, Riopelle returned to figurative modes of representation after working almost exclusively in abstraction since moving to Paris. Riopelle would continue to be represented by Pierre Matisse in New York and Arthur Tooth in London: ‘I was always close to my dealers because our relationship was always based on “shared opinions,”’ Riopelle once mused. ‘When my dealers’ opinions changed, I changed dealers.’

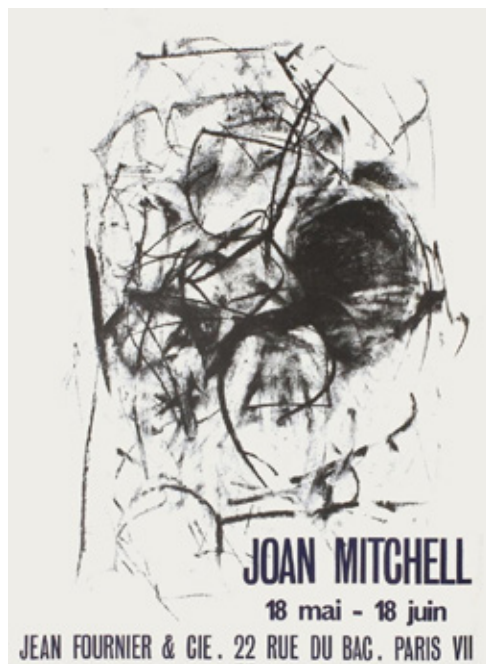
The first major United States retrospective of work by Pierre Soulages opened at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston (20 March–22 May), curated by James Johnson Sweeney. Soulages decided to hang the pictures out in the space for the first time, constructing a framework of display whereby thin nylon strings, extended between ceiling and floor, show the work. Soulages would later experiment using cables.



# 1967

Joan Mitchell had her first solo exhibition at Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris (18 May–17 June), and would remain affiliated with Fournier until her death. The exhibition invitation included an extract from Jacques Dupin’s poem ‘La Nuit grandissante’.

In July, Mitchell purchased a two-acre estate in Vétheuil, about sixty-five kilometres northwest of Paris, with money inherited from a substantial trust fund left by her mother, who had died earlier in the year. La Tour, as it was warmly named by Mitchell and Riopelle, was a country retreat and studio, overlooking the Seine and with a garden that grew spectacular sunflowers. Immediately below the house was a small cottage once rented by Claude Monet, whose name Mitchell was known to rhyme with ‘bonnet’, perhaps to playfully push back against critical interpretations that traced the artist’s influence on her work.



Poster for *Joan Mitchell*, Jean Fournier & Cie, Paris, 1967

# 1968

Sam Francis received an honorary doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley, his alma mater, and was recognised with a major solo show at the Centre national d’art contemporain, Fondation Rothschild, Paris.

# 1969

Riopelle began work on an ambitious public sculpture project and homage to sport, *La Joute* (The Joust), an ensemble of bronze sculptures (among them an Indian chief and a bear dressed in female clothing) with a central fountain that operated on a 32-minute kinetic sequence. A plaster version was exhibited at Galerie Maeght in 1970. The bronze was cast in Italy in 1974, and the monumental sculpture was first installed in Montreal’s Parc Olympique, in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve district, to inaugurate the 1976 Olympic Games. With some controversy, *La Joute* was relocated to the Place Jean Paul Riopelle downtown, where it now faces the city’s convention centre.

While Riopelle and Joan Mitchell maintained their rue Frémicourt apartment in Paris, Mitchell’s principal residence became Vétheuil, and it would remain so until her death in October 1992. In 1969, she completed the first of her *Sunflower* suite, which referred to the bright golden-rayed flowers she kept in her garden.

There was no significant event as such that signalled the dissolution of the *art autre* programme, and many of the artists introduced here continued painting in versions of *abstraction lyrique* late into their careers. However, it is generally recognised that by the end of the 1960s any coherent justification for an international language of gestural abstraction had been undermined by the generation who worked in styles associated with Minimalism, Pop, and Fluxus. *Art autre* may have been radically outsider art at one time, but it would soon be accused of being the establishment art form in the United States and western Europe. Nevertheless, no account of the postwar period can ignore its contribution to the long history of abstraction in Western modern art.





Soulages in his studio on rue Victor Schoelcher, Paris, 1949

## CHECKLIST OF PLATES

## SAM FRANCIS

### ARCUEIL

1956/58

Oil on canvas

80¾ × 76 inches (205.1 × 193 cm)

Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum,  
Washington University in St Louis, Gift of  
Mr and Mrs Richard K Weil, 1962

### COMPOSITION

c. 1957-1958

Oil on canvas

15¾ × 31½ inches (40 × 80 cm)

Henie Onstad Kunstsenter collection,  
Hövikodden, Norway

### UNTITLED

1958

Gouache on paper laid down on canvas

59½ × 79¾ inches (151.1 × 202.6 cm)

Private Collection

### UNTITLED

1959

Tempera on paper

30⅞ × 22<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches (78.5 × 58 cm)

Private Collection, Europe

### BLUE SERIES, NO. 1

1960

Gouache on paper

41½ × 29½ inches (105.4 × 74.9 cm)

Private Collection



JOAN MITCHELL

UNTITLED  
c. 1956  
Oil on canvas  
74⅞ × 74⅞ inches (190 × 190 cm)  
Private Collection

UNTITLED  
1957  
Oil on canvas  
69 × 58½ inches (175.2 × 148.5 cm)  
Private Collection, Santa Barbara

UNTITLED  
c. 1958  
Oil on canvas  
21 × 20¼ inches (53.3 × 51.4 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe

UNTITLED  
1961  
Oil on canvas  
37 × 36 inches (94 × 91.4 cm)  
Private Collection, Los Angeles

JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE

ABSTRACTION (ORANGE)  
1952  
Oil on canvas  
38⅜ × 77 inches (97 × 195.5 cm)  
Museu Coleção Berardo

UNTITLED  
1953  
Oil on canvas  
28¾ × 21¼ inches (73 × 54 cm)  
Private Collection

HORIZONTAL, BLACK AND WHITE  
1955  
Oil on canvas  
28¾ × 36¼ inches (73 × 92 cm)  
Henie Onstad Kunstsenter collection,  
Hövikodden, Norway

L'HEURE FEU FOLLET  
1956  
Oil on canvas  
17⅞ × 21⅝ inches (45.5 × 55 cm)  
Private Collection

UNTITLED  
1959  
Oil on canvas  
23⅜ × 31⅞ inches (59.5 × 81 cm)  
Private Collection

PIERRE SOULAGES

PEINTURE 73 × 54 CM,  
28 MAI 1954  
1954  
Oil on canvas  
28¾ × 21¼ inches (73 × 54 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe

PEINTURE 195 × 130 CM,  
3 FÉVRIER 1957  
1957  
Oil on canvas  
76¾ × 51⅝ inches (195 × 130 cm)  
Private Collection

PEINTURE 195 × 155 CM,  
7 FÉVRIER 1957  
1957  
Oil on canvas  
76¾ × 61⅞ inches (195 × 155 cm)  
Private Collection, Los Angeles

PEINTURE 162 × 130 CM,  
6 OCTOBRE 1963  
1963  
Oil on canvas  
63⅞ × 51¼ inches (162 × 130 cm)  
Private Collection

PEINTURE 130 × 162 CM,  
12 MAI 1965  
1965  
Oil on canvas  
51⅞ × 63¾ inches (130 × 162 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe

ZAO WOU-KI

28.05.65  
1965  
Oil on canvas  
25⅞ × 36¼ inches (65 × 92 cm)  
Private Collection

16.09.69  
1969  
Oil on canvas  
31⅞ × 51⅝ inches (81 × 130 cm)  
Private Collection

10.04.70  
1970  
Oil on canvas  
18⅞ × 21⅞ inches (46 × 55 cm)  
Private Collection, Europe



Published on the occasion of

UN ART AUTRE

26 April – 5 July 2019

LÉVY GORVY

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