

PROPERTY OF THE ESTATE OF BLEMA AND H. ARNOLD STEINBERG



Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg
Courtesy of the family of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg

A PASSION FOR PHILANTHROPY, ART & HIGHER EDUCATION

IT IS WITH great honour that Heffel presents a selection of masterpieces from the Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg this spring. Included among the top 200 collectors in the world by *ARTnews*, the late couple had extraordinary taste and a profound passion for art that is mirrored in the exceptional Post-War & Contemporary works on offer, and in their collection as a whole. As Karen Thomson states in their family catalogue, “The breadth, depth and quality of his and his wife’s collection reflect an active engagement with the art world that spans the last five decades.” More powerful than their collection, however, is the far-reaching and enduring legacy that Blema and Arnold left behind, thanks to their impressive contributions to the community, their leadership and their philanthropy.

The Steinbergs’ outstanding collection was built out of a passion for art that they developed together as a couple, after their marriage in 1957. At that time, Arnold Steinberg was working at Dominion Securities Corp. Ltd. before joining his family’s grocery chain in 1958. Founded by his grandmother Ida Steinberg in 1917, Steinberg’s (later renamed Steinberg) would grow to become Quebec’s first modern grocery chain. Throughout

his very successful career in leadership and board positions at Steinberg Inc., Arnold dedicated any spare time to charitable, educational and cultural initiatives, with a focus on public health.

His extensive involvement with the Montreal Children’s Hospital began with a push to add vitamin D to Quebec-produced milk in order to help combat rickets. He later became co-chairman of the Capital Campaign for the Montreal Children’s Hospital and a founder of the National Food Distribution Centre for the Treatment of Metabolic Diseases. Arnold was also a founding trustee of the Inter-Service Clubs Council Foundation, a founding member and chairman of Canadians for Health Research, an executive committee member of the Canada Council, officer of Federation CJA of Montreal and board chairman of Canada Health Infoway. In 1993, he was made a Member of the Order of Canada.

Perhaps most notably, Arnold also joined forces with his alma mater McGill University in Montreal, and it was there that he devoted much of his heart and his support. “A force of uncommon integrity and grace, Mr. Steinberg reflects his deep loyalty to McGill as constant ambassador, inspiration and friend,” read a statement from the university. At various points, he served as chairman of the board of governors of the McGill University–Montreal Children’s Hospital Research Institute, a

member of the board of governors of McGill University, and later as governor emeritus, and founding chairman of the board of the McGill University Health Centre, among other titles. All of this led to one of the most gratifying roles of his extraordinary life, when in 2009 he was appointed chancellor of McGill University.

Upon his passing, Heather Munroe-Blum, vice-chancellor of McGill, reflected: “Arnold was a prince of a man. He shaped McGill, Montreal and Canada in deeply progressive and positive ways—uniquely, indelibly. He influenced everyone he met through his gracious warmth, joyous optimism and incisive intelligence.”

Blema Steinberg wore many hats and was exceptionally accomplished. She too was known for her remarkable dedication to McGill University and her continuous philanthropic efforts. She was a double graduate of McGill, where she completed her BA and PhD, and a graduate of Cornell University, where she completed her MA. She became a professor in 1961 and was appointed to McGill’s Department of Political Science, where she taught for more than 40 years, before being honoured with the title of professor emerita following her retirement in 2001. During her tenure, she focused her research efforts on the psychological factors of decision-making and character studies of leaders in politics. Blema authored many academic publications and, most notably, two books—*Women in Power: The Personalities and Leadership Styles of Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher* and *Shame and Humiliation: Presidential Decision-Making on Vietnam*.

Blema also pursued a second career in psychoanalysis to complement her already flourishing professorship. She helped adults navigate depression, grief and loss, anxiety, self-esteem issues and relationship difficulties. She saw patients at her private practice and also through the Henry Kravitz Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Clinic, which offered low-fee care to the disadvantaged.

Together, Arnold and Blema established the Steinberg Centre for Simulation and Interactive Learning at McGill University, a first-of-its-kind facility that uses medical simulation to enhance the skills of health care professionals.

Among these countless endeavours, the Steinbergs found time to build their very impressive and important art collection. This passion took them around the world to museums, galleries, collections and auctions to see, appreciate and acquire major artworks. Their interest began early in their married life in Montreal, where a close family friend had opened a gallery. Through this foundational relationship, Arnold and Blema began to appreciate and acquire works by School of Paris artists, which planted the roots of their growing collection. This interest led them to make frequent trips to France, where art galleries and museums in Paris were basking in the excitement of twentieth-century masters like Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Alberto Giacometti and others. During a pivotal time for the couple and their new-found appetite for art, they acquired prints and works on paper with a modest budget before looking closer to home for many of the masterpieces that highlight the Heffel offering this spring.

At the time, Montreal was becoming a major art centre. Artists like Jean Paul Riopelle, Paul-Émile Borduas and Guido Molinari



Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg
Photo: Owen Egan
Courtesy of McGill University

were making waves across Canada and internationally, and the Steinbergs proudly began to collect their works. Their love of these Quebec artists continued to grow, and later in their collecting life, Arnold and Blema acquired the 1953 Riopelle masterworks *Incandescence* and *Carnaval II*, lots 18 and 20 in this sale, which are among the finest examples ever painted by the internationally renowned artist. They also purchased the commanding canvases by Borduas, Molinari, Paterson Ewen and Claude Tousignant that Heffel has the honour of bringing to market this season.

Routine trips to New York in the 1970s helped shape another important part of the extensive collection, as visits to MOMA, the Guggenheim and the Whitney instilled an interest in the American Colour Field school. The couple purchased superb examples by some of the greatest artists of that period, which hung proudly next to masterworks by their Canadian counterparts.

With the goal of sharing their collection with the family business, over 1,500 works by young Canadian artists hung in the Steinberg offices in Quebec and Ontario by the 1980s. Heffel will also offer 46 works from the collection in a dedicated online specialty auction in May 2019.

Arnold Steinberg passed away in 2015, and Blema Steinberg in 2017. Prior to his passing, Arnold reflected, “Art has been such an enriching and important part of our lives that we don’t really think of ourselves as ‘collectors.’ We still experience the same thrill going into a museum, art gallery, or private collection as we did 50 years ago.”

15 Guido Molinari

AANFM LP QMG RCA SAPQ 1933 – 2004

Sans titre

acrylic on canvas, on verso signed twice,
dated 2/1968 and inscribed FM 134 OC
on a label

60 × 24 in, 152.4 × 61 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of Steinberg Inc.
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above in 1990
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal

LITERATURE

“Guido Molinari,” *The Toronto Star*,
March 13, 1969
Gail Dexter, “An Artist Unites Man and
Environment,” *The Toronto Star*,
March 15, 1969
Dennis Young, *49th Parallels: New Canadian
Art*, Ringling Museum of Art, 1971,
pages 15 – 16
Pierre Théberge, *Guido Molinari: Écrits sur
l’art*, National Gallery of Canada, 1976,
pages 44 and 86
Robert Welsh, “Molinari and the Science
of Colour and Line,” *Canadian Art Review*
vol. 5, no. 1, 1978, for a full discussion of
Molinari’s understanding of Structuralist
theory and its impact on his oeuvre,
pages 3 – 20
Paulette Gagnon and Yolande Racine,
L’œil du collectionneur, Musée d’art
contemporain de Montréal, 1996,
listed page 58

EXHIBITED

Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal,
L’œil du collectionneur, October 18, 1996 –
January 5, 1997

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND OUTSTANDING
achievement began for Guido Molinari in 1959
with his initial attempts to eliminate horizon-
tal or angular elements from compositions.
Relying solely on repeating vertical bands of
colour, soon to all be of equal width, estab-
lished Molinari’s mature visual voice. By 1961,
suites of repeating stripes in multiple hues
exploded across canvases and catapulted a new
artist onto the international stage. Molinari’s
striped paintings entered collections such as
the National Gallery of Canada (1963), Vancou-
ver Art Gallery (1964) and, with his inclusion
in *The Responsive Eye* (1965), the Museum

of Modern Art, New York (1966). A Guggenheim Fellowship
(1967) and the prestigious David Bright Prize for his monumental
striped paintings, presented when he represented Canada at the
34th Venice Biennale (1968), rounded out the decade.

Throughout this period of intense activity, all of Molinari’s
paintings were comprised solely of vertical bands of colour: visu-
ally dynamic groupings of carefully calibrated hues that seem
to repeat and set off optical illusions unique to each observer.
Colour detached from both figure and ground spreads out across
a flattened picture plane. Each colour appears to be constantly
on the move, reaffirming Molinari’s belief that “there is no such
thing as colour, there are only colour harmonies. Any given colour
exists only in its shape and dimensions, and its correlation with
other colours.”

Sans titre, like all of what have come to be known as Molinari’s
Bi-serial paintings, was developed by dividing the canvas into a
series of sequential groupings of vertical bands of colour. The
repeating colour bands in *Sans titre* appear twice, in the same
order, bifurcating the painting into two equivalent rectangles
comprised of four stripes each, or is it four equivalent rectangles
of hues. Molinari was interested in colour relationships, and the
degree to which rhythmic sequences of repeating colours begin
to actively respond to the viewer’s position once you are engaged
in looking closely. Essentially through his extensive reading of
Structuralist philosophy and his enthusiasm to move beyond the
achievements of Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock, artists he
admired, Molinari was always testing the perceptive capacity of
each viewer.

How much visual information can any individual hold onto?
For example, if you focus on two bands in *Sans titre*, perhaps red
and grey, it is relatively easy to at the same time expand your
comprehensive capacities to the adjacent bands on either side—
so four bands—but make that next step, to six bands, and your
previously concentrated perception of the pair of colours where
you began your visual journey begins to wane. Dennis Young
wrote of the artist, “His serial repetitions produce slight changes
of resonance in each colour note across the work. By this
method of repetition, Molinari implies a discursive, temporal
reading of the canvas, which, like the tonalities used, is aimed
at mitigating the figure-ground gestalt ... Colour hovers near the
painted surface and the gestalt potential of the work remains
unfirm: just as each hue makes a slight equivocation where it
abuts an adjoining colour.”

The immersive visual richness of *Sans titre* from 1968 results
from an exploration of what the artist called colour / space. In the
1976 National Gallery of Canada retrospective catalogue, Pierre
Théberge described these paintings as “a completely new picto-
rial space.” An unrelenting rigour underscores all of Molinari’s
Bi-serial paintings, achieving what he described in 1969 as his
goal as an artist, “to do away with the distinction between figure
and ground. There is a unity between man and his surroundings.
My paintings express it by permitting the viewer to enter the
painting.”

How each colour actually performs when placed side by side
and repeated across a flat surface is central to Molinari’s oeuvre;
that and his belief that emotional responses to juxtapositions of



Guido Molinari; who represented Canada at the 1968 *Venice Biennale*
Photo: Frank Lennon / *Toronto Star*
Courtesy of Getty Images, editorial #502503307

colour are fundamental to painting. The striped paintings are any-
thing but cool abstraction, and their force in engaging viewers is
unrelated to their scale. *Sans titre* does not so much envelop you;
its constantly active surface engages you. Molinari’s stripes form
delicate relationships to initiate an ongoing experience, anticipa-
tions realized inform experience, and all of the elements in the
painting flow freely—no blanks unfilled, no single colour pushed
to the back, no overlaps, and most importantly, the self-identity
of each individual colour band is never sacrificed.

Each colour is fully saturated, individually applied with unerr-
ing gestural detachment and abutted with precision. Colour alone
is activating the space in each painting. With figure-ground abol-
ished, Molinari’s colour / space brings the dynamics of time and
movement into the relationship one can have with the painting.
As your eyes move, a colour relationship changes, space opens up
or folds in. Molinari creates an accordion of colour in which all
of the optical action is orchestrated with the simplest of means—
through abutting bands of colour and the powerful influence each
has on the other.

We thank Gary Dufour, adjunct associate professor at the
University of Western Australia, for contributing the above essay.
Dufour was the curator of the exhibition *Guido Molinari, 1951 –
1961: The Black and White Paintings*, shown at the Vancouver Art
Gallery, the Art Gallery of Windsor and the Art Gallery of Ontario
in 1989 – 1990.

ESTIMATE: \$60,000 – 80,000



16 Guido Molinari

AANFM LP QMG RCA SAPQ 1933 – 2004

Dualité blanche

acrylic on canvas, signed and dated 1959
and on verso inscribed 2065, rue Filion,
Saint-Laurent, Qué. and \$1200 and #1096
on a label
50 × 50 in, 127 × 127 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of Guy Gérin-Lajoie, Montreal
Galerie Simon Blais, Montreal
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above in 2014
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal

LITERATURE

Fernande Saint-Martin, “Révélation de l’art abstrait,”
Art abstrait, École des beaux-arts de Montréal, 1959,
unpaginated
The Fourth Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Art,
National Gallery of Canada, 1961

EXHIBITED

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *The Fourth Biennial
Exhibition of Canadian Art*, May 20 – September 4,
1961, catalogue #55

MONTREAL IS REMARKABLE for giving Canada not one, but two true avant-garde movements, first the Automatists and then the Plasticiens. The Automatists, led by Paul-Émile Borduas, had established themselves in the early 1940s, but only in the 1950s, after many difficult years of public resistance, did they finally win the day. But just as quickly, they found themselves challenged by a next generation of painters who rebuffed their predecessors’ spontaneous working methods in favour of their opposite: hard-edged geometry. The decisive turning points for the young Plasticiens were the solo exhibitions that Guido Molinari and Claude Tousignant presented in 1956 at Molinari’s Galerie l’Actuelle, which showed paintings that addressed the issues of surface, flatness and non-referentiality in a more fundamental way than Montreal had heretofore seen.

The two exhibitions were radical, and for both artists they had also, in effect, been leaps into the dark, with neither fully understanding the implications of the work they had exhibited. For the rest of the 1950s their challenge was to reconsider it all, to parse out in their studios what they had done in order to build up a firmer foundation from which to carry on. For both of them, and for the larger Plasticien cause, 1959, the year in which Molinari executed *Dualité blanche*, turned out to be a significant year. Crucial for Molinari was his technical decision to abandon oil paint

for acrylic. For the Plasticiens as a group, it was the exhibition *Art abstrait*, which took place at the beginning of the year at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal, that first bestowed critical legitimacy on the new movement, its catalogue texts underscoring geometric painting’s relevance to the real and present world.

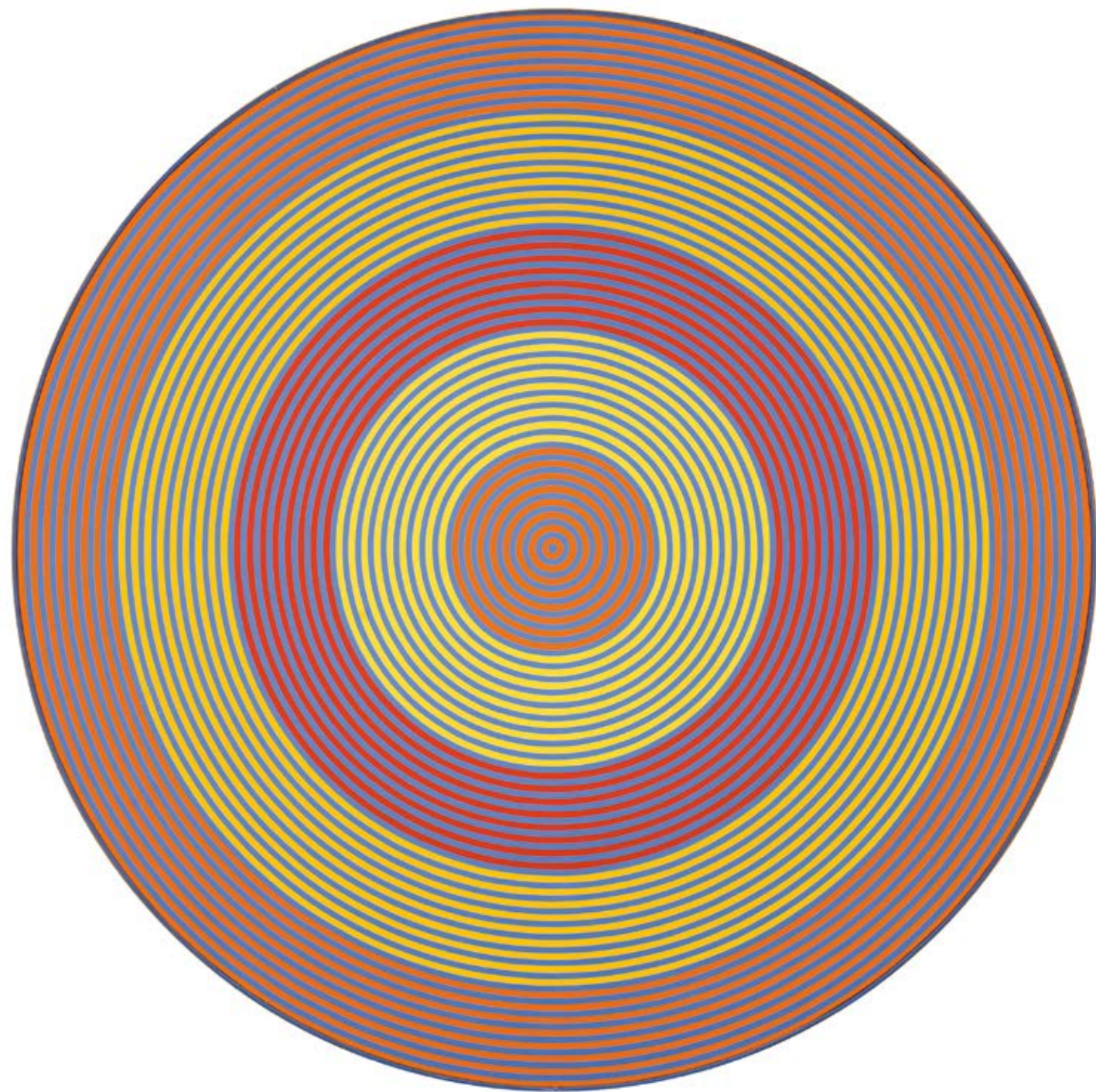
Molinari adopted acrylic paint—which had only recently become commercially available—to solve problems posed by the geometric demands of paintings like *Dualité blanche*. Acrylic dried quickly, allowing him, using masking tape, to achieve the desired crisp hard edges that bounded his planes of colour, undistracted by traces of the hand. He would eventually come to call his work razor-edge, contrasting it to the softer, slightly illusionistic edges of the American Colour Field painters, like Kenneth Noland, and like Jack Bush in Toronto. Molinari needed his colour planes to stay taut on the surface and be uncompromisingly flat and up front.

Dualité blanche, with its simplified palette of black, white and red, is bracingly fresh and bold. Its scale is authoritative and majestic, with powerful rhythms surging through its asymmetrical structure. Its composition balances out formally, as it must, but its energy is restless, its vertical movement rises and falls, barely held in check by a white horizontal crossbar. It is a painting that reaches out to tug at our muscles. And indeed, that was a principal point that the exhibition *Art abstrait* set out to make: that paintings like *Dualité blanche* function less in pictorial space than they do in the objective world.

The introductory text to the exhibition catalogue, written by the estimable Fernande Saint-Martin, who was also Molinari’s wife, was intended as a manifesto for this new rigorous hard-edge direction in Montreal art represented by Molinari and his fellow exhibitors. To Automatist-trained eyes this “art abstrait” looked mathematical and cold, but as Saint-Martin explained, geometric art is neither without emotion nor cut off from the everyday world. It should be seen and understood instead as a broader conception of realism. The new abstract art can explore the world more profoundly than traditional painting because it is capable of establishing even “more adequate relations” with reality. Abstract art is about discovering, as she said, “the structures of an unceasingly non-verbal world” as it was being realized by psychology and physics. Therefore, it is not about surface appearances, but about the deepest dimensions of a modern humanity. This is the optimistic theme that also prevails throughout the individual artists’ texts in the *Art abstrait* catalogue: that their work is always fully immersed in human experience; that, despite their resort to geometry, creativity is an altogether intuitive process and has little to do with rational calculation.

We thank Roald Nasgaard, author of *Abstract Painting in Canada*, for contributing the above essay.

ESTIMATE: \$60,000 – 80,000



17 Claude Tousignant

AANFM LP QMG RCA 1932 -

Sans titre

acrylic on canvas, on verso signed, dated 6/1966
and inscribed FT 106 ac on a label
42 in diameter, 106.7 cm diameter

PROVENANCE

Galerie Thérèse Dion, Montreal
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above in 1990
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg, Montreal

CLAUDE TOUSIGNANT IS one of the giants of Canadian modern abstraction. He has been a major innovator, contributing to a number of phases of non-objective art from the time of his emergence in 1952. Tousignant is continuing to create and evolve in full force today, however, without question his career is most associated with his geometric Op Art paintings of the 1960s. *Sans titre* from 1966 is an outstanding example of his unique iconic signature image.

In contradistinction to the lush palette-knife painterly textural applications of the Automatists, Tousignant's interest in geometry and colour drew him to the legacy of the Bauhaus and the constructivists—Josef Albers, Piet Mondrian, László Moholy-Nagy and Barnett Newman. By 1956 he was creating hard-edge abstraction, with meticulous thin, even coats of industrial car paint that eliminated all texture and brush-strokes. Each band of colour or area was exclusively one hue, without any modulation or shading. Thus, Tousignant is recognized as a central figure in the second generation of Montreal abstraction, the group the Plasticiens.

All of these inventive practitioners employed newly developed acrylic paints to optimize dazzling colour as the key sensation to be experienced through their work. The properties of acrylic are ideal to pursue hard-edged painting, along with masking tape and a clear acrylic sealer to create razor-sharp, crisp clean lines. Masking tape comes in rolls, and each strip of tape, by definition, can most naturally be used to create straight lines of a consistent even width. Additionally, the most common shape of a canvas stretcher is either a rectangle or a square. Thereby, the properties of the material and the customary shape of the canvas dictate rectilinear compositions as the most suitable. The great majority of hard-edged painting compositions feature lines or shapes bearing 90-degree angles.

In 1962, Tousignant began working on circular-shaped canvases. They are a technical marvel, a brazen virtuoso dare: creating hand-painted, perfect hard-edged circles of machine-like precision. He explored this motif for over a decade. *Sans titre*, dated 1966, is from the period of his greatest critical acclaim

and rapid rise to prominence. In 1965, Tousignant and Guido Molinari were the sole two Canadians included in the seminal exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (it toured to five other US cities). It defined a new tendency referred to as Op Art and featured leading international figures of the movement, including Albers and Larry Poons. Tousignant represented Canada at the prestigious *8th Bienal de São Paulo* in 1965.

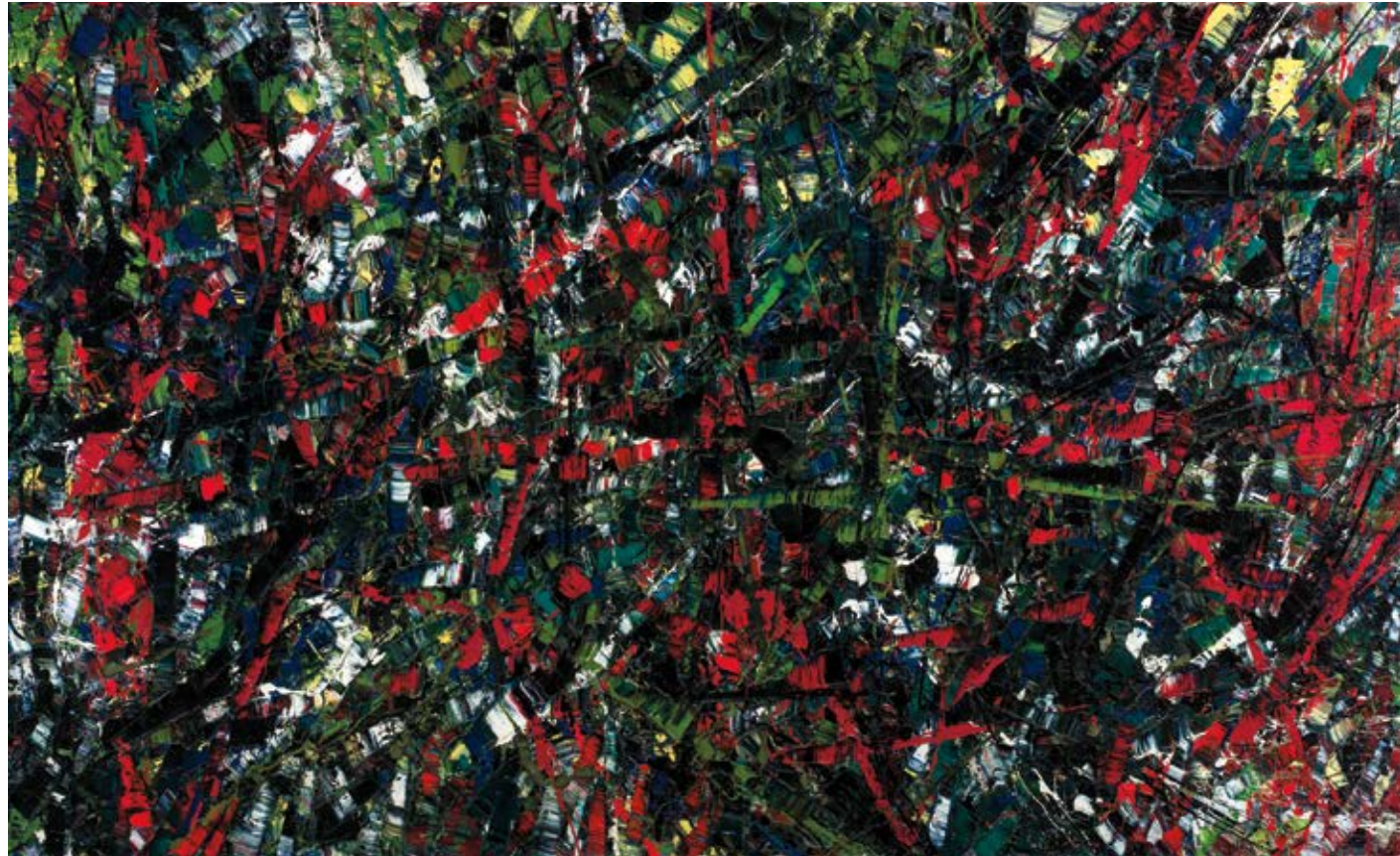
In 1966, he participated in the National Gallery of Canada traveling exhibition *Constructions de Montréal*. In 1967, he won First Prize in the painting section at *Perspective '67*, Art Gallery of Ontario, also shown at Expo 67. In 1968, he was included in a staggering number of exhibitions worldwide, among them the Edinburgh International Festival of the Arts; Musée national d'art moderne, Paris; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome; Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, Lausanne; Palais des beaux-arts, Brussels; *Canada: Art d'aujourd'hui*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and *Canadian Artists '68*, National Gallery of Canada, *7th Biennial of Canadian Painting*. By 1970 he was prominently discussed in art history texts, notably in *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, by Dennis Reid.

Sans titre is deceptively simple. There are equal-width concentric bands of blue interspersed with what at first appear to be the other components of the primary triad: red and yellow, but which turn out to be red, orange and two yellows. When these colours are viewed at a distance, the eye blends them into various subtle intonations of green and lilac. Yet up close, the individual colour contrasts explode in a cacophony of dynamic visual stimulation. Such works feign the posture of cool, intellectual exercises, but this target painting is anything except reserved. *Sans titre* is “romantic minimalism”; its configurations advance and recede, drawing the viewer into its depths.

Works of this period have been avidly acquired for distinguished private and corporate collections. Tousignant's works are in nearly every important public museum collection in Canada and beyond, including the National Gallery of Canada, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Art Gallery of Ontario, Vancouver Art Gallery, Phoenix Art Museum and the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum.

We thank Jeffrey Spalding for contributing the above essay. Spalding is an artist, curator, author and educator. For more than 40 years, Spalding has served in leadership roles at art museums and educational institutions. He is currently an Art Consultant for the Tao Hua Tan Cultural and Creative Company, and a Lifetime Senior Artist, Tao Hua Tan International Artist Creative Residency, China.

ESTIMATE: \$50,000 – 70,000



18 Jean Paul Riopelle

AUTO CAS OC QMG RCA SCA 1923 – 2002

Incandescence

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1953 and on verso signed, titled on the Pierre Matisse gallery label, dated, inscribed *Cat. No. 6* and *H* and numbered 4856 on a label
35 × 57 ¾ in, 88.9 × 146.7 cm

PROVENANCE

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York,
inventory #St 2974
Acquired from the above by Elliot Fish,
March 4, 1954
Sold sale of *Contemporary Paintings, Drawings
and Sculptures*, Sotheby's, Madison Avenue
Galleries, New York, May 4 and 5, 1982, lot 22
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal

LITERATURE

Georges Duthuit, *Riopelle: First American Exhibition*,
Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1954, listed, unpaginated
Jean Paul Riopelle, Svensk-Franska Konstgalleriet,
1959, listed page 7
Gilbert Érouart, *Riopelle in Conversation*, 1995,
pages 4 and 10
Yseult Riopelle, *Jean Paul Riopelle Catalogue Raisonné*,
Volume 1, 1939 – 1953, 1999, listed page 382 and
reproduced page 357, catalogue #1953.004H.1953
Marie-Claude Corbeil, Kate Helwig and Jennifer Poulin,
Jean Paul Riopelle: The Artist's Materials, Getty
Conservation Institute, 2011, page 9

EXHIBITED

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, *Riopelle:
First American Exhibition*, January 5 – 23, 1954,
catalogue #6
Svensk-Franska Konstgalleriet, Stockholm,
Jean Paul Riopelle, 1959, catalogue #6



detail



detail



Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, *Riopelle: First American Exhibition*, 1954, catalogue cover



Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, *Riopelle: First American Exhibition*, 1954, catalogue interior



GUSTAVE COURBET
The Source of the Loue
 oil on canvas, 1864
 39 ¼ x 56 in, 99.7 x 142.2 cm
 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York,
 H.O. Havemeyer Collection, #29.100.122
 Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929

Not for sale with this lot



detail

JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE'S compelling paintings are at once classics of mid-twentieth-century modernist abstract art and the object of fascination for new generations. The 2018 exhibition *Mitchell/Riopelle: Nothing in Moderation*—originating at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) and seen at the Art Gallery of Ontario—for example, presented the sweep of Riopelle's painterly career alongside that of his life and painting partner's—American Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell, whom he met in Paris in 1955. While we are sometimes encouraged to look at and ponder only what we can see on the canvas with painting of this sort, institutional contexts—especially a work's exhibition, collecting, and thus reception history—are also important to our full appreciation of a given work. This is especially the case with *Incandescence*, which was part of *Riopelle: First American Exhibition*, seen at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York City in 1954. While Riopelle was included in the *Younger European Painters* exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1953 (the Guggenheim purchased a work from this show, *La nuit bleue*, from 1953), the commercial exhibit in which *Incandescence* appeared was indeed his first American solo exhibit. Riopelle was at the height of his painterly prowess, so this was the time to challenge the US market, with its many influential painters and critics.

Riopelle's New York dealer, the renowned Pierre Matisse, was the younger son of Henri Matisse and his wife Amélie; he established his New York gallery in 1931. Riopelle has reflected that it was important to him to be close personally to his art dealers, to share values on art and in life more generally. "When my dealers' opinions changed, I changed dealers," he quipped. Riopelle and

the younger Matisse shared interests in sailing and cars (Riopelle raced cars and prized his sailboat, the *Serica*) as well as abstract art. Matisse also represented Mitchell. Importantly, too, Riopelle admired the Matisse family's resistance activities in World War II France. He came to know Pierre Matisse through art historian and critic Georges Duthuit, whose memorably vivid essay on Riopelle accompanied the 1954 New York exhibition. Duthuit had married Henri Matisse's daughter and was thus the art dealer's brother-in-law. This circle of powerful cultural figures also included Duthuit's frequent interlocutor Samuel Beckett, who translated the Duthuit essay for the 1954 exhibit and became, in turn, a friend of Riopelle's. "We would talk for hours," the painter reported. This circuit of friendship and commentary continued to the next generation: when Riopelle traveled to the Canadian Arctic in 1977, he was accompanied by Claude Duthuit, an underwater archaeologist and the son of Georges Duthuit and grandson of Henri Matisse.

This institutional history must include reference to Duthuit's important essay "A Painter of Awakening: Jean-Paul Riopelle," begun in 1951. His memorable opening sentence sets the tone for our engagement with this passionate painting: "Like a trapper fresh from the Canadian solitudes measuring his stride to our narrow pavements, Jean-Paul Riopelle seems hardly to contain the flooding energies of youth..." Playing a stereotype, André Breton, "Pope" of the Surrealists according to Riopelle and other artists, had dubbed Riopelle a "master trapper" in the 1940s. What might seem in Duthuit's reiteration like a primitivist stereotype of the northern woodsman as naive was actually true of Riopelle, the lifelong hunter and lover of northern climes.

Duthuit's incandescent essay is replete with new ways to understand Riopelle's painting. For example, buttressing the intuition that these abstracts are akin to landscapes, he also justifies abstract art with an unexpected and striking comparison between Riopelle and Gustave Courbet, stating, "Or as though Courbet, for the dark patch that he needs, had no longer to seek the justification of a bundle of sticks." Suggesting that Riopelle's works in the 1954 exhibition—including *Incandescence*—show us a primordial landscape, not a figurative depiction of anything, Duthuit emphasizes the artist's ability to work as Nature. Perhaps he is competing, on Riopelle's behalf, with Jackson Pollock's purported claim "I am nature." The trope was common at the time; Riopelle claimed that Ozias Leduc was "nature incarnate." Duthuit continues with a reference to one of the French nineteenth-century master's best-known motifs: "And in truth, before certain canvases of Riopelle, we are tempted to exclaim: The source of the Loue, in its first infancy!" For Duthuit, Riopelle's canvases can be seen as the even more primordial source in this landscape.

Such art historical analogies deployed by a writer orient readers to a way of seeing; they also reveal much about the writer's priorities. Duthuit (and Pierre Matisse in using the essay for Riopelle's inaugural exhibit) could assume that New York audiences knew Courbet's *Source of the Loue* landscapes—an example from 1864 is in the Metropolitan Museum—and that these profound paintings would function to Riopelle's advantage as markers of European lineage, status and technical accomplishment. The analogy implies, for example, that unlike his New York contemporary Barnett Newman, Riopelle was not about to abjure such associations with high culture and start over in an abstract

idiom that claimed no history. Yet despite this subtle invocation of European roots, for Duthuit, abstraction is essentially linked to Nature in Riopelle's work.

To what aspects of *Incandescence* are we alerted by Duthuit's analogy with Courbet? Riopelle typically laid down his vibrant colour thickly and quickly with a palette knife. Red, yellow, black, white and especially green predominate. Shards of sapphire blue accent the welter of gestural activity. Duthuit's cue to think in terms of Courbet's *Source of the Loue* landscapes can transport us to what is central in these nineteenth-century works, the emergence of the river from a dark grotto in the centre of the image and the contrasting white of the cascading water. Duthuit does not claim that Riopelle was thinking about or influenced by Courbet, or that *Incandescence*, for example, looks like a Courbet. The connection he evokes can only form in our minds and eyes. While he argues that the artist "must be constantly on the watch lest something of conscious logic steal into the picture, which the least of its incursions would render null and void," viewers can see the underlying "logic" of abstraction as it embraces natural phenomena before they coalesce into a landscape such as Courbet's. Abstraction, Duthuit implies, precedes figuration.

We thank Mark Cheatham, Professor of Art History at the University of Toronto and author of *Abstract Art Against Autonomy: Infection, Resistance, and Cure since the 60s*, for contributing the above essay.

ESTIMATE: \$1,500,000 – 2,500,000

19 Paul-Émile Borduas

AUTO CAS QMG RCA 1905 – 1960

Sans titre

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1958 and on verso stamped indistinctly (canvas manufacturer)
24 x 19 3/4 in, 61 x 49.8 cm

PROVENANCE

Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto
Drabinsky Gallery, Toronto
Miriam Shiell Fine Art, Toronto
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above in 1993
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal

LITERATURE

François-Marc Gagnon and Dennis Young, editors,
Paul-Émile Borduas: Écrits/Writings, 1942–1958,
Nova Scotia College of Art, 1978, page 34
Maurice Gagnon, “Conversation with Borduas,”
May 1, 1942, quoted in Ray Ellenwood, *Eggregore: A History of the Montreal Movement*, 1992,
pages 14 and 15
Paulette Gagnon and Yolande Racine, *L’œil du collectionneur*, Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, 1996, listed page 58

EXHIBITED

Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, *L’œil du collectionneur*, October 18, 1996 – January 5, 1997

PAUL-ÉMILE BORDUAS PRODUCED the painting *Sans titre*, from 1958, in Paris, where he had been living since 1955. He moved to Paris after having spent two fruitful years in New York, expecting that the French capital would still be, as it had been before the Second World War, an international centre of advanced artistic production. But Paris disappointed him. Not only did its artistic offerings pale in comparison to what Abstract Expressionism had achieved in New York, but the city also failed to give his work serious critical recognition. His Paris years were nevertheless remarkably creative. He consolidated the lessons he had learned in New York, and struck out in new directions that make his paintings still startling in the audacity of their immediate material presence. In his Paris period Borduas produced some of his most masterful works, markers of a new adventure that remained unfulfilled by his early death in 1960, at age 55.

The strength and the beauty of *Sans titre* are rooted in how physical the painting is. Borduas has spread his oil paint into thick folds and creases that often rise into high relief. His predominant colours are black and white; but he also lets some red-brown and grey streaks and patches play their roles in a roughly gridded, but perfectly poised composition. The masses of black sit, dense, within their equally palpable white surrounds, not optical holes—as they have sometimes been described—but compact insets, obdurate and solid.

The most dramatic change in Borduas’s work in Paris occurred when he substituted gesture for more deliberate construction,

building his surfaces with a palette knife. His new way of spreading and covering, while by no means systematic, is less personal than it is workmanlike, drawing attention to the paint’s own presence. More than ever the space of the painting occurs in the same space as the viewer’s, light tickling the raised ridges and casting shadows behind them, light sparkling off the white, and slowed down and absorbed into the mattes of the blacks. What finally matters about *Sans titre* is the expressive potential of the paint itself—no distracting imagery, no storytelling, just stuff—and the way that Borduas has laid it down. It is not only about what we see, but what we feel to our very fingertips.

The painting belongs solidly within the story of how, over the course of the 1940s and 1950s, Borduas translated his long-standing aesthetic theories into actual studio practices, and how in doing so he broached fundamental issues about how we experience abstract painting. In 1942, in Montreal, he announced his avant-gardism with an exhibition of gouaches, *Les Oeuvres surréalistes*, and soon after would become the leader of the Automatist movement. But already then, even as his work was still full of poetic evocations, he took pains, when he described his automatist methods, to insist that as a painter he started out from “painterly thoughts” and “not literary ideas.” In the process of working, he argued, “the painter’s song” becomes “a vibration imprinted on matter by human sensibility. Through it matter is made to live.” Borduas’s resounding conclusion: “Therein lies the source of all mystery in a work of art, that inert matter can be brought to life.” Matter, material, *matière*.

The next year, in 1943, in a lecture entitled “Ways to Appreciate a Work of Art,” he underscored how, whatever materials an artist used—metal, stone, wood, paint, paper, charcoal, etc.—the “art object is made of two things, each equally real: tangible material and the sensibility of the artist.” But “sensibility,” he carefully clarified, is not about “personal expressiveness.” Instead “the more universal the sensibility, the more lively, more identifiable and more pure it will be.”

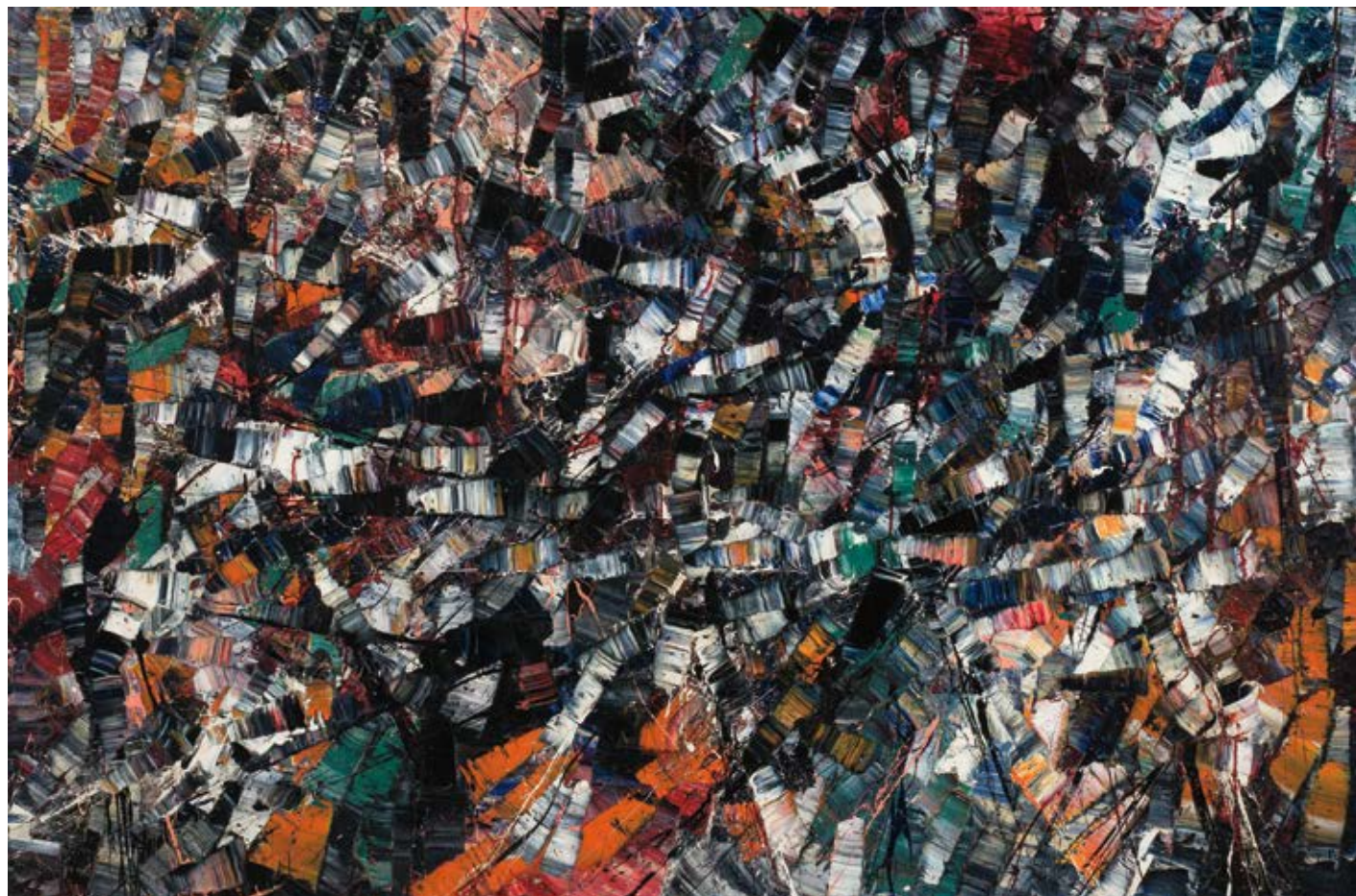
When in Paris Borduas fully turned his long-standing theories into concrete studio practice. Could he have looked with curiosity at Lucio Fontana’s work at the time or, more aptly, at Alberto Burri’s burlap collages with their black interstices, examples of which he surely saw in New York and Paris? Even if until the end of his life he never felt the need to move beyond oil paint, his visual practice, nevertheless, had more in common with those Italian, pro-Arte Povera artists than it did with anything by the French tachists. Let us not forget that Borduas never doubted that his art engaged in aesthetic problems that were shared universally by artists whether from, as he noted, Montreal, New York, Paris or even Tokyo.

We thank Rold Nasgaard, author of *Abstract Painting in Canada*, for contributing the above essay.

This work is included in François-Marc Gagnon’s online catalogue raisonné of the artist’s work at <http://www.borduas.concordia.ca>.

ESTIMATE: \$300,000 – 500,000





20 Jean Paul Riopelle

AUTO CAS OC QMG RCA SCA 1923 – 2002

Carnaval II

oil on canvas, signed and on verso signed twice, titled, dated 1953, inscribed variously *H12*, *NYAB 909 / Lot 6*, *13 May 81* and stamped with a Paris export stamp
38 × 57 ¾ in, 96.5 × 146.7 cm

PROVENANCE

Galerie Jacques Dubourg, Paris
Galleria del Naviglio, Milan
Sold sale of *Contemporary Art, Evening Sale (5056)*,
Christie's New York, May 13, 1981, lot 6
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal

LITERATURE

Georges Duthuit, *Riopelle: First American Exhibition*,
Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1954, unpaginated
Jean Paul Riopelle, Kestnergesellschaft Gallery,
1958, listed page 19
Guy Robert, *Riopelle: Chasseur d'images*, 1981, page 65
Paulette Gagnon and Yolande Racine, *L'oeil du collectionneur*,
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1996, listed page 58
Robert Bernier et al., *Jean Paul Riopelle: Des visions d'Amérique*,
1997, page 89
Yseult Riopelle, *Jean Paul Riopelle Catalogue Raisonné*,
Volume 1, 1939 – 1953, 1999, listed page 389 and reproduced
page 343, catalogue #1953.045H.1953

EXHIBITED

Kestnergesellschaft Gallery, Hanover, *Jean Paul Riopelle*,
1958, catalogue #4
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, *L'oeil du
collectionneur*, October 18, 1996 – January 5, 1997
Galerie Simon Blais, Montreal, *Jean Paul Riopelle et
Rosaline Granet*, May 29 – July 12, 2002



detail 1



detail 2



Jean Paul Riopelle and Georges Duthuit in front of *Pavane* (in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada), circa 1954

CELEBRATED IN HIS lifetime in Canada, Europe and the USA as few other Canadian artists have been, Jean Paul Riopelle was a prominent member of the pivotal Quebec avant-garde group Les Automatistes before moving to France in 1947. There he became part of the Surrealist circle, the only Canadian to exhibit with this group in a landmark 1947 exhibition at the Galerie Maeght in Paris. Paintings such as *Carnaval II* subsequently confirmed Riopelle's reputation as a leading artist of French Lyrical Abstraction, of tachisme, art informel, and most generally, of the École de Paris. These categories and descriptions set the expressive, unbridled freedom of painterly expression that we see here against the more emotionally neutral, frequently hard-edged, geometrical tendencies increasingly prevalent in both American Colour Field painting of the time and the two generations of Montreal abstractionists known as the Plasticiens.

Carnaval II was completed during the period of Riopelle's greatest celebrity: his wide recognition included participation in the *Bienal de São Paulo* in 1951 and 1955 and the *Venice Biennale* in 1954 and 1962. He returned to Quebec to live in 1972 and remained active until his death in 2002. Riopelle is important historically in part because his work focused debates about the increasingly wide and fractious gap between post-World War II European and American abstract painting. In Europe and

the United States, he was seen more as a French and specifically a Parisian artist than as a Canadian. By showing with the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York City beginning in 1954, Riopelle embodied that gallery's explicit tactic to reintroduce then-contemporary European art into a newly dominant American post-war context. Happily distant as we now are from the partisan and nationally based polemics against School of Paris work—though not often Riopelle's specifically—of Clement Greenberg and other New York critics in the 1950s, we may better realize the visual impact of these paintings and more accurately measure their import for the abstract idiom and for twentieth-century art in general.

We may also readily understand why Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg, from whose extensive collection *Carnaval II* and *Incandescence* (1953), lot 18 in this sale, come, embraced Riopelle's paintings: they were extending an early interest in French École de Paris painters to the work of their Montreal cognates. It is equally apparent why Riopelle's large canvases from the mid-1950s are renowned. It was in 1953 that he began the working procedures that led to his works being called "mosaics." *Carnaval II* is a fine example; it is a kaleidoscope of colour and texture, a cavalcade of movement seemingly paused only for the instant of our gaze. Riopelle's inflections of paint are built

up into a self-contained geology of flat and smooth areas, edges, collisions of shapes and colours, almost innumerable forms and regions whose contrasts are underlined by his unusual deployment of both glossy and matte paint, without the use of varnish. This topography contrasts with—but is also touched by—ultra-thin, spidery streaks of black, white, red or salmon oil paint that animate the top layer of the canvas. These are not drips in the manner of Jackson Pollock—despite what American critics claimed at the time—but rather the traces of Riopelle flicking paint onto the canvas.

In his vibrant essay for Riopelle's first solo exhibit, held in New York in 1954, Georges Duthuit attempted to capture the import of the remarkable details in Riopelle's paintings from this period. His account—replete with organic metaphors—is pertinent to the fine lines we see in *Carnaval II*: "Already certain centres of agglutination foretell the formation of organs of more clearly defined function, already there is outlined a frail and rudimentary nervous system: a tracery of fibrils, ... exquisitely tenuous, casts its nets over the fluid mass." The key is his apt identification of a "rudimentary nervous system ... exquisitely tenuous," established by "a tracery of fibrils."

If we look closely at the bottom right quadrant of *Carnaval II*, for example (see detail 2, taken near Riopelle's signature), moving

from right to left, we see relatively large blocks of blue, black, orange and white pigment in several hues dragged into one another (yet maintaining their individual shapes). Overtop are the "tendrils," first of white, and further to the left, then of black and salmon (see detail 1). These fragile skeins of paint do not so much link the surface's other shapes as function as an independent "nervous system," or to extend the metaphor, as we might think today, function as ciphers of synapses firing across the restlessly animate surface of this painting. The intricate weaving together of the black and salmon-coloured lines in this detail can be seen as "nervous" in the sense of kinetic—certainly an accurate description of Riopelle's paintings from this time—and as a charge of electric energy across the whole. One of the many accomplishments of *Carnaval II* is that we may register its vitality in the most intimate, close-up looking as well as when we take in its expansive surface as a whole.

We thank Mark Cheetham, Professor of Art History at the University of Toronto and author of *Abstract Art Against Autonomy: Infection, Resistance, and Cure since the 60s*, for contributing the above essay.

ESTIMATE: \$1,500,000 – 2,500,000



21 William Paterson Ewen

AANFM RCA 1925 – 2002

Untitled

oil on canvas, signed and on verso dated 1954
on the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal
exhibition label

31 3/8 x 38 in, 79.7 x 96.5 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of Françoise Sullivan, Montreal
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal

LITERATURE

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, *Panorama:*

Peinture au Québec, 1940 - 1966, 1967, listed page 82

Matthew Teitelbaum, *Paterson Ewen: The Montreal Years*,
Mendel Art Gallery, 1987, page 19, reproduced page 18,
listed

Claire Gravel, "Les années montréalaises, 70 peintures
et dessins de Paterson Ewen," *Le Devoir*, October 1,
1988, page 13

Matthew Teitelbaum, editor, *Paterson Ewen*, Art Gallery
of Ontario, 1996, reproduced page 50

EXHIBITED

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, *Espace 55*, 1955

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, *Panorama:*

Peinture au Québec, 1940 - 1966, May - August 1967,
catalogue #30

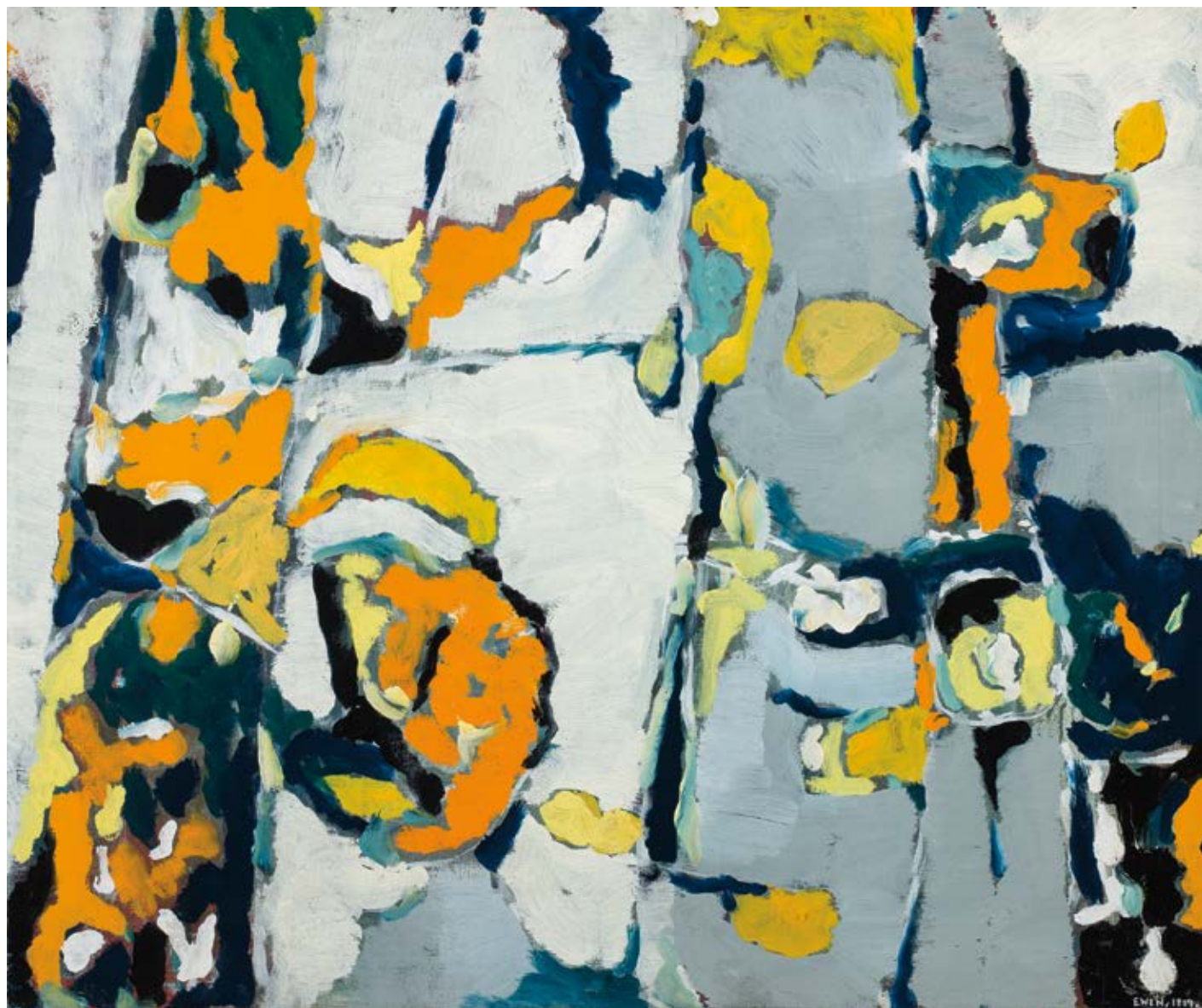
Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, *Paterson Ewen: The Montreal
Years*, November 20, 1987 - January 3, 1988, traveling in
1988 to the London Regional Art Gallery; Art Gallery of
Windsor; Concordia Art Gallery, Montreal; and St. Mary's
University Art Gallery, Halifax, catalogue #12

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, *Earthly Weathers/Heavenly Skies*,
September 1996 - February 1997

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, *Paterson Ewen*,
May - August 1997

REPRESENTING A MILESTONE in Paterson Ewen's career, *Untitled* is the artist's first fully abstract work, according to curator Matthew Teitelbaum. This bold oil on canvas, a historically important masterpiece embodying a major transition in his work, was extensively exhibited across the country. It was painted during Ewen's Montreal years, when the art scene was dominated by the Automatists and Plasticiens. Although *Untitled* is gesturally indebted to Automatism, it also draws inspiration from Cubism and painter Paul Cézanne through its "clearly marked contours, closed and more or less regular shapes, and flat or tonally related colors," as Teitelbaum describes. Thickly brushed organic shapes of mustard, maroon, brown, black and navy hover over a white background. A network of calligraphic lines runs across the canvas, connecting one form to another in a gridlike fashion. According to Teitelbaum, "[*Untitled*]'s modulated tones and scumbled paint handling recall Ewen's landscape sympathies, while anticipating much of what was to predominate in his subsequent abstract work of the 1950s." His abstract work quickly gained recognition, as dealer Gilles Corbeil included *Untitled* in his 1955 exhibition *Espace 55* at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

ESTIMATE: \$30,000 - 50,000



22 William Paterson Ewen

AANFM RCA 1925 – 2002

Untitled

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1957
and on verso inscribed 8
30 x 36 in, 76.2 x 91.4 cm

PROVENANCE

Art 45, Montreal
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above in 1989
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal

LITERATURE

Matthew Teitelbaum, *Paterson Ewen: The Montreal Years*,
Mendel Art Gallery, 1987, page 20

IN THE YEARS following the 1955 exhibition *Espace 55* at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, where his work *Untitled* (lot 21 in this sale) was shown, Paterson Ewen traveled frequently to New York, attending and organizing exhibitions. Exposed to new influences, he experimented with the structure and style of his abstract works throughout the second half of the 1950s. While he was interested in geometric order and shared the Plasticiens' "flat, Cubist space," as described by curator Matthew Teitelbaum, he favoured a more gestural approach to painting over their hard edges. This is perfectly exemplified in *Untitled*, a lively and expressive composition. Here, he arranges a complex structure of richly coloured forms applied in painterly dabs. Yellow, apricot, navy, teal, black and white flattened shapes cluster together over a white and slate background. The dynamically contrasting colours and the delicate balance between light and dark together create tension between background and foreground, inviting the viewer's eye to move throughout the flowing composition.

ESTIMATE: \$30,000 – 50,000

23 Guido Molinari

AANFM LP QMG RCA SAPQ 1933 – 2004

Structure triangulaire

acrylic on canvas, on verso signed

and dated 10/1971

36 × 36 in, 91.4 × 91.4 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of the Artist

Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,

Montreal, acquired from the above

Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,

Montreal

LITERATURE

Pierre Théberge, *Guido Molinari*, National Gallery

of Canada, 1976, pages 46, 50 and 54

Michael Snow and Louise Dompierre, *The Collected*

Writings of Michael Snow, 1994, pages 92 – 96

IN 1973, MICHAEL SNOW, a towering figure in Canadian art, was lip-syncing his pre-recorded opening remarks at the National Gallery of Canada and announced, “One of Canada’s greatest artists, Guido Molinari”—huge praise from one peer to another.

Molinari’s success at the *Venice Biennale* in 1968 had by then positioned him as the country’s leading abstract artist. For the artist it was a time of renewal, a time to set new challenges. By 1969 Molinari had abandoned vertical bands of colour, preferring instead to pursue a new modular arrangement, though one still based on repeating verticals; however, now each vertical rectangle was also bisected diagonally to create co-equal pairs of different coloured triangles. With this new format Molinari could consolidate his reading of Structuralism to extend beyond the achievements of his striped paintings into new terrain.

Molinari’s mutating colour variations, the constancy of repeating forms and his need for *espace dynamique* are familiar. This and something central to his oeuvre, the essential dictate that each colour be appreciated independently, also remained. Molinari’s canvases acknowledge the influence every juxtaposed colour exerts on its neighbour. In *Structure triangulaire* from 1971, this new space of bisected rectangles doubles down on the dynamism of this effect to reduce the gap between viewers and his paint surface even further. Now your proximity to the surface is almost palpable—haptic space of juxtaposed equals, colour and viewer reacting to each other. With all of these paintings the tendency is to read the composition from left to right, or right to left. Either

approach produces the same effect. Each colour is simply beside the others, none pushed to the back, none propelled forward. *Structure triangulaire* is a new form of bi-dimensionality at its flattest and most active.

Pierre Théberge stated: “Between the viewer and the canvas is that virtual space where the impulses of colour rhythms can have free rein. In this space, colour planes, far from being fixed in space (warm colours in the forefront, cold colours in the background), are in constant motion, perpetually ‘coming and going,’ which recently caused the painter to remark that his colours ‘breathed.’” Looking closely at Molinari’s triangular structures, Théberge wrote that one sees them “first in a serial enumeration. Once you get to the centre of a painting, the second half is like an echo of the first... [Then] working your way to the periphery again, as you weld the second half to the first, you realize that the second half has a different identity.”

The establishment of individual identity is at the core of the theorems of Jean Piaget, a pioneer of theories of knowing, whose writings gained a broad audience in the 1960s. Molinari was a reader of Piaget, and what is particularly useful when thinking about *Structure triangulaire* is Piaget’s commentary on the human tendency to overestimate acute angles and underestimate obtuse angles. This, when combined with diagonal distortions of perception plus the general visual inability to neither keep parallel lines parallel nor estimate their length with accuracy, was used to great advantage by Molinari throughout the 1970s. His tendency was to stretch the interaction amongst multiple perceptual distortions to create a colour / space of troughs and ridges, all seemingly in constant dynamic opposition. Molinari’s shallow space of troughs and ridges is populated with a completely original intuitive use of colour, each colour pair separated by a destabilizing diagonal. His introduction of the diagonal allows him to once again redefine colour as a form of energy. As the artist stated, “In using chromatic energy as a structural element in this new spatiality, I was intending to create an art more expressive than anything that had gone before.”

We thank Gary Dufour, adjunct associate professor at the University of Western Australia, for contributing the above essay. Dufour was the curator of the exhibition *Guido Molinari, 1951 – 1961: The Black and White Paintings*, shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Windsor and the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1989 – 1990.

ESTIMATE: \$30,000 – 50,000





24 William Paterson Ewen

AANFM RCA 1925 – 2002

Untitled

oil on canvas, initialed and on verso dated circa 1962
on a label, inscribed *INV. PF71* and *PFE 328 OC* on a label
and stamped Galerie du Siècle, Montreal
42 x 50 in, 106.7 x 127 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of Françoise Sullivan, Montreal
Collection of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg,
Montreal, acquired from the above
Estate of Blema and H. Arnold Steinberg, Montreal

LITERATURE

Jacques Folch, “Paterson Ewen,” *Vie des Arts*,
December 25, 1961, page 53
Matthew Teitelbaum, *Paterson Ewen: The Montreal Years*,
Mendel Art Gallery, 1987, pages 28, 29 and 41
John G. Hatch, “Biography,” *Paterson Ewen: Life & Work*,
Art Canada Institute, 2017 – 2018, <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/paterson-ewen/biography>, accessed March 8, 2019

EXHIBITED

Galerie du Siècle, Montreal

DIRECTLY ACQUIRED FROM the collection of artist Françoise Sullivan, Paterson Ewen’s partner, *Untitled* is an exquisite example of his 1963 monochrome works that marked an important transition in his oeuvre. Following the creation of his first fully abstract work in 1954, *Untitled* (lot 21 in this sale), Ewen sought to experiment with the structure and style of his abstract works in the following years. He would draw inspiration from artists such as Kazimir Malevich, Ad Reinhardt and Paul-Émile Borduas during his numerous gallery and museum visits in both Montreal and New York.

In 1961, Ewen produced two bodies of work, *Blackout* and *Alert*. In both series, he juxtaposed geometric planes, building compelling compositions with a painterly approach. To achieve this highly textured effect, he would drag a saw blade across the surface of the canvas, creating deep creases and high ridges of paint. Jacques Folch of *Vie des Arts* described these works as “streaked, scraped with parallel, very deep lines, yielding surfaces

on which light could play.” While the *Blackout* works showcased a restrained colour palette and were suggestive of the night sky, the *Alert* ones were almost monochromatic and were influenced by Russian Constructivism and the works of Piet Mondrian.

The black and white paintings of Borduas would also leave a great impression on Ewen. When discussing a visit to Borduas in New York, Ewen later said: “He had got rid of the figure-ground [distinction]. He was doing white paintings, with black ... and they were great ... Later he was doing monochromes and they were works of genius.” Moreover, when he saw the Borduas retrospective at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1962, he realized the painterly possibilities that the palette knife held.

These important encounters and influences culminated in 1963, when Ewen created a series of exceptional monochromatic works. These highly pigmented and deeply saturated canvases were heavily worked with the palette knife and were realized in a number of colours, such as blue, red, purple, white, yellow and orange. In *Untitled*, Ewen applies vibrant orange paint in broad strokes, building up texture at the centre of the work. Laying one slab next to the other, he manipulates his thick impastos in a mosaic-like rectangle delineated by soft ridges. Compelling and lavish, *Untitled*’s painterly surface effectively engages the viewer in a sensuous experience.

Ewen’s monochromes quickly brought him both popular and critical recognition. Curator Matthew Teitelbaum explains: “With all their tasteful energy, the 1963 monochrome paintings brought Ewen what was, until then, his greatest popular and commercial success.” Indeed, his monochrome show in February 1963 at Galerie Denyse Delrue nearly sold out. Teitelbaum continues: “For Ewen, monochrome painting was an exploration of a romantic, even mystical light and space, which followed, through reduced means, the landscape provocation of the *Blackout* and *Alert* series. With their pronounced impasto, the monochrome works summarize an essential aspect of Ewen’s work from the early 1960s: the painterly surface which signals a sensuous engagement with materials.” In 1964, Ewen was awarded a Canada Council fellowship for his monochromes and Russian Constructivist-inspired works.

ESTIMATE: \$40,000 – 60,000