





## 27 Guido Molinari

AANFM LP QMG RCA SAPQ 1933 – 2004

### Sériel vert-violet

acrylic on canvas, on verso signed, titled on various labels, dated 1968 and inscribed *G. M.-T-1968-04*  
92 x 144 in, 233.7 x 365.8 cm

#### PROVENANCE

Estate of the Artist

#### LITERATURE

*Ulysse Comtois, Guido Molinari: xxxiv International Biennial Exhibition of Art, Venice*, National Gallery of Canada, 1968, artist's statement by Molinari, page 15; introduction by Brydon Smith, page 5  
*Guido Molinari: Retrospective*, Galerie de Bellefeuille, 2018, reproduced pages 20 and 21

#### EXHIBITED

Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal, *Guido Molinari: Retrospective*, November 8 – 26, 2018  
Paul Kuhn Gallery, Calgary, *Guido Molinari: Large Scale*, February 8 – March 28, 2020

IT WOULD BE hard to overstate the prevalence and vibrancy of colour across every aspect of life in the 1960s. So no real surprise then that Brydon Smith, the National Gallery of Canada's new curator of contemporary art, found himself in a Montreal restaurant discussing "colors ev'rywhere... like a rainbow... colors in the air... colors ev'rywhere," with Ulysse Comtois and Guido Molinari, the two artists chosen to represent Canada in the 1968 *Venice Biennale*. The lyrics animating their conversation: "She's a Rainbow," by the Rolling Stones.

Molinari sketched a pathway for his paintings in 1958, one that relied exclusively on colour—colours seen together and

inseparable from their groupings. These so-called *Stripe* paintings were his exclusive pursuit for the next decade, and the paintings established his reputation as Canada's pre-eminent abstract artist.

For Molinari, 1968 was to be a big year, and *Sériel vert-violet* was exemplary of the artistic boundaries pushed in his unparalleled pursuit of a new space of vibrating, optically dynamic colour harmonies. The previous year he had received a Guggenheim Fellowship, awarded to individuals who have already demonstrated exceptional creative capacity in the arts. This acknowledgment, together with the more practical removal of a wall in his studio, doubling its size, engendered in Molinari a renewed painterly ambition on a bigger scale. His paintings from 1967 and 1968 are large. The stripes in each began to expand in width and ultimately reduce in number. *Bi-sériel orange vert* from 1967, purchased by the National Gallery of Canada in 1968, is a combination of 12 stripes. Molinari went bigger, was bolder, and became even more ambitious with *Sériel vert-violet*. It is taller and comprises only eight stripes, and each one is half again wider than those in his paintings with 12 stripes. The result gets to the core of the relational colour / space propositions optically active in all his works.

While it may seem pedantic, let us just briefly examine what it is that contributes to a rectangular shape becoming a stripe. Does it have something to do with proportion, width to height? But then just when does a rectangle become a stripe? The other rationale is relational, the interdependence of combinations of coloured partners signifying a stripe. With the expanded field of *Sériel vert-violet* Molinari is testing just these limits; with such a small number of broad stripes, each repeated in the same order, the intensity of each hue seems enhanced. The speed of the overall visual oscillation of just eight stripes is slowed by the reduced number, while the optical vibration between whichever pair of colours is holding a viewer's attention accelerates because of both the breadth of each stripe and the length of each juncture. In pictorial structure, colour intensity and sheer formal rigour, *Sériel vert-violet* is a *tour de force* by an artist at the peak of his powers, the culmination of a decade's achievements. Whether *Sériel vert-violet* was simply too tall for the pavilion at Venice, as it was not displayed there, we will never know. The composition of Molinari's recent paintings that dominated the pavilion was identical. Although smaller, those paintings had a magisterial presence. Commanding attention with their innovative chromatics, they secured Molinari the coveted David E. Bright Foundation prize.

*Sériel vert-violet* seems to have been in Molinari's thoughts when he prepared his artist's statement for the *Venice Biennial* catalogue. He stated, "In my work it's difficult to get too spread out, because then the quality of the stripes changes; then, they would be really large rectangles and I would not like that too much. I like the concept of verticality and I want the vectoral quality of the stripes in the painting to be stressed. I also like the viewer to see the end-beginning all at once." Molinari's comment



Guido Molinari, 1965  
Courtesy of the Guido Molinari Foundation  
Photo: © Gabor Silaszi

emphasizes verticality and stresses three things: the challenge of making extremely wide paintings, the need for each stripe to have both magnitude and direction, and when combined, the need for viewers to see the end-beginning / repeat all at once, a gestalt. The importance of vectors and verticality created by the height of *Sériel vert-violet* cannot be overstated as it leads directly to *Dyad* (1968–69), a trilogy half again larger in both dimensions.

Molinari's paintings are easily recognized as having many parts, yet somehow, they always achieve something more than just the sum of their parts: stripes forming and reforming the colour stanzas that keep the pictorial colour / space in constant motion. These characteristics were acknowledged perceptively by Brydon Smith in 1968, when he stated in the biennale catalogue, "The coloured stripes in a painting by Molinari do not remain inactive on the surface: the coloured stripes in his paintings constantly reorganize themselves into different optical groupings. Because these stripes are painted in a repeated series, rhythms and counter-rhythms play back and forth at different speeds across the entire picture surface."

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

ESTIMATE: \$200,000 – 300,000