



18 Jean Paul Riopelle

AUTO CAS OC QMG RCA SCA 1923 – 2002

Le réveil

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1970 and on verso titled, dated on the gallery and exhibition labels and inscribed *Riopelle* and *PH 10876*
72 7/8 x 111 3/4 in, 185 x 284 cm

PROVENANCE

Galerie Maeght, Paris
Sold sale of *Post-War & Contemporary Art*,
Sotheby's London, June 27, 1989, lot 682
A Prominent European Private Collection

LITERATURE

Jean Paul Riopelle, Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, 1980, page 36
Yseult Riopelle, *Jean Paul Riopelle Catalogue Raisonné*,
Volume 4, 1966 – 1971, 2014, reproduced page 231,
catalogue #1970.037H.1970

EXHIBITED

Galerie Maeght, Barcelona, *Riopelle 75*, 1975, catalogue #6
Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Saint-Étienne, *Jean Paul Riopelle*,
1980, catalogue #22
Musée des beaux-arts de Nancy, *Riopelle à Nancy*,
1980 – 1981
40th Venice Biennale, June 13 – September 12, 1982, catalogue #56

Artcurial, Centre d'art plastique contemporain, Paris,
Un art autre/un autre art, 1984

ALTHOUGH JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE acquired international renown in the mid-1950s, the 1960s were punctuated by events that confirmed the artist's place in the art world. In 1962, he represented Canada at the *Venice Biennale* and was awarded the UNESCO prize. The following year, the National Gallery of Canada dedicated an exhibition to him entitled *Jean Paul Riopelle: Painting and Sculpture*. In 1966, his association with the Galerie Maeght further established his prestige, in addition to allowing him to interact with artists such as Joan Miró, Marc Chagall and Alexander Calder, among others. The Musée du Québec celebrated the artist in 1967 with a major retrospective: *Peintures et sculptures de Riopelle*. Thus he entered the 1970s with strong Canadian and international recognition.

In 1970, Riopelle was 47. His annual output was 60 oil paintings, 20 works on paper (lithograph collages and inks), 14 lithographs and nearly 60 sculptures. In parallel with the *Hiboux* series (1969 – 1970), which marked his return to figurative painting, Riopelle completed a collection of abstract works, most of which were small in scale. After *Salut Gérard!*, *Le réveil* is the largest-format piece the artist produced that year. The work was produced in the workshop at Saint-Cyr-en-Arthies, in Val-d'Oise (northwest of Paris). Riopelle rented a hangar there starting in 1969, which he then purchased in 1974.

Le réveil is part of a continuation of works painted by the artist throughout the 1960s. Starting in 1963, a portion of his output differed from previous works as much by its composition—sculptural forms emerging from more uniform backgrounds—as by its facture marked by broad strokes of the trowel signifying wider movement. With the appearance of these sculptural masses in which the artist moves farther away from the all-over of the 1950s with a new figure-ground relationship, it is not insignificant that the artist's first sculptural works appear in this decade: "I believe that the two need each other—that my painting influences my sculpture and my sculpture influences my painting" [translation].¹

Le réveil's composition features three overlapping, interwoven planes: from a white-dominated background emerges a sculptural form in black tones, upon which the artist casts a veil of red, orange and yellow, forming a network of more or less interrupted lines. The precariously balanced sculptural element horizontally spanning the painting displays a density of colour, creating a mass that contrasts with the lightness of the lines laid upon it, which illuminate the composition. The strokes of the artist's palette knife punctuate this effect, creating both a vertical axis in the first tier of the composition and a horizontal axis in the centre. These delineate the spaces, each of which is dominated by a colour that also invades the white background. This space is constructed by the juxtaposition of wide strokes which deposit a generous amount of material onto the surface.

Commentators on Riopelle's body of work often speak of "abstract landscapes" to describe the artist's labour that proceeds not from imitating nature but from evoking it. Although his work did not proceed from mimesis, admittedly the territories Riopelle visited and their natural features always fueled his approach, whether expressed as figurative or abstract: "My most 'abstract' paintings, according to some, are for me the most figurative, in the true sense of the word... Abstract: 'abstraction,' 'to abstract,' 'to extract from,' 'to derive from'... My approach is the exact opposite. I don't take anything from Nature, I move into Nature."²

In a forthcoming text,³ François-Marc Gagnon postulates that Riopelle's approach proceeds mainly from *methexis*, or in other words, participation: "To be reconciled with nature, it is not a question of describing it but of making yourself natural" [translation], asserts the artist.⁴ Beginning in the late 1960s, Riopelle returned more frequently to Canada, notably to devote himself to the practice of hunting and fishing, which led him to visit and "participate" in territories and in a nature that was more and more northern. In 1969, he undertook his first journey to Pangnirtung (Baffin Island, Nunavut) in the company of gallery owner Theo Waddington. Does *Le réveil* reveal a northern-inspired composition that prefigures, in a broader palette, the *Icebergs* series (1977) completed upon his return from another expedition to Pangnirtung? Whatever the possible influence of that journey, the work starts off the 1970s, which are marked by the "northern trilogy"—made up of the series *Jeux de ficelle* (1971 – 1972), *Le Roi de Thulé* (1973), and *Icebergs* (1977)—but also by Riopelle's last great abstract compositions.

Le réveil was presented at the 40th Venice Biennale (1982) in the group exhibition at the international pavilion, *Art as Art: Persistence of the Art Work*, curated by Luigi Carluccio.

We thank Andréanne Roy, art historian and curator of the exhibition *Riopelle: The Call of Northern Landscapes and Indigenous*



TOP: Jean Paul Riopelle, on the Seine near Vétheuil, circa 1968
Courtesy of Archives Yseult Riopelle

BOTTOM: detail

Cultures, Montreal Museum of Fine Art, 2020, for contributing the above essay. This essay is a translation from the French text.

1. Gilbert Érouart, *Entretiens avec Jean Paul Riopelle: suivis de Fernand Séguin rencontre Jean Paul Riopelle* (Montreal: Liber, 1993), 26.

2. Jean Paul Riopelle, Gilbert Érouart, and Fernand Séguin, *Riopelle in Conversation*, trans. Donald Winkler (Concord, ON: House of Anansi, 1995), 25.

3. François-Marc Gagnon and Andréanne Roy, "Iceberg: Riopelle au milieu des 'plus belles sculptures du monde,'" in *Riopelle: À la rencontre des territoires nordiques et des cultures autochtones* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, forthcoming), exhibition catalogue.

4. Pierre Schneider, *Riopelle: Signes mêlés* (Paris: Maeght Éditeur, 1972), exhibition catalogue, 64.

ESTIMATE: \$1,000,000 – 1,500,000