

# 42 Guido Molinari

AANFM LP QMG RCA SAPQ 1933 - 2004

#### Espace bleu-ocre

acrylic on canvas, on verso signed, titled on various labels, dated 2/1964 and inscribed *G.M.-T-1964-01/cassa N. 4/Cat. #28* 81 × 108 in, 205.7 × 274.3 cm

#### PROVENANCE

East Hampton Gallery, New York Estate of the Artist, Quebec

#### LITERATURE

Ted Berrigan, "Reviews and Previews: Guido Molinari," *Art News*, vol. 64, no. 1 (March 1965), page 16 Anne Hoene, "In the Galleries: Guido Molinari," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 39, no. 9 (May 1965), page 60 Pierre Théberge, *The Deceived Eye*, Fort Worth Art Center, 1965 Bernard Teyssèdre, "Deux artistes canadiens à la Biennale: Ulysse Comtois et Guido Molinari," *Art international*, vol. 12, no. 6 (Summer 1968), pages 68 - 70 *Ulysse Comtois | Guido Molinari: XXXIV International Biennial Exhibition of Art*, National Gallery of Canada, 1968, essay by Pierre Théberge, pages 17 - 18, listed page 23 Pierre Théberge, "Molinari: An Interview." *artscanada*, vol. 26, no. 3 (June 1969), pages 37 - 38 Pierre Théberge, *Guido Molinari*, National Gallery of Canada, 1976, pages 40 and 90, reproduced page 8

### EXHIBITED

Galerie du Siècle, Montreal, *Molinari*, October 19 – November 8, 1964
East Hampton Gallery, New York, *Molinari: Optical Mutation*, March 16 – April 3, 1965
Fort Worth Art Center, *The Deceived Eye*, June – July 1965
34th International Biennial, Venice, *Canada: Ulysse Comtois / Guido Molinari*, June 22 – October 20, 1968, catalogue #2
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, *Guido Molinari*, July 2 – September 6, 1976, traveling in 1976 – 1977 to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; and Vancouver Art Gallery, catalogue #28

COLOUR IN VERTICAL bands, now always uniform in width, catapulted Guido Molinari's paintings into the international limelight. Selected by Lawrence Alloway for the Guggenheim International Award 1964 exhibition, his paintings were seen in New York, Honolulu, Berlin, Ottawa and Buenos Aires. Then, in 1965, his works appeared in The Responsive Eye at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; The Deceived Eve in Fort Worth, Texas; and a fourth, New York solo exhibition at East Hampton Gallery, garnering this praise from Arts Magazine: "Minimal means and maximum vibrations... Pop spelled 'Pow!'--in these handsome paintings the message comes across visually." A Guggenheim Fellowship followed and then in 1968, the prestigious David Bright Prize at the 34th Biennale di Venezia. At the centre of it all was *Espace bleu-ocre* (1964), exhibited in Montreal, New York and Fort Worth. Selected by Brydon Smith for Venice and later included in the artist's retrospective in 1976, these were rare honours extended by the National Gallery of Canada.

Molinari's paintings are based on a simplified compositional strategy of vertical stripes, in dynamic colour groupings that set off unique optical experiences. These bands of colour were characterized by Pierre Théberge in 1976 as follows:

Once perceived, [they] are modified by the colours adjacent; these in turn are modified in the same manner. The entire surface is transformed: the bands vibrate, undulate, and emerge from the surface.... In short, these quasi-simultaneous mutations destroy the initial geometry, and the spectator discovers a new space, situated between the eye and the surface of the moving object perceived.

The artist begins analytically in *Espace bleu-ocre* and the result, somewhat counterintuitively, is an individually orchestrated synthetic experience: bands of colour in an asymmetrical conjunction of stripes across a flat picture plane. This is Molinari's colour/space, where colour is constantly on the move, creating dynamic harmonies, vibrating in endless optical variations. With such simplicity comes intellectual and emotional depth. Every colour vies to attract and dominate the viewer's perception. Colours move incrementally forward and then fall back; abutting stripes become pairs, trios or double pairs of trios, further systems to further complicate and disrupt perception.

*Espace bleu-ocre* was the first of two very large paintings produced after Molinari doubled the size of his Ville Saint-Laurent studio. The other, *Espace orange-bleu*, is in the collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Their immersive visual richness cannot be overstated. Able now to undertake expansive compositions, Molinari could give substance to the new spatial reality of colour / space, something noted in the 1976 retrospective catalogue as "immediately demonstrated by *Espace bleu-ocre*, completed in February, where the wide juxtaposed colour stripes create a visual field equal in size to its surroundings—its environment... a completely new pictorial space." Molinari's unrelenting belief in the capacity in colour underscored his ambition for painting to do away with the duality of figure / ground and, once eliminated, invite the spectator into colour / space.

How colours interact when placed side by side in sequences across a flat surface is central to Molinari's oeuvre, and in *Espace bleu-ocre* for the first time this happens at scale. This colour sequence was also entirely new; the seven bands create a composition with no obvious centre. Three colour stripes dominated by ochre begin at the left, continuing to a second predominantly red group. These repeating trios are disrupted by a single ochre band on the left. The viewer is automatically led by the reading mechanism, already in operation, to presume that a stripe has disappeared. Would it have been red? The asymmetrical stripes elude stability, while scale and breadth hint the opposite.

"The painting-environment sucks you in. A new type of space is created, fictional space because it happens in the mind and vet it also involves the totality of perception," was Molinari's summation when interviewed by Théberge in 1969. What we see in Espace bleu-ocre is the birth of a new compositional strategy for Molinari, one that engages a viewer's choice-each one setting their own rhythm for seeing. The painting envelops you, its colour energies engulfing you in Molinari vision. Colour alone activates this newly synthesized space, bringing the dynamics of durational time and movement into the visual equation. When your eyes move, colour relationships change, a space opens, another collapses. Any colour can be ground or figure. All this optical action is orchestrated with the simplest of means-abutting bands of colour, and the powerful influence each colour has on the other and on humanity-all the while staying true to Molinari's belief that emotional responses to juxtapositions of colour are fundamental not just in painting.

We thank Gary Dufour, an art historian based in Mount Claremont, 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 – 1990.

## ESTIMATE: \$200,000 - 300,000