



9 Joan Mitchell

1925 – 1992 American

Untitled

oil on canvas, signed and on verso signed, dated 1956 – 1958 on the gallery label and stamped indistinctly three times
22 × 17 in, 55.9 × 43.2 cm

PROVENANCE

Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris
Galleria d'Arte Hausammann, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy
Woltjen / Udell Gallery, Edmonton
Private Collection, Alberta

LITERATURE

Barbarigo, Bergman, Gischia, Hartung, Mitchell, Music, Pulga, Riopelle, Galleria Hausammann, 1965, reproduced, unpaginated

EXHIBITED

Galleria d'Arte Hausammann, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, *Barbarigo, Bergman, Gischia, Hartung, Mitchell, Music, Pulga, Riopelle*, opened February 6, 1965

JOAN MITCHELL WAS an American artist born in Chicago. Following the wartime years spent in college, first at Smith College and then at the Art Institute of Chicago, Mitchell moved to New York. After a year in Paris on a traveling fellowship from the Art Institute of Chicago, Mitchell returned to New York just as the group that would become known as the New York School was gathering momentum and cohering into a vibrant artistic scene in the city's downtown environs. Living in and among the painters of the then-unnamed New York School, Mitchell quickly met key artists like Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline; she became part of their circle and linked with their daily pattern of hard painting interspersed with convivial (and sometimes contentious) evenings in the Cedar Street Tavern. During these years, from late 1949 until she began living part of the year in Paris in 1955, Mitchell painted seriously and engaged fully with the spirited ideas circulating around downtown New York—and was a fully participating member of the New York School.

In 1955, Mitchell began living part of the year in New York and part of the year in Paris, a pattern she would continue from 1955 to 1959. During this time, Mitchell and her work bridged innovations in and between both cultures, embodying the New York School's legendary abstraction, boldness, stylistic individuality and use of a large scale, and also the expressive, sometimes brooding materialism of post-war French abstraction. Mitchell worked continuously from her early days in Chicago through her years in New York and Paris, and finally in her home and studio in rural Vétheuil, France. She died in France in 1992, leaving behind a monumental oeuvre breathtaking in its consistent visual power, and historically resonant for its influence and continuous engagement with the problems and exhilarations of painting in the late twentieth century.

Having forged her painting in the New York School, the period to which *Untitled* (1956 – 1958) has been dated corresponds with a time when Mitchell connected her New York thinking and working with the life in Paris she began in 1955. While moving between these two art capitals, Mitchell maintained relationships



Joan Mitchell and Jean Paul Riopelle aboard the *Sérica*, 1960s
Courtesy of Yseult Riopelle

with her friends and associates in the New York art world, while also developing a strong daily rapport with the Parisian circle that expanded around Mitchell and her then-lover, the painter Jean Paul Riopelle (1923 – 2002). The influential art historian and critic Georges Duthuit, artists Alberto Giacometti, Shirley Jaffe, Kimber Smith, Sam Francis and Norman Bluhm, the American poet and arts critic John Ashbery (who lived in Paris from 1955 to 1965), and Samuel Beckett were but the most regular of Mitchell's many artistically and intellectually significant companions at this time.¹ Mitchell's geographies and the social circles that enlivened them in New York and in Paris joined literary and visual spheres in a sustained dialogue.

Beginning in the late 1950s and continuing into the 1960s, Mitchell's work was exhibited in numerous exhibitions in New York and in regional art centres in the US, in European cities including Paris, Bern, Milan, Munich and Venice, as well as in São Paulo and Osaka. Mitchell's work participated in an art world and market that reflected a progressive cosmopolitanism in the 1950s and 1960s that conceived of art—and especially abstract art—as a site of connection between diverse cultures.² In a catalogue produced by the Galleria d'Arte Hausammann in the northern Italian city of Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1965, Mitchell was included among seven other artists in an exhibition curated by the critic Giuseppe Marchiori.³ The entry on Mitchell's work includes mention of the painter's strong personality, and of "pictorial fury," of "anguish."⁴ The high-keyed entry suggests the ways Mitchell's quintessentially "New York" use of gestural painting was understood by European audiences in the 1950s and 1960s against the backdrop of an existentialist post-war context of abstract painting. Mitchell's American presence in this European-dominated exhibition—in which she was represented by this work—demonstrates the ways Mitchell's painting created links between the two art worlds she inhabited in the late 1950s and the 1960s. In a filmed interview with Angeliki Haas in 1976, Mitchell explained, "I love to do small paintings and I love to do big paintings ... I think they have, I hope, when they [the small paintings]



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

succeed, the same scale as the large paintings.”⁵ From a vital painterly space Mitchell generated between art worlds, *Untitled* summons Mitchell’s key presence in New York and in Europe—an in-between space that, like her paintings, she fully conceived and vivified, that she rendered expansive.

We thank Amy Rahn for contributing the above essay. Rahn is an assistant professor of art history and director of the Charles Danforth Gallery at the University of Maine at Augusta. She recently authored a catalogue essay for the Joan Mitchell retrospective exhibition opening in 2020 at the Baltimore Museum of Art and traveling to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

1. Patricia Albers, *Joan Mitchell: Lady Painter: A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 220, 277, and David Bergman, introduction to *Reported Sightings: Art Chronicles 1957 - 1987*, by John Ashbery, ed. David Bergman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), xiv.

2. I am thinking here of *II documenta* organizer Werner Haftmann’s vision of abstraction as a language that could unite Europe. See

Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s - 1980s: A Geopolitics of Western Art Worlds* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 19-20. Dossin discusses organizer Haftmann’s vision of abstraction as a language that would unite post-war Europe. The globalizing patterns of art exchange during the Cold War have been famously criticized by, among others, Serge Guilbaut in his book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (1983; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

3. *Barbarigo, Bergman, Gischia, Hartung, Mitchell, Music, Pulga, Riopelle* (Cortina d’Ampezzo: Galleria Hausammann, 1965), exhibition catalogue, reproduced, unpaginated.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Joan Mitchell, quoted in *Joan Mitchell à Vêtheuil*, directed by Angeliki Haas (1976), Collection of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Archives, viewed and transcribed by the author January 17, 2017.

ESTIMATE: \$300,000 – 500,000