



31 Jean Paul Riopelle

AUTO CAS OC QMG RCA SCA 1923 – 2002

Sans titre

mixed media on paper on board and on two lithographs
from the *Suite* series, 1972 – 1989
103 ¼ × 187 ¾ in, 261.9 × 475.9 cm

PROVENANCE

Estate of the Artist
Galerie Simon Blais, Montreal
Acquired from the above by the present Prominent
Corporate Collection, Montreal

LITERATURE

Pierre Schneider, “L'éternel et l'éphémère,” *L'Express* (Paris),
June 22, 1990, page 130
Jean-Louis Prat et al., *Jean Paul Riopelle*, Musée des beaux-arts
de Montréal, 1991, titled as *Painting*, reproduced pages 168
and 169
Jacelyne Lepage, “Jean Paul Riopelle: la force de la nature,”
La Presse, November 23, 1991, page E5
Eure-Inter, *Jean Paul Riopelle entre au Musée*, July 1, 1993
Pierre Schneider, *Riopelle: parcours 1963 – 1993*,
Musée d'Évreux – Ancien évêché d'Évreux, 1993,
reproduced page 39
Karl-Gilbert Murray, “Riopelle: un dialogue par intérim,”
Vie des arts, no. 190, Spring 2003, page 44
Yseult Riopelle, *Mutations de Riopelle*, 2003, reproduced
pages 52 and 53
Yseult Riopelle, *Jean Paul Riopelle Catalogue Raisonné*,
Volume 2, 1954 – 1959, 2004, page 477
Yseult Riopelle, *Catalogue raisonné des estampes de Jean Paul
Riopelle*, 2005, reproduced pages 96 and 97, catalogue
#1989.110, and the lithographs *Suite à l'Année verte*
reproduced page 209, catalogue #1972.02EST.LI, and
Suite Tabou, catalogue #1972.06EST.LI, reproduced page 213

EXHIBITED

Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, *Jean Paul Riopelle,
D'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, April 28 – June 25, 1990, catalogue #54
Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, *Jean Paul Riopelle*, 1991,
catalogue #113
Musée d'Évreux – Ancien évêché d'Évreux, France,
Riopelle: parcours 1963 – 1993, July 3 – September 30, 1993
Couvent des Cordeliers, Châteauroux, France, *Riopelle*,
1993, catalogue #16
Art Chapel Gallery, Cologne, 1994
Centre d'exposition du Vieux-Palais, Saint-Jérôme, Quebec,
Mutations de Riopelle, February 2 – March 30, 2003, traveling
in 2003 – 2004 to Centre national, Jonquières, Quebec;
the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke; the Maison
Hamel-Bruneau, Sainte-Foy; and the Musée du Bas-Saint-
Laurent, Rivière-du-Loup



Jean Paul Riopelle in front of the work *Bestiaire* at his Saint-Cyr-en-Arthies studio in 1989
Courtesy of Yseult Riopelle
Photo: © Jacqueline Hyde

THE VOCABULARY Jean Paul Riopelle employs in this impressive untitled work is characteristic of his creations from 1989, which are among his most joyful. Some of the motifs, which include both abstract and figurative elements, were later reused in *Le Cirque* (1989 – 1996). In that artist's book, “we find first of all a catalogue of acrobats, tightrope walkers, flame swallows, clowns, human cannonballs and trapeze artists, along with an ambiguous array of fauna more closely related to the farmyard and butterfly collecting than to the circus, though little does it matter,” as François-Marc Gagnon described it.¹

The techniques and materials are representative of the artist's methods towards the end of his career: positive and negative shapes have been created with stencils and mediums more



detail



detail



detail

usually associated with “low art,” like spray paint, felt-tip pens and acrylics. In this case, Riopelle used cardboard from Gauloises cigarette boxes; taking the brand’s emblem of a winged helmet as a starting point, he cut out a group of figures and outlined them with spray paint in the upper and lower bands of the work. He also imprinted the surface with motifs derived from other found objects, such as logs and incense coils.

In 1989, Riopelle made a number of works on paper, “the most extraordinary surely being the ‘Suites’ of very large compositions painted over lithographs from 1972.”² Salvaging previous works was not new in the artist’s production: he had done so in 1971 with the series *Jeux de ficelles* and again in 1982, 1983 and 1989,³ when the series of *Suites* served him as a starting point for many unique creations. In this untitled work, the gaze is attracted first and foremost by the two lithographs (*Suite à l’Année verte* and *Suite Tabou*), which stand out because of how they are placed and because of the density of their compositions masking the original prints. Beside and between these lithographs, which appear to be the main arenas of the spectacle, a group of circus motifs is arranged against relatively spare white backgrounds.

This three-part composition creates an effect of symmetry by placing the identically sized sheets so as to impart a rhythm and

order. Adjoining the middle section, which occupies most of the space, are two bands containing a succession of negative shapes outlined in gold and silver spray paint. This comparative chromatic restraint contrasts with the brightness of the colours used in the middle section, which attracts the viewer’s attention more forcefully. Here, the motifs are naive both in subject and style, as may be seen in the apparent grooves of the cardboard stencils. The motifs’ free and dynamic arrangement contrasts with the more systematic organization of the upper and lower sections.

Riopelle seems to be playing opposites against each other—positive/negative, saturation/paleness, compositional order/compositional freedom—in offering the viewer his personal vision of the circus, a living spectacle that interested him because it coincided with his fascination with popular traditions and heroes. He presents his own interpretation of a theme found in art history in works by great artists like Marc Chagall, Pablo Picasso and Alexander Calder.

We thank Andréanne Roy, art historian and curator of the exhibition *Riopelle: The Call of Northern Landscapes and Indigenous Cultures*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2020, for contributing the above essay. This essay is a translation from the French text.

1. François-Marc Gagnon, “Le cirque de Riopelle,” *Vie des arts* 40, no. 65 (1996): 54–55.

2. Simon Blais, *Tigre de papier: Oeuvres sur papier, 1953–1989* (Montreal: Les 400 coups, 1997), 20.

3. Yseult Riopelle, “Suites...,” in *Mutations de Riopelle* (Montreal: Hibou Éditeurs, 2003), 8.

This work will be included in Yseult Riopelle’s forthcoming *Volume 7* of the catalogue raisonné on the artist’s work.

The lithographs included in this work are *Suite à l’Année verte*, 1972 (left) and *Suite Tabou*, 1972 (right). Each part of the horizontal triptych measures:

Upper panel: 20 × 187 ³/₈ inches, 50.8 × 475.9 cm

Centre panel: 63 ¹/₈ × 187 ³/₈ inches, 160.3 × 475.9 cm

Lower panel: 20 × 187 ³/₈ inches, 50.8 × 475.9 cm

ESTIMATE: \$400,000 – 600,000