



Anna-Eva Bergman. *N°30-1963 Panorama*, 1963. Oil and metal sheet on canvas. 35 x 46 inch. Photographer: Claire Dorn. ©Anna-Eva Bergman / ADAGP Paris & ARS, New York, 2023. Courtesy Fondation Hartung - Bergman & Perrotin.

## THE NEW SCHOOL OF PARIS THROUGH ITS PIONEERING WOMEN (1945 – 1964)

April 13 – May 23, 2024

**Perrotin is pleased to present the first exhibition about the “New School of Paris” in the United States, featuring never-before-seen works from private collections and foundations. Exploring the period from 1945 through 1964, the presentation will bring together a wealth of archives recounting the stories of pioneering women who helped shape the post-war movement.**

The term “School of Paris” was coined by André Warnod in 1924 to refer to the generation of avant-garde artists who flocked to France – particularly to Montmartre and Montparnasse – from all over the world, although artists from Eastern Europe, such as Chagall and Soutine, predominated. This “school” did not have a homogenous style. It was more of a network of sociability, but visually it was dominated by a raging, expressionist aesthetic which distorted lines and colors, and readily borrowed its visions from non-Western cultures.

In 1952, the critic Charles Estienne used the expression “New School of Paris” at Galerie Babylone, continuing the work of other gallery owners – particularly women – who had promoted the various trends in abstraction after the Second World War. Whether it was indeed a

“school” is disputed, since its dynamic, anarchic nature made it more of a laboratory of paradoxes. On the one hand, it was believed to represent a certain French spirit while also assimilating the best international artists. On the other hand, it was both figurative and abstract, oscillating between “hot” and “cold” abstraction.

The art that emerged in Paris after 1945 benefited from a flourishing market, but suffered from misunderstandings and numerous scandals. Neither the press nor the bourgeois Parisian audiences of the time unanimously appreciated these new trends and critiqued them, as has often been the case in the history of the Parisian avant-garde since the nineteenth-century quarrels over Romanticism, Realism and Impressionism.

The critic Odile Degand recounts: “The first time Lydia Conti displayed a Schneider alongside a Hartung in her gallery window at rue d’Argenson, the glass was smashed: people thought she was making fun of them.”

Nevertheless, within fifteen years, the new style had established itself, enraging advocates of a more traditional, expressionist, dreamlike,



Georges Mathieu. *Le roy Etudes attaque les Normands*, 1960. Oil on canvas. 71 x 24 inch. ©Georges Mathieu / ADAGP Paris & ARS, New York, 2024. Courtesy of the artist's estate & Perrotin.



Hans Hartung. *Sans titre*, 1947. Gouache, pastel and charcoal on paper. 18 x 23 inch. Photographer: Tanguy Beurdeley. ©Hans Hartung / ADAGP Paris & ARS, New York, 2024. Courtesy Fondation Hartung - Bergman & Perrotin.

Picasso-esque figurative style, such as Bernard Lorjou. The names of Pierre Soulages, Zao Wou-Ki, and Hans Hartung soon became world-famous, the latter winning the Grand Prix with Fautrier at the Venice Biennale in 1960. Four years later in Venice, however, everything came to a head. During the 1950s and 1960s, the United States utilized its soft power to compete against the Soviet enemy and “old” Europe. This strategy proved successful at the 1964 Biennale, where the pop artist Robert Rauschenberg, backed by art dealer Leo Castelli, emerged victorious. This was a triumph for New York and pop art, from which Paris would never recover.

This exhibition tells three stories that have long been forgotten or overlooked. Firstly, it portrays a moment, rather than a movement: the “New School of Paris” was a cosmopolitan, dynamic group of abstract painters (“lyrical,” “action painting,” “calligraphic,” “gestural,” “warm,” and “cold”) that emerged between 1945 and 1964. Among them, Geneviève Assé, Anna-Eva Bergman, Terry Haass, Hans Hartung, Georges Mathieu, Serge Poliakoff, Gérard Schneider, Pierre Soulages, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Wols, and Zao Wou-Ki. Why a moment rather than a movement? Because each person involved took part in this collective adventure and brought their own personality to it. But, and this is also what makes the “New School of Paris” so interesting, they eschewed the idea of forming a coherent and homogeneous whole during this period.

Like a luminous halo with the French capital at its center, the exhibition also explores a group of female gallery owners and critics who were able to see the potential of these artists and promote them, acting as remarkable visionaries. Following in the footsteps of Jeanne Bucher, who died in 1946, these gallerists included Denise

René, Lydia Conti, Colette Allendy, Nina Dausset, Florence Bank, Iris Clerf, Myriam Prévot, and many others. In the field of criticism, they included Madeleine Rousseau, Odile Degand, Suzanne Tenand, Claude-Hélène Sibert, Dominique Aubier, and Jeanine Warnod. Finally, in the United States, where the New School of Paris was also mainly supported by women, New York’s Betty Parsons, who dared to show Soulages, Hartung, and Schneider as early as 1949, and Peggy Guggenheim, who collected and promoted their work, were included in the canon of female gallerists that helped pioneer this cultural moment.

Lastly, the exhibition also tells the story of the shift in artistic influence from Paris to New York at the famous 1964 Venice Biennale. It shows how this shift led to the marginalization of these artists, as well as the female critics and gallery owners who had worked tirelessly, both intellectually and socially, for their recognition.

This exhibition is curated by **Thomas Schlessner** and has been organized in collaboration with **ACA (Archives de la critique d’art)**, **Fondation Hartung-Bergman**, and **Fondation Gandur pour l’Art, Geneva**. It features exceptional loans and rare archival material, providing an unprecedented glimpse into the lives of these visionary women in Post-war Paris. A 52-minute documentary was produced specifically for the exhibition and will be screened during the show.

Thomas Schlessner is an art historian, director of the Hartung-Bergman Foundation, professor at the École Polytechnique, and author of numerous books, including *Anna-Eva Bergman – Luminous Lives* (Eris Press, 2023).

**Divided into 5 chapters, the exhibition will feature the artists' work through the vision of pioneering women who championed abstract art of their time.**

*"A dream that seems ambitious, inhuman perhaps"* – Marie Raymond

In the aftermath of the war, Europe was in a state of total disaster on every level. Artist and critic Marie Raymond wrote of "a dream that seems ambitious, inhuman perhaps." This expression perfectly reflects the ambiguous climate of the time, in which pictorial imagination was underpinned by great hope and inhuman character – both of which belong and are foreign to humanity. Two Germans living in France, both anti-Nazi, perfectly embodied this "dream" formulated by Marie Raymond. On one hand, Wols' tormented, dreamlike paintings verge on nightmares, which sought to escape the scale of human perception. On the other, Hartung, a friend of Marie Raymond, whose first painting in the exhibition, gnarled and explosive, was produced partly before the war (for the background) and partly afterwards (for the graphics on the surface), the artist having lost a leg in combat in the meantime.

*"The spirit of a new order"* – Madeleine Rousseau

According to critic Madeleine Rousseau, art entered a new existential phase after the Second World War. She was very close to Hans Hartung, who owed her a great deal in terms of promoting and interpreting his work, especially in regard to Lydia Conti. Rousseau campaigned for an abstraction that combined human expression, history's political and social torments, and cosmic truths that govern the universe. Rousseau said this was to be the "spirit of a new order" driven by painting. Georges Mathieu and Hans Hartung, with their predominant focus on signs—be it drawn on paper, thrown onto the canvas with a gesture, or scratched into fresh vinyl—were precisely the representatives of what she called "revolutionary art." For them, abstraction was not just a decorative form but a response to the great questions of civilization, sometimes spontaneous and sometimes more deliberate. It's also worth noting that both Mathieu and Rousseau (and, to a lesser extent, Hartung) wanted to expose as many people as possible to abstraction. Due to her advocacy of the art form and liberal ideals, Madeleine Rousseau was expelled from the Communist Party in 1949.

*"Painting that has become song again"* – Suzanne Tenand

Suzanne Tenand was an Egyptologist, an art critic, a connoisseur of past cultures, and a visionary. Tenand equivocated the renewal of post-war painting to "song." The term "lyrical abstraction" has been primarily used to describe the non-figurative experiments that made Myriam Prévot's Galerie de France so famous in the 1950s and 60s. But Suzanne Tenand's "song" is perhaps even more appropriate to bring together Zao Wou-Ki, Hans Hartung, Pierre Soulages, and Anna-Eva Bergman, as Prévot did in her gallery. These artists shared a visual language that sought equivalences with the depth of music. This was achieved through vast swathes of color that capture and reflect the light, similar to melodic variations, and through the use of lines and strokes which impart rhythm – a key term in Anna-Eva Bergman's work, for example. Tenand said: "If we want to live in our turn, we must not exhaust a treasure, but create values for ourselves that are adapted to our contemporary humanity." At their exhibitions at the Galerie de France, these artists demonstrated their attachment to ancient cultures in the service of an original, modern and daring language. A rallying cry for a new way of seeing.



Portrait of Marie Raymond in her studio, Paris, 1950. Photographer: Willy Maywald.

*"In infinite extensions"* – Herta Wescher

In an article published in March 1958, the German art critic Herta Wescher spoke of Anna-Eva Bergman's "infinite extensions." These extensions are the reveries that occur when the imagination encounters a painting created with extraordinary technical mastery. In addition to Bergman's use of metal sheets to achieve a mirrored effect, we should mention Maria Helena Vieira da Silva's tracing of mesh that form complex graphic architectures, Terry Haass' etching of clouds, and Geneviève Assé's use of matterism. More specifically, Herta Wescher sang the praises of a style of painting "that cannot be grasped by its appearance," and what these four female artists have in common is their spiritual, sometimes even mystical interests. Herta Wescher had several opportunities to champion the "Paris School" in the 1950s, and even to assert its influence on American painting. Without going that far, we should note that the shamanic, meditative, and ecstatic character commonly attributed to painters such as Mark Rothko, for example, was an essential aesthetic feature of the work of Bergman, Vieira da Silva, Haass, and Assé, independent of what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic.

*"Acidic sparring, irritating to the eye"* – Claude-Hélène Sibert

Observing the "New School of Paris," the critic Claude-Hélène Sibert referred to the paintings of the period as "acidic sparring, irritating to the eye"—in other words, the opposite of decorative, bourgeois comfort. This is exactly what Serge Poliakoff wanted to fight against as soon as he began to gain recognition. He reworked the elaboration of his fragmented forms, quivering brushstrokes, and chromatic ranges in order to escape the trap of what was considered good ornamental taste. As for Gérard Schneider, he was a fan of Gustave Courbet and steeped in classical culture, like many artists of the "New School of Paris." Instead of denying this heritage, he freely appropriated it, stimulating perception to the point of pushing it to aesthetic extremes that were "irritating to the eye." Poliakoff and Schneider both immerse viewers through their use of color and texture. But, their respective styles represent the "sparring" that Claude-Hélène Sibert spoke of: Poliakoff stabilizing space through vibrations, Schneider disrupting it with explosive strokes.

## APPENDIX OF FEMALE GALLERISTS

Finally, the exhibition explores the careers of three key figures in Parisian cultural life.

### Lydia Conti

Virtually nothing was known about the brilliant and audacious woman who ran a small gallery on rue d'Argenson, not even the dates of her birth or death. However, through recent research into the New School of Paris, it was discovered that she was born Lydie Desclozeaux in Toulon in 1902. She studied political science and was married to Joseph Pugliesi-Conti, who came from a large military family. While it is not clear how or why she opened her gallery at 1 rue d'Argenson, she organized several legendary exhibitions there, including one in February 1947 on Hans Hartung's work. The acclaimed show in 1949 was accompanied by a catalog featuring a special text by Madeleine Rousseau, and one on Hartung, Schneider, and Soulages. Her gallery may have been small, but it gave countless young people the opportunity to witness the art of the time, including the future Louvre Museum director Michel Laclotte and artist Jacques Villeglé. After rue d'Argenson closed, she worked at Galerie Carré for a while, bringing in Hartung and Soulages, but soon retired from her work. She died in the South of France in 1982. A single photograph of her at the age of 74 was recently discovered.

### Colette Allendy

Colette Allendy (1895-1960) lived in a house on rue d'Auteuil that also served as a gallery. She had the unusual habit of welcoming visitors to her home in an intimate and informal setting surrounded by books and magazines. Critic Odile Degand described Colette Allendy as "the most charming woman on earth, very out of touch because she lived in Auteuil, far from the center of Paris; she was a delightful hostess." But despite her cozy bourgeois home on the Right Bank, Colette Allendy promoted painters that were considered to be highly radical, such as the German artist Wols, members of the Cobra group, and, later, Yves Klein. One of her most notorious exhibitions was "HWPSMTB" (short for Hartung, Wols, Picabia, Stahly, Mathieu, Tapié, and Bryen) in April 1948, which featured a mix of "lyrical" and "informal" works.

### Myriam Prévot

Myriam Prévot's (1923-1977) story is one of romance, brilliance, and tragedy. Art critic Jeanine Warnod recalled: "Her vitality, energy, and effectiveness were evident in everything she did." She had a unique personality that was reflected in her signature butterfly glasses and constant smile. She first worked at Galerie Drouin before setting up her own gallery with Gildo Caputo in the early 1950s. Galerie de France was strategically located at a key address on rue Saint-Honoré, near the powerful Galerie Charpentier and the Élysée Palace. It showcased works by Hartung, Soulages, Zao Wou-Ki, Manessier, Music, Alechinsky, and Serge Poliakoff. Myriam Prévot also represented Anna-Eva Bergman from 1958 onwards. Her energy and constant risk-taking led to many successes but also to bitter disappointments. The failure of two Hartung exhibitions in the United States in 1975, one in a gallery and the other at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, severely impacted her, and tragically, she took her own life in 1977.



Portrait of Myriam Prévot, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1969. Photographer: Hans Hartung.

## INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

### The Fondation Gandur pour l'Art

The Fondation Gandur pour l'Art was established in 2010 by Jean Claude Gandur to make his internationally significant collections accessible to a wide audience. Based in Geneva and recognized as a public utility, the Foundation strives to preserve, document, enrich, and exhibit its collections in renowned institutions in Switzerland and abroad. In order to contribute to the understanding and preservation of the global cultural heritage, it develops a sponsorship program that supports projects in university research, restoration, or the safeguarding of heritage.

### ACA (Archives de la critique d'art)

The ACA is an institution in service of the living memory of contemporary art. Since their founding in 1989, they have collected, preserved and promoted the activities of art critics from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day. In 2014, the ACA became a Research Cluster supported by three main partners: the International Association of Art Critics – AICA, the National Institute of Art History – INHA (Europe's largest library of art history), and the University Rennes 2. The specificity of the collections – focusing on art criticism and the original connection between cultural heritage and current discourses on art – makes it a unique place and an internationally acclaimed resource.

### Fondation Hartung-Bergman

Founded in 1994, the Fondation Hartung-Bergman is the result of the lives and wishes of two very important painters of the 20th century: Hans Hartung and Anna-Eva Bergman. Very few institutions in France and abroad have managed to preserve in their spaces for pictorial creations, the creations themselves, and the memory of a daily life in the same location. Since 2022, the Foundation has been open to the public and works in the general interest by making its architectural and artistic heritage known to people from all over the world through local and off-wall exhibitions. In this context, it invites academics, curators, historians and critics in residence to work with its archive collection.

