

CARDI GALLERY



Gerard Ernest Schneider, *Opus 86K*, 1974, Acrylic on canvas, 66 x 81 cm 25 5/8 x 31 7/8 in

GÉRARD SCHNEIDER

May 3 - July 20, 2024

22 Grafton Street, London W1S 4EX

Cardi Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of works by Swiss-French artist Gérard Schneider (1896 – 1986) in its London premises. A leading figure of post-war European painting, Schneider came to embody the Lyrical Abstraction movement that emerged in Paris during the 1950s. This group of artists, which included Pierre Soulages, Hans Hartung and Georges Mathieu, redefined painterly abstraction as a radical new means of personal expression, free from any reference to nature or the outside world. In place of rigid formalism, their art embraced lyricism, spontaneity and exuberant combinations of pure colour to express inner emotional states. Schneider and his peers played a crucial role in establishing a new pictorial language predicated on the evocative power of gesture, one that paralleled the early development of Abstract Expressionism in New York.

Featuring works created between 1956 and 1981, this exhibition traces the evolution of Schneider's formal vocabulary through the post-war years. The paintings on show demonstrate the artist's tireless conviction in the poetics of abstraction, as well as the gradual adoption of a looser, more essential visual language influenced by Japanese calligraphy.

Through vivid gestural marks and a masterful use of colour, Schneider's mature works record the artist's fleeting, exalted movements in space. Using wide brushes, Schneider applied paint across the canvas in rapid, dynamic motions that, once imprinted on the surface, came together to form an "orchestral whole". The resulting paintings are musical in essence, each visual element producing a corresponding rhythm or melodic effect that envelops the viewer. Influenced by Kandinsky's seminal theories of abstraction earlier in the century, Schneider often employed musical analogies to describe his creative process. "The spectator is free to interpret according to his feelings", he once remarked of his paintings, "in the same way he might react to a sonata." In 1945 he began titling most of his works "Opus", reinforcing their inherent lyrical quality.

BIO

Born in Sainte-Croix in Switzerland, Schneider enrolled at the École Nationale des beaux-arts de Paris in 1918 before settling permanently in the French capital in 1922. In the following years, he devoted himself to the study of art history while writing poetry and frequenting the city's avant-garde circles. In the 1930s Schneider came into contact with Surrealism, and was drawn to that group's fascination with the unconscious and practice of automatic drawing. While participating in several group exhibitions in Paris, including the Salon des Surindépendants and the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, he gradually moved away from representation in favour of abstract forms and intuitive, imaginary compositions. By the early 1940s, his paintings had abandoned any trace of figurative representation.

As his work gained prominence in post-war Paris, Schneider established himself as a major figure within the growing Lyrical Abstraction movement, with solo exhibitions in New York and across Europe throughout the early 1950s. The paintings of this period are characterised by a rich, dark colour palette and expressionistic brushwork that imparts a physical and emotional intensity.

By the 1960s, Schneider's marks became sharper and more calligraphic in nature, with brightly coloured backgrounds counterpointed by linear, black strokes that suggest the weight and orientation of the brush itself. The 1970s, which critic Michel Ragon described as the "luminous years" of the artist's career, saw the artist increasingly adopting acrylic paint and working directly on paper, enabling a fluid, uninterrupted mark as well as a faster working method. These late works are a culmination of Schneider's ultimate commitment to painting, alternating between dramatic tension and harmonious balance with a remarkable economy of means. Since the early 1950s, Gérard Schneider has been the subject of many retrospectives in Europe and abroad. He participated in the first two editions of Documenta in Kassel (1955, 1959), and exhibited three times at the Venice Biennale (1948, 1954 and 1966). For the 1966 edition, an entire room of the French Pavilion was devoted to his work. In 1957, Schneider won the Lissone Grand Prize for Abstract Art. His works also travelled regularly to Japan from 1950 until the early 1970s, especially for the International Exposition of Art.

In addition, for the International Art Exhibition in Tokyo in 1959, he was awarded the prize of the Governor of Tokyo. Schneider also showed several times at the São Paulo Biennale (1951, 1953 and 1961). His works are held in the permanent collections of institutions worldwide, including the Musée d'Art Moderne, Brussels; the Walker Center of Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.; the Musée national d'Art Moderne – Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Quebec, among many others.

#GérardSchneider

PRESS

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