

PRESS RELEASE

Joan Mitchell

Trees

Opens Thursday May 15, 2014 from 6-8 pm

Exhibition continues through August 29



Trees 1990–91 oil on canvas diptych
94 1/2 x 157 1/2 in 240 x 400.1 cm

Cheim & Read, in cooperation with the Joan Mitchell Foundation, is pleased to announce an exhibition of seven large-scale canvases by celebrated painter Joan Mitchell (1925–1992). The show is accompanied by a full color catalogue with an essay by John Yau.

Dating from 1964 to 1991, the paintings in this exhibition are inspired by the form and structure of trees. Known for her expressionistic, visceral explorations of the natural landscape, Mitchell abstracted tree-forms throughout her career, from the richly-hued, interlacing branches of *Hemlock*, 1956 (Collection Whitney Museum of American Art) to the thick, rectangular-trunked grove in *Trees*, 1990-91. The paintings bristle with energy and emotion; her staccato brushwork, rich color palette and pervading sense of light and composition are at once elegant and rebellious.

Though rooted in Abstract Expressionism (she was one of the few successful female painters of the New York School), Mitchell's work redefines the parameters of gestural abstraction. As Yau notes in his catalogue essay, her works are characterized not by a stream-of-conscious, chance assembly of paint-loaded brushstrokes, but by a precise and thoughtful construction which in turn fosters "animated eloquence": "For Mitchell...rigor and expressiveness are not mutually exclusive activities." In many ways, a tree's inherent structure is analogous to the way in which Mitchell composes her paintings: beginning from an anchored core, her physical gestures create an armature of rhythmic potential, allowing for an expressive lyricism that attempts to, as she says, "define a feeling." Mitchell succeeds in capturing not only nature's various visual effects, but also its essence of "being alive." In 1959, Mitchell moved to France and lived there for the last three decades of her life. The region's distinctive light, color and atmosphere not only rewarded her sensitivity to the natural world, but also connected her work to a long history of *plein air* painting. Van Gogh's charged, vibrating brushstroke and Cezanne's fusion of mark-making and color greatly informed her practice, as did the structured surfaces and divided forms of Mondrian's tree paintings.

Mitchell's artistic practice can be defined as much by her body's intuitive reaction to her surroundings as by her visual and intellectual rationalization. For her, experience was manifested physically, and her deft use of paint is an extension of this understanding. The range of effects she achieves in the medium – from the saturated passages of *Green Tree*, 1976, to the dry boughs of *Tilleul (Linden Tree)*, 1978 – enhances her work's tactility and physicality. Lavender drips and sprayed drops of paint in *Red Tree*, 1976, seem to bounce off the painting's surface, resulting in complex spatial interplay. Late works, like the two diptychs titled *Trees*, 1990-91, are composed of broad, downward strokes and loose, calligraphic knots of jarring color against a white, light-filled ground, conveying a sense of Mitchell's personal struggle as she approached the last year of her life. Recurring over four decades, these paintings provide a history of Mitchell's painting process, and exemplify the unique, intimate ways in which she simultaneously channels the sensibility of nature while exposing her own internal landscape. As she has said, "Painting is a means of feeling 'living.'"

Jenny Holzer opens September 11 and continues through October 25.

Cheim & Read 547 West 25 Street, New York