

PRESS RELEASE

Joan Mitchell

Paintings from the Middle of the Last Century, 1953–1962

Reception: Thursday September 6, from 6 to 8 pm

Exhibition continues through November 3, 2018



Slate 1959 oil on canvas
77 x 74 in 195.6 x 188 cm
JPMorgan Chase Art Collection
© Estate of Joan Mitchell

Cheim & Read is pleased to announce its next exhibition, *Joan Mitchell: Paintings from the Middle of the Last Century, 1953–1962*, which explores a crucial decade in the artist's early career. It is the ninth solo show that the gallery has devoted to Mitchell's paintings and drawings, and the nineteenth to include her work overall. The exhibition will open on September 6, 2018, and run through November 3.

"By any reckoning, it was an extraordinary, self-assured start" is how David Anfam, the co-curator of the acclaimed 2016 exhibition, *Abstract Expressionism*, at the Royal Academy in London, characterizes this period in his essay for the exhibition's full-color catalogue. In the spring of 1953, at the age of 28, Mitchell was given her first solo show at Eleanor Ward's legendary Stable Gallery. Two years later, she decamped to Paris for the summer, and soon began to divide her time between Paris and New York.

The paintings she made during this time attest that Mitchell, who was decades younger than such influential Abstract Expressionists as Hans Hofmann, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and Clyfford Still, achieved a singular sensibility very early in her career. As Anfam writes, "Like Athena sprung fully formed from the head of Zeus, this self-styled 'lady painter' had come abreast with her erstwhile peers" to such an extent that "it might be no great exaggeration to regard Mitchell in these years as the foremost female American abstractionist (Lee Krasner's finest hours lay ahead)."

Mitchell's memories of Lake Michigan from her childhood in Chicago — where her grandfather designed bridges — resonate throughout these paintings, so much so that Anfam places her among "the great tradition of American water watchers" and cites the profound effect that Frank O'Hara's elegiac poem "To the Harbormaster" (1957) had on her, with its visions of waves separating a lover from his desire.

Anfam also touches on Mitchell's love of bridges, especially the Brooklyn Bridge, and quotes Harold Bloom on *The Bridge: To the Brooklyn Bridge* (1930) by Hart Crane, whose "intensely metaphorical and allusive [poetry] characteristically gives us the sensation of an impacted density, sometimes resistant to unraveling."

In response to Bloom's critique of Crane, Anfam writes, "Difficulty, metaphor (a fundamental agency in Mitchell's lifelong passion for poetry), allusion and 'impacted density' often 'resistant to unraveling' provide an exact description of where Mitchell's art was headed through the 1950s and beyond."

Joan Mitchell was born in 1925 in Chicago, and spent half her life in France, where she died in 1992. In 1951, her work was exhibited alongside that of Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Hans Hoffman in the celebrated *Ninth Street Show*, which marked the ascendancy of Abstract Expressionism within the development of modern art. Mitchell has since been the subject of numerous museum exhibitions, and examples of her work hang in nearly every major public collection of modern art, including the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Osaka City Art Museum of Modern Art, Japan; the Samsung Museum, Seoul; and the Tate Gallery, London.

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