



13 Lawrence (Larry) Poons

1937 – American

Sayronnella

acrylic on canvas, on verso signed,
titled on a label and dated 1974
97 1/4 x 55 3/4 in, 246.7 x 141.3 cm

PROVENANCE

Fred Stimpson, Vancouver
Private Collection, Vancouver
Private Collection, Montreal

AMERICAN PAINTER LARRY POONS is widely acknowledged as a seminal contributor to international contemporary art. Perhaps obscured by his voluminous and auspicious global recognition is the lesser-known fact that Canada figures prominently in the evolution of his career. The masterful work *Sayronnella*, from 1974, exemplifies this chapter.

Poons had a meteoric rise as a young painter, and he was included in many of the most historically significant shows of the 1960s. His work was featured on the cover of the summer 1968 issue of *Artforum* magazine, and it was collected and exhibited by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, among other leading art museums worldwide. He was represented by the legendary Leo Castelli Gallery in New York. Poons was the youngest artist featured in Emile de Antonio's highly regarded 1973 film documentary *Painters Painting*, about post-war American painting.

In 1970, at the height of his prominence, he radically shifted his aesthetic style and crossed over to join the William Rubin Gallery in New York. Many of his supporters were confounded—they were stunned that he would abandon the approach that had resulted in his stature. Canadian galleries and our public art museums became the main showcases for his new art. Whereas his work in the 1960s was aligned with minimal tendencies, mathematics, grids and optics, in 1970 he began a move towards a sensual painterly abstraction. By 1970 he began pouring and splashing oceans of luscious acrylic paint onto canvases tacked to the studio floor. The sheer magnitude of paint caused them to dry and crackle, in what are sometimes referred to as his elephant-skin paintings. In 1971 he returned to working on canvases pinned upright on a wall. Gravity played the hand of the composer, with rich rivulets of paint free-flowing and intermingling in seemingly chance configurations. In retrospect these works channeled the precedents of Clyfford Still and Morris Louis. Canada's admiration for Paul-Émile Borduas, Jean Paul Riopelle and the Automatists might have established a natural proclivity for Canadians to value these new Poons paintings.

These works were warmly embraced, and they were exhibited in prestigious Canadian galleries much earlier than by other nations. Prominent venues heralded solo exhibitions at David Mirvish Gallery, Toronto, in 1972 and 1976 (and in a group exhibition in 1978). Works of the period such as *Sayronnella* were avidly collected and exhibited by the Edmonton Art Gallery (now the Art Gallery of Alberta) in *Masters of the 1960s* in 1972 and in a 1974 solo show. Poons was a regular fixture in solo exhibitions in Toronto, Montreal and Edmonton: at Gallery One, Toronto, during the 1980s; Waddington Galleries, Montreal (1982); and Theo Waddington Gallery, Boca Raton, Florida (2000). In the early 1980s, Kenneth G. Heffel Fine Art Inc. showed his work



detail

in Vancouver. His influence was an inspiration to many leading Canadian painters, among them Douglas Haynes, Robert Scott, Harold Feist, Ann Clarke Darrah, Graham Peacock, Bruce O'Neil, David Bolduc and Paul Fournier. Reflecting the importance of the work of Poons in Canada, his works are in the key public collections nationwide, such as the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Vancouver Art Gallery, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Alberta, Art Gallery of Ontario and Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Sayronnella is an exquisite example of the period of work most coveted by art museums worldwide and illustrated in all the major histories of twentieth-century international art. In this painting, Poons intermixes tactile dollops of multiple hues into indescribable, unnamable waves of warm chromatic greys with strong pure colour accent counterpoints.

Poons would insist that *Sayronnella* is solely “about paint”—pure retinal sensation. The work gives the impression that it is crafted intuitively, absent of conscious “intervention”—nevertheless, there is evident design and composition. Lurking behind the skins of pigment is a veiled allusion to his admiration for Claude Monet's water lily paintings. Poons is the natural inheritor of the legacy of 1950s expressionist abstraction.

Public museum collections throughout the world have chosen to represent Poons by works akin to the qualities of *Sayronnella*. These notably include the Tate, Van Abbemuseum, Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Philadelphia Museum of Art and Smithsonian American Art Museum.

We thank Jeffrey Spalding for contributing the above essay. Spalding is an artist, curator, author and educator. For more than 40 years, Spalding has served in leadership roles at art museums and educational institutions. He is currently an Art Consultant for the Tao Hua Tan Cultural and Creative Company, and a Lifetime Senior Artist, Tao Hua Tan International Artist Creative Residency, China.

This work will be included in the forthcoming *Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings* currently being prepared by the Larry Poons Studio.

ESTIMATE: \$30,000 – 50,000