



25 Jean Paul Riopelle

AUTO CAS OC QMG RCA SCA 1923 – 2002

Le vol des crevettes

oil on canvas, signed and on verso titled and dated 1955 on the gallery and exhibition labels and inscribed 4252 and 1/6, and 177 on a label 28 ¾ x 39 ¾ in, 73 x 100 cm

PROVENANCE

Galerie Jacques Dubourg, Paris
Private Collection, São Paulo
Michelle Morin, Montreal
Masters Gallery Ltd., Calgary
By descent to the present Private Estate, Calgary

LITERATURE

Yseult Riopelle, *Jean Paul Riopelle Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 2, 1954 – 1959, 2004*, reproduced page 194, catalogue #1955.010H.1955

EXHIBITED

Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, *Riopelle*, January 10 – February 9, 1958, catalogue #16
Städtisches Museum, Wuppertal, *Riopelle*, February 16 – March 16, 1958, catalogue #14
Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover, *Riopelle*, September 13 – October 19, 1958, catalogue #30

JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE is the most internationally renowned Canadian artist born in the twentieth century. He is one of two Canadians whose work is chronicled in H.H. Arnason's *History of Modern Art*, used for decades worldwide as the standard university text. *Le vol des crevettes* from 1955 is an impressive large-scale work that holds an important place in the exhibition history and development of the artist's most characteristic stylistic innovations. Riopelle, a founding figure of Quebec's Automatists, moved to Paris in 1947, establishing lasting relationships with key European moderns. In that same year, he was the only Canadian invited to participate in the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme*.

By the 1950s Riopelle gained critical acclaim for his painterly overall abstractions. These works were built with faceted surfaces patterned uniformly by impasto marks, mirroring the shape of the palette knife used in their creation. His work was heralded in exhibitions throughout Europe and beyond, including Pierre Loeb's gallery in Paris. In 1952 Riopelle participated in the *Venice Biennale*. His work was included in the 1953 *Younger European Painters* exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Riopelle was awarded his first solo show in New York in 1954, at the influential Pierre Matisse Gallery. In that same year, works by Riopelle, along with those of B.C. Binning and Paul-Émile Borduas, represented Canada at the *Venice Biennale*. Their compositional format was likened to the work of Jackson Pollock and his friend Sam Francis.

Yet in 1955, Riopelle abandoned the aesthetic approach that had brought him meteoric success. With works akin to *Le vol des crevettes*, he reintroduced figure / ground and part by part relational compositional structure; he embraced the grand legacy of easel painting utilizing exquisite quality oil paints and fine linen

canvases. This brave departure was rewarded by an even grander reception for his work. He had a solo exhibition at Galerie Jacques Dubourg, Paris, and received an Honorable Mention at the 1955 *Bienal de São Paulo*. These two exhibitions may account for the early entries in the provenance history for *Le vol des crevettes*. In 1955 Riopelle traveled to the USA, where the Pierre Matisse Gallery mounted his second New York show. Riopelle befriended well-known American Abstract Expressionist Franz Kline, and he took a prominent place as a leader of the revitalized approach to Lyrical Abstraction.

With the financial success of his exhibitions, Riopelle purchased a sailboat. He began a 24-year intense, fiery, tumultuous relationship (1955 to 1979) with the second-generation Abstract Expressionist American painter Joan Mitchell. Together they reveled in sailing on the Mediterranean Sea. These forays may partially account for the source of inspiration for works such as *Le vol des crevettes* (The Flight of the Shrimp). Riopelle vociferously denied that his work was anything but pure form. Yet both he and Mitchell chose to have studios and homes at Claude Monet's Giverny. In 1969, Mitchell purchased and lived out her life at Monet's former property, La Tour in Vétheuil. It seems more plausible that their form of abstraction was inspired by sensitive observation of nature, not unlike Monet's fascination with his water lily pond.

The period of the creation of *Le vol des crevettes* finds Riopelle at his most inventive and unique stage in a storied career of accomplishments. In 1958 Riopelle was included in exhibitions on two continents, among them at London, Brussels, Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum and the National Museum of Modern Art, Paris. He received an Honorable Mention at the Guggenheim Museum's *Guggenheim International Award* exhibition. Prominent German art museums hosted solo shows: a major retrospective at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, as well as Wuppertal and Hanover. *Le vol des crevettes* was selected for inclusion in all three, indicating contemporaneous endorsement of the fine quality of this specific work.

Works of the period and style of *Le vol des crevettes* are prominently showcased in the collections of every major Canadian public art museum and chronicled in international art history texts that define the art of its time. Additionally, his works are in the most respected international museum collections, among them the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; National Gallery of Art and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; National Galleries of Scotland; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; and the Tate Modern, London.

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.

ESTIMATE: \$250,000 – 350,000