

8 Guido Molinari

AANFM LP QMG RCA SAPQ 1933 – 2004

Bi-sériel violet-ocre

acrylic on canvas, on verso signed, dated 5/69

and inscribed #G.M.-T-1969-08

111 x 90 in, 281.9 x 228.6 cm

PROVENANCE

Estate of the Artist

LITERATURE

Gilles Daigneault, *L'art au Québec depuis Pellan: une histoire des prix Borduas*, Musée du Québec, 1988, reproduced page 47

Sandra Grant Marchand, *Guido Molinari, une rétrospective*, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1995, reproduced page 53 and listed page 71

EXHIBITED

Musée du Québec, Quebec City, *L'art au Québec depuis Pellan: une histoire des prix Borduas*, May 18 – August 14, 1988, catalogue #25

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, *Guido Molinari, une rétrospective*, May 19 – September 17, 1995, catalogue #48

GUIDO MOLINARI'S *Bi-sériel violet-ocre* from 1969 is an outstanding example of colour harmonies in constant motion. With the central motif of colour/space, Molinari honed colour in visual motion with an unfaltering clarity of purpose throughout the 1960s. A decade of "striped" paintings established Molinari's international reputation, highlighted by his award-winning success representing Canada at the *Venice Biennale* in 1968 and, three years prior, his inclusion in the now legendary New York exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, organized by the Museum of Modern Art.

The strict geometry of Molinari's multicoloured striped paintings, with every stripe of equal width, completely eradicated illusionistic space from his paintings. What remained was the materiality of colour, supported by a single constantly repeating form. This wholly new chromatic space was free from the burdens of Euclidean geometric space—figure/ground gone, representation abolished—just colour and space, to be activated by the traversing gaze of individual viewers.

Bi-sériel violet-ocre is an unerringly precise visual testament to Molinari's concept of seriality, something he expressed in his essay "Colour in the Creative Arts" in 1971. To paraphrase, seriality is the only pictorial process that (a) rejects giving any single colour dominance, (b) uses recurrence or repetition so individual colours acquire a dialectic function in the painting, (c) rejects secondary systems of expression with a constancy of form, thus eliminating notions of larger/smaller, darker/lighter, or even line versus mass, and (d) eliminates the secondary opposition of textures, something that always restricts the colour message.¹

Like all of Molinari's paintings produced after 1964, *Bi-sériel violet-ocre* is based on his serial compositional strategy of vertical bands of colour, spread across the flat picture plane. Advances in acrylic paint afforded him a homogeneous surface, high-saturation colour with opacity and a singular unified

material presence. Paradoxically, it was just this simplicity of materiality and form that was liberating, leaving space for vibrating dynamic colour harmonies.

Each colour band in *Bi-sériel violet-ocre* appears twice, repeated in the same order. The violet and ochre form both the outer edges of the surface and the central divide, which effectively bifurcates the painting into two rectangles of six stripes each, or it could just as easily be read as six pairs of slender two-tone rectangles, or as stanzas of multicoloured stripes bound by any two stripes of the same hue. The choice rests with the viewer and to a significant degree relies upon how individuals see and organize colour. The organization of colours responds to the viewer's position in a colour/space orchestrated by Molinari. His interest was in colour relationships, and equally the perceptive capacity of viewers. How much visual information can the human mind hold and with what degree of certainty?

Bi-sériel paintings tend to be read from one edge to the other. When a viewer's gaze crosses over the centre, or what Molinari called "the point of no return," it is game on, one's mind battling with similarity and difference, recurrence and repetition, and unity and dispersion simultaneously. Molinari's homogeneous patterns of high-saturation hues, each uniform in intensity and with a near-flat opaque materiality, frustrate the mind's overriding will to unify. This was something first enunciated by MOMA curator William Seitz when preparing *The Responsive Eye*.² In combination, the strategies enacted in *Bi-sériel violet-ocre* are what engage viewers to make the decisions that ultimately activate colour in space. Seitz wrote:

Molinari's serial repetitions produce slight variations in the resonance in each colour note across the work. By his method of repetition, Molinari implies a discursive, temporal reading of the canvas, which, like the tonalities used, is aimed at mitigating the figure-ground gestalt... Colour hovers near the painted surface and the gestalt potential of the work remains unfirm; just as each hue makes a slight equivocation where it abuts an adjoining colour.³

Bi-sériel violet-ocre is the work of a mature artist at the peak of his powers, a painting where colour gloriously achieves a magisterial autonomy from any obligation to represent.

We thank Gary Dufour, adjunct associate professor at the University of Western Australia, for contributing the above essay. Dufour was the curator of the exhibition *Guido Molinari, 1951–1961: The Black and White Paintings*, shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Windsor and the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1989–1990.

1. Guido Molinari, "Colour in the Creative Arts," in *Guido Molinari: Écrits sur l'art (1954–1975)*, by Paul Théberge (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1976), 94.

2. William Seitz, *The Responsive Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1965), exhibition catalogue, 8.

3. Quoted in Dennis Young, *49th Parallels: New Canadian Art* (Sarasota, FL: John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1971), exhibition catalogue, 15–16.

ESTIMATE: \$200,000 – 300,000

