



312 Jean Paul Riopelle

AUTO CAS OC QMG RCA SCA 1923 – 2002

Sans titre

oil on canvas, signed and dated 1949 and on verso titled *Abstraction*, dated on the Musée d'art contemporain exhibition label, inscribed 491 Stuart, Montreal, PQ Canada and 2 (circled) and stamped Galerie Gilles Corbeil, 2175 rue Crescent, Montreal
28 ¾ x 36 ¼ in, 73 x 91.8 cm

PROVENANCE

Galerie Gilles Corbeil, Montreal
Maurice Corbeil, Montreal
Galerie Claude Lafitte, Montreal
Acquired from the above by the present Private Collection, Vancouver, 1995

LITERATURE

Evan H. Turner, *Eleven Artists in Montreal / Onze artistes à Montréal, 1860 – 1960*, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, 1960, titled as *Abstraction*, listed, unpaginated
Gilles Henault, *Panorama de la peinture au Québec, 1940 – 1966*, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1967, listed
R.H. Hubbard, *Painters of Quebec: Maurice and Andrée Corbeil Collection*, National Gallery of Canada, 1973, titled as *Abstraction*, listed page 202 and reproduced page 203
Ann Davis, *Frontiers of Our Dreams: Quebec Painting in the 1940s and 1950s*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1979, titled as *Abstraction*, listed and reproduced page 83
Guy Robert, *Riopelle, Chasseur d'images*, 1981, detail reproduced page 61
Yseult Riopelle, *Jean Paul Riopelle Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 1, 1939 – 1953*, 1999, reproduced page 252 and listed page 368, catalogue #1949.001H.1949

EXHIBITED

Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, *Eleven Artists in Montreal / Onze artistes à Montréal, 1860 – 1960*, September 8 – October 2, 1960, catalogue #101
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, *Panorama 1 de la peinture au Québec, 1940 – 1955*, May 15 – June 25, 1967, catalogue #59
Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, *Painters of Quebec: Maurice and Andrée Corbeil Collection*, March 30 – April 24, 1973, traveling to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, May 10 – June 10, 1973
Winnipeg Art Gallery, *Frontiers of Our Dreams: Quebec Painting in the 1940s and 1950s*, February 9 – April 22, 1979, catalogue #29



JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE

Sans titre

watercolour and ink on paper, 1948
10 x 13 ¾ in, 25.4 x 35.2 cm
Sold by Heffel Fine Art Auction House, November 22, 2017, lot 25

Not for sale with this lot

IN 1949, JEAN PAUL RIOPELLE was in Paris, immersed in a surrealist group gathered around Galerie La Dragonne. Encouraged by this community of artists and writers, Riopelle was beginning to produce the results his high self-expectations demanded. A friendship with Pierre Loeb led to him meeting André Breton, who with Marcel Duchamp included his paintings in the 1947 *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* in Zurich. Riopelle grasped the freedom offered by Surrealism but quickly moved on to champion an art created more spontaneously, without predetermined forms. Art Informel sought something much rarer, an art of authentic individuals.¹

Sans titre (1949) is from the year of Riopelle's first Paris solo exhibition, *Riopelle à la Dragonne* (Galerie Nina Dausset). It is an outstanding example of how his experiments with watercolour and ink from 1948, shown above, where the colourful underpainting is contained by a veil of rapidly applied black ink, quickly progressed to showcase his early exploration of automatism and the gestural language that define his mature oeuvre. A style renowned for refracted colours and intuitive gestures orchestrated by a network of rhythmic black lines, his technique sought to express the unconscious through unpremeditated



detail

mark-making. Riopelle developed a distinctive approach that married spontaneous gesture within a complex, mosaic-like structure.

Sans titre begins with a multicoloured background of relatively large areas of orange, red, yellow, green and blue, which remain undisturbed at the extremities of the picture plane. This stability is offset against the increasingly intense vectors of colour that coalesce optically and physically layer upon layer towards the centre. This density creates real depth and the artist's mark-making engages the full range of techniques: brush, paint applied directly from a tube, and of course his signature, paint applied with a *couteau*, his preferred description for a palette knife. The result is an intertwined surface of indexical marks that prefigure his "mosaics" of the 1950s.

Like *Le Perroquet vert* (The Green Parrot) (1949), similar in structure and rhythm of repeating colours, *Sans titre* marks the beginning of Riopelle establishing his reputation as the most internationally significant Canadian artist of his generation. Riopelle's wet-on-wet troweling can be seen across the entire

surface of *Sans titre*. His technique does not allow for the previsualization of an intended result. Instead, the act of painting itself, the physical layering of colour in motion, becomes the subject. Each slashing movement, often in white, brings with it traces of adjacent colours. And the black veil so dominant only a year earlier has disintegrated, dispersed across the entire painting to deliver a compelling argument for depth.

Each black gestural line conveys direction, embedded into every layer, in a way recording each campaign at the easel where chaos and discipline did battle. Unlike Jackson Pollock, often referenced in discussions of Riopelle,² who worked horizontally, Riopelle worked at an easel, his canvas orientated vertically, therefore unreceptive to a drip. The application of pigments required force and reflects the physicality of paint scraped, squeezed, hurled or dragged across the surface with a *couteau*.

This brief description just hints at the dynamism and energy that underscores the entirety of Riopelle's oeuvre. *Sans titre* is an image of originality, raw energy that pushes the picture plane to the point of dissolution, when a new filigree of dispersed black



lines re-establishes stability only to immediately dissolve again in a metonymical pursuit of new forms to fuse spontaneity with discipline and nature with abstraction. *Sans titre* transforms the canvas into a living surface, one which first and foremost revels in the joy of a moment.

We thank Gary Dufour, adjunct associate professor at the University of Western Australia, for contributing the above essay. A modern and contemporary art specialist, Dufour was formerly the senior curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery (1988–1995) and chief curator / deputy director of the Art Gallery of Western Australia (1995–2013).

1. Michel Tapié, "An Other Art" (1952), in *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 630.

2. J. Alvarez-Ramirez et al., "Fractality of Riopelle Abstract Expressionism Paintings (1949–1953): A Comparison with Pollock's Paintings," *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications* 526 (April 2019): 121–31.

Paintings by Jean Paul Riopelle from 1949 are exceptionally rare on the market. A closely related work, *Le Perroquet vert* (The Green Parrot), 1949, is in the collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. Our work, *Sans titre*, belongs to the same important year. The Riopelle catalogue raisonné documents that the artist produced only 26 oil on canvas works in 1949, with even fewer remaining in private hands.

ESTIMATE: \$300,000 – 500,000