

DIANE DE POLIGNAC

HUGUETTE ARTHUR BERTRAND (1920-2005)



Huguette Arthur Bertrand in her studio

One of the few women of Lyrical Abstraction, Huguette Arthur Bertrand was an active member of the Post-War Paris art scene, rubbing shoulders with Pierre Soulages, Hans Hartung, Serge Poliakoff, Jean Dewasne, Martin Barré and Pierre Dmitrienko among many others.

BIOGRAPHY

A YOUNG WOMAN PAINTER IN POST-WAR PARIS

Born in 1920 in Écouen, Huguette Arthur Bertrand spent her childhood in Roanne (center south of France) and settled in Paris shortly after the war. She attended the Académie libre de la Grande Chaumière. A fellowship allowed her to spend a year in Prague between 1946 and 1947 where she had her first solo exhibition. She met the painter Joseph Sima there.

A rare painter woman in the essentially masculine artistic landscape of Post-war Paris, she immersed herself fully in the buzzing art world of Montparnasse and Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Huguette Arthur Bertrand became friendly with publishers, critics (Michel Ragon) and abstract artists, those of the Galerie Denise René: Jean Dewasne, Jean Deyrolle, Serge Poliakoff; and with Martin Barré, Pierre Dmitrienko, James Guitet, Kumi Sugai and John F. Koenig. On Saturdays she would visit Jean-Michel Atlan's studio with Marcelle Loubchansky. She participated with passion in this artistic effervescence, marked by lively debate between figurative and abstract art, but also between supporters of "cold" abstraction and those of "warm" abstraction: one geometric, the other gestural, lyrical, guided by a free and spontaneous gesture.

IN THE 1950'S, HUGUETTE ARTHUR BERTRAND'S SUCCESS IN PARIS

During the 1950s, Huguette Arthur Bertrand applied the full force of her art and the confidence of her artistic vocabulary made from stripes that hatch, streak, give rhythm to compositions. A powerful way of painting that confuses. A solid form of painting that marks a determined, independent character, "a type of painting that does not appear feminine at all; even muscular painting, strong, dynamic in a way that would appear masculine [...]" as Michel Ragon wrote.

The woman artist Huguette Arthur Bertrand's explosive work, which was definitively abstract from 1950, presents an audacious palette, full of colour that gradually evolved towards more dramatic shades, concentrated in a range of ochre, brown, orange-red.

In 1949 and 1950, Huguette Arthur Bertrand participated in the key exhibition *Les Mains Éblouies* (The Dazzled Hands) at the Galerie Maeght alongside Pierre Dmitrienko, and with Cobra artists in 1950 (Pierre Alechinsky, Corneille, Jacques Doucet).

In Paris, from the start of the 1950s, several galleries exhibited the painter woman's work: Galerie Niepce, Galerie La Roue, Galerie Arnaud above all...

Huguette Arthur Bertrand regularly participated in the main salons of abstract art in Paris, at the Salon de Mai

from 1949 until the late 1980s, at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles until the 1990s, and at the Salon d'Automne.

The year 1955 was decisive for her: she won the famous Prix Fénéon (Fénéon award).

In 1956, Huguette Arthur Bertrand participated in the Festival de l'Art d'Avant-Garde, a major event held at Le Corbusier's Cité Radieuse in Marseille.

HUGUETTE ARTHUR BERTRAND'S INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Her works began to travel abroad: a solo exhibition was held at the Brussels Palais des Beaux-Arts in 1956, and crossed the Atlantic: in 1956, the Meltzer Gallery in New York organized for the woman artist a solo exhibition in 1956, praised by critics, then a group show the year after: *North and South Americans and Europeans*. Also in 1957, the painter Huguette Arthur Bertrand participated in the exhibition *New Talents in Europe* at the University of Alabama. In 1958 and in 1960-61, she exhibited at the Howard Wise Gallery in Cleveland.

The works of the painter woman Huguette Arthur Bertrand continued to be exhibited in many different galleries and art events all over the world: in Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, England, Italy... as far as Japan, Venezuela, Mexico and Cuba.

In 1961, Jean-Marie Drot made a film about Huguette Arthur Bertrand for French television (ORTF).

THE WOMAN ARTIST HUGUETTE ARTHUR BERTRAND IN MICHEL RAGON'S CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

Close to the art critic, Michel Ragon, Huguette Arthur Bertrand met his circle of friends: Pierre Soulages, Hans Hartung, Gérard Schneider, Zao Wou-Ki, Victor Vasarely, among others. Together they worked on a collection *La Peau des Choses* (the skin of things), a portfolio of prints published in a limited edition by Jean-Robert Arnaud in 1968 in honour of their friend Michel Ragon.

HUGUETTE ARTHUR BERTRAND'S MATURITY WORK

Starting in 1971, Huguette Arthur Bertrand worked with tapestry for over a decade (she received commissions from the Mobilier national) and became interested in monumental mural painting. At the turn of the 1980s, her gestures became more and more liberated, and calmer, summarized in subtle white traces, airy like a breath on the canvas. The woman artist Huguette Arthur Bertrand died in 2005.

© Diane de Polignac Gallery / Astrid de Monteverde
Translation: Jane Mac Avock

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Aalborg (Danemark), Museum of Modern Art
Angers, Musée Jean Lurçat et de la tapisserie contemporaine
Dunkirk, Lieu d'Art et d'Action Contemporaine (LAAC)
Geneva, Fondation Gandur pour l'Art
Minneapolis, Walker Art Center
Nantes, Musée d'arts
Oslo, Fondation Moltzau
Paris, Musée national d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou
Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale
Paris, Mobilier national
Paris, Centre national d'Arts plastiques (CNAP)
Quebec, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Québec
Saint-Étienne, Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Étienne

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Les Mains éblouies (The Dazzled Hands), Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1949 and 1950
Salon de Mai, Paris, 1949-late 1980s
Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Paris, 1950-1990
Solo exhibition, Galerie Niepce, Paris, 1951
Salon d'Octobre, Paris, 1952-1953
Solo exhibitions, Galerie Arnaud, Paris, 1953-1957
Divergences, group shows, Galerie Arnaud, Paris, 1954-1957
Éloge du Petit Format, group shows, Galerie La Roue, Paris, 1955, 1956
10 Peintres de l'École de Paris, Galerie de France, Paris, 1956
L'Aventure de l'Art Abstrait, group show, Galerie Arnaud, Paris, 1956
Festival de l'Art d'avant-garde, Unité d'Habitation Le Corbusier, Marseille, 1956
Solo show, Meltzer Gallery, New York, 1956
Expression et non-figuration, group show, Galerie Le Gendre, Paris, 1957
Gouaches et collages, group show, Galerie Le Gendre, Paris, 1957
Festival de l'Art d'avant-garde, Unité d'Habitation Le Corbusier, Nantes, 1957
North and south Americans and Europeans, Meltzer Gallery, New York, 1957
New talents in Europe, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, 1957
Howard Wise Gallery, Cleveland, 1958, 1960-61
Solo show, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1957
50 ans de collage (50 years of collage), group show, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1964
L'Envolée lyrique (Lyrical Flight), Paris 1945-1956, Musée du Luxembourg, Paris, 2006
Les Sujets de l'abstraction, Peinture non-figurative de la Seconde École de Paris (1946-1962), (The Subjects of Abstraction, Non-figurative Painting of the Second School of Paris (1946-1962)), Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Musée Rath, Geneva, 2011

Huguette Arthur Bertrand, Donation et autres œuvres, Musée des Beaux-Arts, cabinet d'arts graphiques, Angers, 2011-2012
Femmes années 1950. Au fil de l'abstraction, peinture et sculpture (Women of the 1950s. Through abstraction, painting and sculpture), Musée Soulages, Rodez, 2019-2020

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Michel Ragon, *Une aventure de l'art abstrait*, Paris, Laffont, 1956
Hubert Juin, *Seize peintres de la Jeune École de Paris*, Le Musée de Poche, Paris, Georges Fall, 1956
Michel Seuphor, *Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite*, Paris, Hazan, 1957
Bernard Pingaud, *Huguette Arthur Bertrand*, monography, Paris, Hoffer, 1964
Michel Seuphor and Michel Ragon, *L'art abstrait*, Paris, Maeght, 1973
Michel Ragon, *Huguette Arthur Bertrand, followed by Notes de parcours du peintre*, monograph, Paris, Porte du Sud / Galarté, 1987
Geneviève Bonnefoi, *les années fertiles, 1940-1960*, Paris, Perrin, 1988



Huguette Arthur Bertrand in her studio