

## LOÏS FREDERICK : VITAL COLOUR

Mathilde Gubanski, Diane de Polignac Gallery, 2020

Loïs Frederick was born in 1930 in Hay Springs, a Nebraska village with a population of 570 in the American Great Plains region. Nothing destined her to become an artist, and yet at a very early age she developed a feeling for colour. After winning a Fulbright award (twice!), this artist spent all her life in Paris. Loïs Frederick is nevertheless a completely American artist.

### Landscapes of Nebraska

The American landscapes of her childhood doubtless left a mark on Loïs Frederick's work. Between the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains and the National Forest of Nebraska, these landscapes of contrasts and huge expanses nurtured her imagination. From this, the artist would retain horizontal formats and compositions built up from a balance of *masse*. The palette of her early works was natural, inspired by landscapes. She brought together blues, greens, blacks and earth colours.

### Vital Colour

Loïs Frederick, like a true colour magician, developed her palette over the 1950s and 1960s. She added halftones: pinks, purples, oranges, turquoises... This great colourist combined with skill primary and secondary colours, while continuing to give them structure by using black brushes. The gesture is slower, meditative. Colour took precedence over form. It became both subject and medium in Loïs Frederick's work. Jean Baudrillard described American landscapes in his book *Amérique*: "the amazement of the heat is metaphysical there. Even the colours, pastel blues, mauves, lilacs, result from a slow, timeless, geological combustion. The mineral character of the subsoil surfaces in crystalline plants. All the natural elements suffer by fire. The desert is no longer a landscape, it is the pure form that results from the abstraction of all the others."<sup>1</sup>

### Loïs Frederick & American Abstraction

In *Art and Culture*, the art critic Clement Greenberg evoked the great painters of the School of New York. His comments about Hans Hofmann can also apply to the works of Loïs Frederick: "Here colour determines form from the inside as it were; thick splotches, welts, smears and ribbons of paint dispose themselves into intelligible shapes the instant they hit the surface; out of the fullness of colour come drawing and design."<sup>2</sup> Clement Greenberg also evokes the work of Mark Rothko, which Loïs Frederick discovered in 1950 and left a huge impression on her.

At the end of the 1960s, a new medium revolutionized Loïs Frederick's painting: acrylic. It allowed her to enrich



Loïs Frederick in her studio in Les Audigers in the 1960's.  
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her palette even more. The colours are bright, dazzling, and fluorescent. Colour invaded everything and Loïs Frederick joined her American compatriots of the Colour Field and All Over movements. The painting no longer had any meaning, no borders, and no centre. Clement Greenberg said about Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still: "They attempt to expel every reminiscence of sculptural illusion by creating a counter-illusion of light alone – a counter illusion which consists of the projection of an indeterminate surface of warm and luminous colour in front of the actual painted surface."<sup>3</sup>

### Essential Light

On paper, Loïs Frederick brilliantly combined gouache, ink, acrylic, pastel, charcoal etc... All the techniques, finishes, all the materials, all the colours work for the light. This what Loïs Frederick sought ultimately: to recreate the effects of light. Like late Monet and like the Abstract Expressionists, Loïs Frederick plunges us into a poetic universe that is mysterious and meditative, built up on transparencies. She brings us back to these American landscapes with their unlimited horizontality, where time seems to stop: "It's a sort of suspended eternity where the year is renewed very day. With the certainty that it will be like this every day, that each evening there will be this rainbow of all the colours of the spectrum in which the light, after having reigned all day in its invisible form, is still analysed in the evening according to all the nuances of which it is comprised, before disappearing. The nuances are already those of the instantaneous rainbow that goes on fire in the wind on the ridge of Pacific waves."<sup>4</sup>

In 1986, Loïs Frederick lost her husband Gérard Schneider, the great pioneer of Lyrical Abstraction. She put her own art aside completely for fifteen years to concentrate on promoting the work of this great artist. In the shadows, Loïs Frederick passed from being a great woman artist to being the wife of a great artist.

1. - Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*, Paris, Grasset, 1995

2. - Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1971

3. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1971

4. Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*, Paris, Grasset, 1995

At the start of the 2000's, it was a car headlight piercing the fog that brought Loïs Frederick back to her search for light. She returned to painting, pushed by a vital impetus "what haunts the American mind is that the lights are extinguished."<sup>5</sup> She created sublime solar explosions, where the diluted colour illuminated a white background; and dazzling lights and shadows, where bright colours contrast with a dark background.

Loïs Frederick chose to spend her life in France. However, like her transatlantic compatriots living in Paris, she nevertheless remained an American painter. Nurtured by the memory of the landscapes of her childhood, Loïs Frederick created an authentic and personal body of work.



Loïs Frederick in Les Audigers, in the countryside of Paris  
circa 1960  
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5. Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*, Paris, Grasset, 1995