

DIANE DE POLIGNAC

SERGE POLIAKOFF (1900-1969)



Serge Poliakoff was a Russian-born French painter. One of the major figures of the post-war abstract movement, Poliakoff is known for his approach to abstraction, structured by the juxtaposition of colour planes.

BIOGRAPHY

SERGE POLIAKOFF'S EARLY LIFE IN RUSSIA

Serge Poliakov was born on 21 January 1900 in Moscow, the thirteenth of fourteen children. His father, Georges Nicolaévitch Poliakov, supplied the Russian army with horses and owned a racing stable. Serge Poliakov began attending courses in drawing in Moscow in 1914. He painted his first landscapes in Nalchik, where the leading Russian landscape painter Isaac Levitan had worked.

Poliakov's pious mother regularly took her son to church, where he discovered religious icons that would have a profound influence on his work. Showing little interest in his studies at high school, Poliakov took refuge in reading and acquired a very good knowledge of Russian literature and the Western classics. Through his brother Anatoly, who studied singing, Poliakov developed a passion for opera and music. He learned to play the guitar at the age of 12 years old.

SERGE POLIAKOFF'S EXILE AND MOVE TO PARIS

The life of the Poliakov family was violently shaken by the Russian Revolution in 1917. The family fled the following year, travelling through Russia and the Caucasus. In 1919, Poliakov took refuge in Constantinople with his aunt, the singer Nastia Poliakov. Poliakov accompanied her on the guitar, which would become his primary source of income for three decades to come. Poliakov travelled all over Europe, passing through Sofia, Belgrade, Vienna and Berlin before reaching Paris, where he settled in 1923.

In 1929, Poliakov enrolled at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Montparnasse to study painting. The painter exhibited his works for the first time in 1931, at a group exhibition at the Galerie Drouant in Paris. During that period, he painted nudes, portraits and landscapes in an academic style. Poliakov worked at the Académie Frochot in Montmartre in 1933, where he studied painting under Othon Friez, Marcel Cosson and Ivan Cerf. In the evenings, he continued to play the guitar to earn a living.

THE PAINTER SERGE POLIAKOFF IN LONDON

In 1935, Poliakov moved to London, where he studied at the Slade School of Art for two years. It was there that he met Marcelle Perreur-Lloyd, whom he married the same year. The couple had a son, Alexis, in 1942. Still living off his earnings from playing the guitar, Poliakov took part in several films as a musician. During his time in London, Poliakov visited its museums, marvelling at the works of the Italian Primitives—Cimabue, Giotto, Simone Martini—as well as members of the Flemish school and

the impressionist movement. He also studied the works of Velasquez, Cézanne, Gauguin and Seurat, as well as modern artists, among whom he particularly appreciated Paul Klee—for his sense of composition—and Juan Gris. "Juan Gris was already abstract," Poliakov said, "unlike Picasso and Braque." The Egyptian sarcophagi that Poliakov discovered at the British Museum were a major aesthetic revelation for the artist at the time. He was fascinated by their proportions, colours and materials.

SERGE POLIAKOFF'S RETURN TO PARIS AND EARLY SUCCESS

In 1937, Serge Poliakov and his wife returned to Paris. The artist's first solo exhibition was held at the Galerie Zak in the same year. It was also in Paris that Poliakov met Kandinsky, who had moved there after the Bauhaus was closed down. The meeting between the two artists encouraged Poliakov to explore abstraction in his work. In 1936, Poliakov's work was exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants, where he was represented every year until 1946. It was through the Salon that he met Sonia and Robert Delaunay, with whom he became very close friends. Robert Delaunay's lessons on simultaneous contrast would have a decisive influence on Poliakov's work.

Poliakov exhibited his first abstract painting at the Galerie Le Niveau in Paris. A fan of the piece, Kandinsky declared: "I'll be staking my money on Poliakov in the future of painting." Poliakov also met the artist Otto Freundlich around this time. Freundlich had a profound impact on the painter. Poliakov's first exhibition of entirely abstract works was presented at the Galerie L'Esquisse in 1945.

In 1946, at the suggestion of the Dutch artist César Domela, Poliakov took part in two exhibitions organised at the Centre de Recherches on Rue Cujas in Paris. The events, which brought together the avant-garde of abstract painting, saw Poliakov exhibited alongside Ernest Engel-Pak, Marie Raymond, Vassily Kandinsky, Auguste Herbin, César Domela, Jean Dewasne, Jean Deyrolle, Hans Hartung and Gérard Schneider. Poliakov's works were exhibited at Denise René's gallery alongside those of Jacques Duthoo, Alfred Reth, Marie Raymond and Marcel Pouget in the same year, and he also took part in the Salon de Mai. Poliakov still continued his activities as a musician, playing the guitar at a Russian cabaret.

In 1947, Serge Poliakov received the Kandinsky Prize, which was created by Nina Kandinsky to encourage the abstract painting movement. Poliakov's first solo

exhibition to be held abroad took place in 1948 at the Tokanten Gallery in Copenhagen. A work by Poliakoff was acquired by a museum for the first time in the same year, when the Musée de Grenoble bought a painting from him.

THE PAINTER SERGE POLIAKOFF'S FIRST EXHIBITIONS ABROAD

In 1950, Poliakoff saw his works exhibited at the Galerie Denise René and the Galerie de Beaune in Paris. He took part in the Salon de Mai in the same year. Poliakoff's work was presented at the Galerie Dina Vierny the following year, as well as in various group exhibitions in Paris and abroad, notably in England and Japan.

In 1952, Poliakoff finally stopped working as a musician thanks to a contract with the Galerie Bing, which enabled him to live off his work as an artist. It was in the same year that the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris presented the exhibition *L'Art du XX^e Siècle*. Viewing the show, Poliakoff discovered two paintings by Malevitch from the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, including *White on White*. The discovery was an aesthetic revelation for Poliakoff, who said: "It showed me once again the capital role played by the vibration of matter. Even if there is no colour, a painting in which the matter vibrates remains alive."

In 1953, Poliakoff's first solo exhibitions were presented in Belgium: at the APIAW (Association pour le progrès intellectuel et artistique en Wallonie) in Liège, at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels and at the Musée de Verviers. His first solo exhibition in the United States took place in the same year, at the Circle & Square Gallery in New York. This was followed by his second solo exhibition in the United States at the Knoedler Gallery in New York in 1955.

Poliakoff was awarded the Lissone Prize in 1956. In 1958, the painter designed the set for the ballet *Contrepoint*, which was performed with choreography by Roland Petit to the music of Marius Constant. Projections of two of Poliakoff's paintings were used as part of the set of Jean Tardieu-Jacques Poliéri's show at the Théâtre de l'Alliance Française in Paris the following year.

Poliakoff took part in major international cultural events, including *Documenta II* and *III*, the *International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting* at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and *and 50 Ans D'art Moderne* in Brussels in 1958.

In 1959, Poliakoff saw one of Malevich's monumental works for the first time at an exhibition organised by Franz Meyer at the Kunsthalle in Bern. The piece had a profound effect on the painter.

The painter Serge Poliakoff was naturalised as a French citizen in 1962. He was featured at the Venice Biennale in the same year, where a room was dedicated to his work. In 1965, Poliakoff was awarded the International Prize at the Tokyo Biennale. The following year, he was awarded the Grand Prix at the Biennale de Menton and a major retrospective of his work was presented at the Kunstmuseum in St. Gallen, Switzerland. In 1968, a Serge Poliakoff retrospective was presented at the Maison de la Culture in Caen, closely followed by a second retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris in 1970.

In September 1969, Serge Poliakoff travelled to Venice for his exhibition at the Galleria del Naviglio. During his stay, he visited the Chapel of the Scrovegni in Padua and discovered the frescoes by Giotto, which influenced his last works. Serge Poliakoff died on 12 October 1969 in Paris, France.

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SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Aalborg, Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum
Amsterdam, Musée Stedelijk
Basel, Kunstmuseum
Berlin, Nationalgalerie
Bern, Kunstmuseum
Brussels, Musées royaux des beaux-arts de Belgique
Buenos Aires, Museo de Arte Moderno
Caracas, Museo de Arte contemporaneo
Chicago, IL, The Art Institute of Chicago
Colmar, Musée Unterlinden
Cologne, Museum Ludwig
Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst
Dijon, Musée des beaux-arts
Dortmund, Museum am Ostwall
Essen, Museum Folkwang
Freiburg, Museum für Kunst und Geschichte
Fukuoka, Fukuoka Art Museum
Geneva, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire
Grenoble, Musée de peinture et de sculpture
Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle
Hanover, Sprengel Museum
Helsinki, Ateneum
Houston, TX, Museum of Fine Arts
Lille, Palais des beaux-arts
Lisbon, Museu Coleção Berardo
London, Tate Gallery
Lyon, Musée des beaux-arts
Madrid, Fondation Thyssen-Bornemisza
Montpellier, Musée Fabre
Montreal, Musée d'Art contemporain
Nantes, Musée d'arts
New York, NY, Musée Solomon R. Guggenheim
New York, NY, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)
Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de Paris
Paris, Musée national d'Art moderne - Centre Pompidou
Rennes, Musée des beaux-arts
Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna
Saint-Étienne, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain
San Francisco, CA, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
Sao Paulo, Museu de Arte contemporanea
Séoul, Ho-am Art Museum
Strasbourg, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain
Stockholm, Moderna Museet
Tahiti, Musée Gauguin
Takanawa, Museum of Modern Art
Toulouse, Les Abattoirs
Vienna, Museum Moderner Kunst
Villeneuve-d'Ascq, LaM
Washington D.C., The Phillips Collection
Zurich, Kunsthaus

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Group exhibition, Galerie Drouant, Paris, 1931
Group exhibition, Galerie Le Niveau, Paris, 1938
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Zak, Paris, 1938
Salon des Indépendants, Paris, 1939, Poliakoff was featured at the Salon until 1946
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie L'Esquisse, Paris, 1945
Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Paris, 1945
Salon de Mai, Paris, 1946, 1950
Group exhibition, Centre de Recherches on Rue Cujas, Paris, 1947
Galerie Denise René, Paris, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951
Serge Poliakoff, Tokanten Gallery, Copenhagen, 1948
Serge Poliakoff, Haaken Gallery, Oslo, 1949, 1995
Serge Poliakoff – Gouaches, Galerie Rue de Beaune, Paris, 1950
Galerie Dina Vierny, Paris, 1951, 1986
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Ex-Libris, Brussels, 1952
Circle & Square Galleries, New York, 1952
La Nouvelle École de Paris, Galerie de Babylone, Paris, 1952
Kunsthaus, Zurich, 1952
Galerie La Hune, 1952, 1972
Salon d'Octobre, Paris, 1952
Gilioli – Poliakoff, APIAW (Association pour le progrès intellectuel et artistique en Wallonie), Liège, 1953
Gilioli – Poliakoff, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1953
Musée de Verviers, Verviers (Belgium), 1953
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Marcel Évrard, Lille, 1953
Serge Poliakoff, Circle & Square Gallery, New York, 1953
L'École de Paris, Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 1954–1958
Serge Poliakoff, Martinet Gallery, Amsterdam, 1954
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie der Spiegel, Cologne, 1954, 1964
Tendances actuelles de l'École de Paris, Kunsthalle, Bern, 1954
Éloge du petit format, Galerie La Roue, Paris, 1955
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Bing, Paris, 1954, 1956
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Henri Dupont, Lille, 1955
Serge Poliakoff, Knoedler Galleries, New York, 1955
Trente peintres de la Nouvelle École de Paris, Galerie Craven, Paris, 1956
L'aventure de l'art abstrait, Galerie Arnaud, Paris
Serge Poliakoff, Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, 1957, 1958, 1966
Serge Poliakoff, Moderne Galerie Otto Stangl, Munich, 1957
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Creuzevault, Paris, 1957
Serge Poliakoff – Gouaches, Galerie Berggruen, Paris, 1957
50 années de peinture abstraite, Galerie Creuze-Balzac, Paris, 1957
Jacobsen – Poliakoff, Kunsthalle, Basel, 1958
Serge Poliakoff, Kunstverein, Hamburg, 1958
Hanover Gallery, London, 1958, 1961
Jacobsen – Poliakoff, Stateus Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, 1958
Serge Poliakoff, Galleria del Cavallino, Venice, 1958
Serge Poliakoff, Galleria d'Arte Selecta, Rome, 1958
Serge Poliakoff, Kunstverein für die Rheinland, Düsseldorf, 1958

Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Berggruen, Paris, 1959
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Knoedler, Paris, 1959
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Cahiers d'Art, Paris, 1959
Serge Poliakoff Gouaches, Paul Kantor Gallery, Los Angeles, 1959
Loan exhibition of Paintings by Serge Poliakoff, The Phillips Collection, Washington, 1959
Documenta II, Kassel, 1959
Serge Poliakoff, Svenska-Franska Konstgalleriet, Stockholm, 1960, 1962
Serge Poliakoff, Marya Gallery, Copenhagen, 1960
Serge Poliakoff rétrospective 1937-1960, Kunsthalle, Bern, 1960
Serge Poliakoff, Galleria Minima, Milan, 1960
Serge Poliakoff, Galleria l'Obelisco, Rome, 1960
Serge Poliakoff, Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, 1961
Galerie Im Erker, Saint-Gallen, 1962, 1965, 1973, 1978, 1984, 1990, 1996
XXXI Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, French Pavilion, Venice, 1962
Galerie Melissa, Lausanne, 1962, 1972
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Stangl, Munich, 1962, 1966
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Bonnier, Lausanne, 1962
Serge Poliakoff, Haaken Gallery, Oslo, 1962
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Artek, Helsinki, 1963, 1971
Serge Poliakoff – A retrospective, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1963
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Le Divan, Paris, 1963
Gouaches de Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Renée Ziegler, Zurich, 1963
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Cavalero, Cannes, 1963, 1964, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1974
Serge Poliakoff, Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover, 1963
Serge Poliakoff, Kunstverein, Bremen, 1963
Serge Poliakoff, Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund, 1963
Serge Poliakoff, Overbeck Gesellschaft, Lübeck, 1963
Documenta III, Kassel, 1963
Serge Poliakoff, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, 1964
Serge Poliakoff, Städtisches Museum, Trier, 1964
Serge Poliakoff, Haus der Städtischen-Kunstsammlungen, Bonn, 1964
Serge Poliakoff, Musée Rath, Geneva, 1964
Serge Poliakoff, Scott Fauré Gallery, La Jolla (California), 1964
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie d'Eendt, Amsterdam, 1964
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie de France, Paris, 1964, 1973, 1977
Serge Poliakoff, Lefebvre Gallery, New York, 1964, 1968, 1971, 1981
Serge Poliakoff, Moos Gallery, Toronto, 1965
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Dina Vierny, Paris, 1965
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Räber, Lucerne, 1965
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Hébert, Grenoble, 1965
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Flaviana, Locarno, 1965
Serge Poliakoff, La Hune, Paris, 1965, 1973
International Prize at the Tokyo Biennale, Tokyo, 1965
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie d'Art Moderne, Basel, 1966
Gouaches, etchings and lithographs by Serge Poliakoff, Redfern Gallery, London, 1966
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie at Home, Toulouse, 1966
Serge Poliakoff, Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen, 1966
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Argos, Nantes, 1966
Grand Prix at the Biennale de Menton, Menton, 1966
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Carrefour, Brussels, 1967
Serge Poliakoff, Théâtre et Maison de la Culture, Caen, 1968
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie XX^e Siècle, Paris, 1968
Serge Poliakoff, Naviglio Venezia, Venice, 1969
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Régence, Brussels, 1969
Serge Poliakoff, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1970
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Dina Vierny, Paris, 1970
Serge Poliakoff, Maison de la Culture André Malraux, Reims, 1971
Serge Poliakoff, Musée Unterlinden, Colmar, 1971
Hommage à Poliakoff, Galerie Calatchi, Paris, 1971
Serge Poliakoff, Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv, 1971
Serge Poliakoff, National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen, 1972
Serge Poliakoff, Kunstnerens Hus, Oslo, 1972
Serge Poliakoff, Tampere Art Museum, Tampere, 1972
Serge Poliakoff, Galleria Dinastia, Lisbon, 1972
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Govaerts, Brussels, 1972
Serge Poliakoff, Jiyugaoka Gallery, Tokyo, 1974
Serge Poliakoff, Musée Fabre, Montpellier, 1974
Serge Poliakoff, Musée des Beaux-Arts, La-Chaux-de-Fonds, 1975
Poliakoff, Galerie Melki, Paris, 1975, 1991
Serge Poliakoff, Kasseler Kunstverein, Kassel, 1975
Rétrospective Poliakoff, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Charleroi, 1975
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Ulysses, Vienna, 1977
Serge Poliakoff, Neue Galerie der Stadt Linz, Wolfgang Gurlitt-Museum, Linz, 1977
Serge Poliakoff, Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo & Osaka, 1978
Serge Poliakoff, Musée Municipal, Vallauris, 1978
Serge Poliakoff, Maison des Arts et Loisirs, Sochaux, 1979
Serge Poliakoff, Musée Ingres, Montauban, 1980
Serge Poliakoff, Art Point Gallery, Tokyo, 1982
Serge Poliakoff, Gallery Gio Sanjyo, Kyoto, 1985
Serge Poliakoff, Kajikawa Bijutsu Shiryo, Kyoto, 1985
Serge Poliakoff, Galerie Takamiya, Osaka, 1985
Serge Poliakoff, Fondation Pierre Gianadda, Martigny, 1987
Serge Poliakoff, The Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1988
Serge Poliakoff, Fondation Dina Vierny, Musée Maillol, Paris, 1995, 2004, 2009
Serge Poliakoff, Museum Würth, Künzelsau, 1997
Serge Poliakoff, Künstlerhaus, Vienna, 1998
Serge Poliakoff, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Carcassonne, 2001
Serge Poliakoff, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dunkirk, 2002
Poliakoff, Musée de Tessé et Collégiale Saint-Pierre-la-Cour, Le Mans, 2003
Poliakoff, rétrospective des estampes, Musée des Beaux-Arts Denys-Puech, Rodez, 2003
Serge Poliakoff, Fundacion Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa, Bilbao, 2003
Serge Poliakoff, de Moscou à Paris, Espace Hennessy, Cognac, 2006

L'Envolée lyrique, Paris 1945-1956, Musée du Luxembourg, Paris, 2006

Serge Poliakoff, Musée de Pont-Aven, Pont-Aven, 2010

Les Sujets de l'abstraction, Peinture non-figurative de la Seconde École de Paris (1946-1962), Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Musée Rath, Geneva & Musée Fabre, Montpellier, 2011

Poliakoff, le rêve des formes, retrospective exhibition, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, 2013

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Françoise Brütsch, *Serge Poliakoff, œuvres 1923-1969*, Neuchâtel, Ides et Calendes, 1993

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Alexis Poliakoff, *Serge Poliakoff, Catalogue raisonné, vol. II, 1955-1958*, Paris/Munich, Archives Serge Poliakoff / Édition Galerie Française, 2010

Alexis Poliakoff, *Serge Poliakoff, Catalogue raisonné, vol. III, 1959-1962*, Paris/Munich, Archives Serge Poliakoff / Édition Galerie Française, 2011

