

## WOMEN IN ABSTRACT ART: Five women – Five artistic visions

**EXHIBITION: 8 MARCH – 16 APRIL 2021**

This exhibition intends to show women's contributions to abstract painting by presenting a selection of five artists: Marie Raymond (1908–1989), Huguette Arthur Bertrand (1920–2005), Pierrette Bloch (1928–2017), Roswitha Doerig (1929–2017) and Loïs Frederick (1930–2013). These five artists constitute neither a school nor a movement, representing instead five different forms of abstraction, five hard-won freedoms.

To introduce our exhibition, we are delving into the world of each artist by examining one of their works of art.

### Chapter 1: Marie Raymond, *Grande Lumière*

By Mathilde Gubanski



Marie Raymond in her studio, Paris, c.1950  
Photo: Willy Maywald -rights reserved

Marie Raymond was born on 4 May 1908 in La Colle-sur-Loup in the south of France. She trained as an artist in the south by painting landscapes from nature. At the end of the war, Marie Raymond chose abstraction, exploring an abstract style nourished by memories of the colours and light of her childhood landscapes. The paintings of Marie Raymond would be truly radiant. Her palette was composed of warm and luminous colours. She described what lay behind this very personal decision: "I could feel this scattered life, which had to be pieced together as a whole, to express the inner states which, for me, contained the gifts of the Impressionists: the light of the south—Hope. For me, it was that, and an impulse that pushed me to express it. All these scattered harmonies, I had to bring them into the light."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to being a painter, Marie Raymond wrote poems, which form true counterparts to her luminous paintings.

## Lumière

Plusieurs, je te l'ai dit,  
Plusieurs se sont brûlés.  
Ils ont tourné tout autour,  
Plus près, toujours plus près,  
Le cercle s'enroulait en piétinant l'espace,  
La lumière brillait.  
Elle guettait sa proie  
Elle, ne savait pas,  
Elle brillait.  
Elle mangeait la Vie.  
Sur des chemins qui n'en sont pas,  
Ils étaient à l'abri  
Ils étaient affamés  
De lumière  
Elle, ne savait pas.  
Comment lui reprocher  
D'être si belle !  
Mais où es-tu ?  
Depuis que je te cherche.  
Je te l'ai dit  
Ils l'ont aimée  
Elle, ... les a brûlés

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1. Marie Raymond, *Notre vie*

In 1957, Pierre Restany wrote about Marie Raymond: "The universe of Marie Raymond retraces the beautiful story of light and its myriad of games through a diffuse space, a sacred place of this complete saturation. Here, the trajectories of the sun's rays—sometimes direct, sometimes grouped in contradictory nebulae—create the dynamic elements of a subtle meridian atmosphere where the scattered memories of ancient natural structures come together and merge. (...) The journey on which Marie Raymond invites us—in an elevated atmosphere, in the full warmth of her light hues—is steeped with an infinite number of sparkling encounters, where the Berthe Morisot of abstract painting succeeds in bestowing chromatic bursts with that delicate, full touch, that distinctive accent. Her work, imbued with the serene joy of spring mornings, has managed to capture the flavour of a melodious secret (...)".<sup>2</sup>

Then came the difficult years for the artist. Marie Raymond and Fred Klein divorced in 1961. The following year, their son Yves Klein died of a heart attack at the age of only 34. Marie Raymond's father also died of a heart attack in 1963.

In the space of only three years, Marie Raymond's life was shaken—she was no longer a wife, mother or daughter. Turned upside down, her role as a woman would never be the same again. Marie Raymond began living and creating for herself for the first time at the age of 55. Once a figure at the centre of the Parisian art scene, Raymond withdrew from the art world altogether.

The artist Marie Raymond's painting was changed forever by these experiences. The painter found inspiration again in her passion for the Cosmos. Going beyond representations of the effects of light, Marie Raymond wanted to reach the stars: "To bring a world into being, is it not true that stars must be born?"

The artist began creating works that were fundamentally personal and intimate. She painted for herself without worrying about her colleagues, collectors or gallery owners. In her new work, was the woman artist "express[ing] regret for having lived in the shadows"<sup>3</sup>?

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2. Pierre Restany, *Marie Raymond, Organiste de la lumière*, May 1957

3. Marie Raymond, extract from the poem *Dans le soleil d'hiver*



MARIE RAYMOND  
*Grande Lumière* – 1981  
Acrylic on canvas  
73,5 x 73,5 cm  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

It was in this context that the artist created *Grande Lumière* in 1981. A perfect illustration of the artist's fascination with the cosmos, the work features a multitude of small touches of yellow recalling the starry sky and circular shapes that could be planets, suns or asteroids... Marie Raymond's work bridges the border between abstraction and figuration: the title of the painting gives us a clue, a theme through which to interpret this very personal world. The work is neither descriptive nor narrative; it is a "mirror of the inner self".

Thanks to her painting, Marie Raymond transcended her darkest moments. She was always in search of clarity: "The night is not the night', because there will be dawn, hope."<sup>4</sup>

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4. Marie Raymond, *La nuit de l'été 76*, published in +/o (Brussels), No. 15, December 1976, p. 21