

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

EXHIBITION: MARCH 8 – APRIL 16, 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 Lois 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 3: Pierrette Bloch, Collage

By Mathilde Gubanski



Pierrette Bloch in her studio, Paris  
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Pierrette Bloch was born in Paris in 1928. She joined the studio of Jean Souverbie in 1947. The following year, Pierrette Bloch studied with André Lhote and then Henri Goetz in their studios. The latter introduced Bloch to the painter Pierre Soulages, with whom she developed a close friendship.

Pierrette Bloch's mother grew up in Japan: the land of ink and paper. One can imagine that these memories influenced Bloch in her choice of materials. The artist was guided by the materials themselves in the execution of her works, much like the artists of the Japanese Gutai group: "Gutai art does not change the material: it brings it to life. Gutai art does not falsify the material. In Gutai art

the human spirit and the material reach out their hands to each other, even though they are otherwise opposed to each other. The material is not absorbed by the spirit. The spirit does not force the material into submission. If one leaves the material as it is, presenting it just as material, then it starts to tell us something and speaks with a mighty voice." For Pierrette Bloch, her choice of tools and materials was a response to her choice of paper or Masonite panels. The importance given to materials in the artist's work can also be likened to the *Supports/Surfaces* movement that developed in France at the end of the 1960s.

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1 - *The Gutai Manifesto*, the movement's founding text written by Jirō Yoshihara, originally published in the *Geijutsu shincho* [New Artistic Trends] art journal, Tokyo, December 1956



PIERRETTE BLOCH  
*Collage n°14*, 1970 - 1971  
 Collage of papers on Masonite  
 131,5 x 98,5 cm.  
 Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris



PIERRETTE BLOCH  
*N°9*, 1970 - 1971  
 Collage of papers on Masonite  
 125 x 130 cm.  
 Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris

In 1968, the artist spent some time in New York where she created her first collages on paper—Canson, Kraft or Bristol—which she mounted on Masonite panels. There, she discovered the minimalist trend. The heir to the Bauhaus movement and its motto, “Less is more”, minimalism represented an art of subtraction, of stripping back. The trend developed throughout the world in the 1960s and Bloch fitted perfectly into the new climate. Rejecting the dramatic, along with illusionism and virtuosity, the artist’s work was a practice of restraint.

Pierrette Bloch’s body of work can also be compared to *Arte Povera* which is developing in Italy at the same time. The term “Arte povera” was first used in 1967 by the art critic Germano Celant. It refers to an attitude from artists who challenge the consumer society. The term “poor” is understood as a voluntary detachment from culture and its institutions. It also recalls the choice of modest materials: earth, sand, rags, wood, rope... as opposed to the “noble” materials of traditional art such as oil painting.

Pierrette Bloch’s body of work is characterized by an extremely limited palette. The colour of the background ranges from the different whites of paper to the browns of Masonite panels. While a few touches of blue appear from time to time, black was the artist’s colour of choice. In the artist’s own words: “For me, black was sometimes a coat, sometimes a trace, sometimes a line. The states of black: sensuality, Jansenism, restraint, opacity, radiance – whoever encounters them has not chosen them but rather experienced them with surprise. They find in them the place, the circumstances where something could happen.”

Collage is an important part of Pierrette Bloch’s body of work, a “family” according to the artist’s expression. The pieces of paper, inked or not, are cut or torn and then applied on Masonite panels. The collage is irregular, organic. The panel is not fully covered, its brown colour is visible and become part of the composition. The pieces of paper are superimposed, overlapping each other: “I worked on them as I would on paintings” explains Pierrette Bloch.