

FREE, VIVID AND EXPRESSIVE

Gérard Schneider, the large works on paper (1983–1985)

By Mathilde Gubanski



UNTITLED - 1983

Acrylic on paper - 150 x 150 cm

Signed and dated "Schneider - 83" lower right

Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

Gérard Schneider was over 80 years old when he started to create his large works on sheets of paper measuring 150 x 150 cm. His painting, which was as lyrical as always, then combined the powerful gesture of the 1950s with the vivid colours of the 1970s.

EXHIBITIONS OF GÉRARD SCHNEIDER

During the 1970s and 1980s, there were still as many exhibitions of Gérard Schneider's work. In 1975, he won the Grand Prix National des Arts awarded by the Culture Ministry. In 1983, a retrospective was organized on the initiative of Pierre von Allmen, curator of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire of Neuchâtel. He stated that, "when in 1982, I met Gérard Schneider for the first time in his country house, at the edge of the forest of Fontainebleau, I was immediately filled with wonder. The work of this genius who contributed to subverting the sign in world painting always enchants me". This exhibition was also shown at the Dunkirk Musée d'Art Contemporain.

In the same year, the city of Paris awarded the Grande Médaille de vermeil to Gérard Schneider. Finally, the artist presented large works on paper at the FIAC. These were commissioned by the gallerist Patrice Trigano who had previously been impressed by Willem de Kooning's large works on paper that he had seen in Chicago.



Gérard Schneider exhibition on Galerie Patrice Trigano booth, FIAC, Grand Palais, Paris, 1983



UNTITLED - 1983
Acrylic on paper - 150 x 150 cm
Signed and dated "Schneider 83" lower left
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

MURAL PAINTING IN GÉRARD SCHNEIDER'S WORK

The issue of mural painting and the large format arose very early in Schneider's career. He started attending the drawing classes of Alfred Blailé, a painter and decorator at Neuchâtel, who gave him a taste for mural painting and large areas to be painted. Gérard Schneider then learned the techniques of painting on enamel. He also painted theatre sets in Geneva and Zurich. At the age of 20, Gérard Schneider enrolled at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. In this way he continued a career as a painter of decors in the 1920s.



UNTITLED - 1984
Acrylic on paper - 150 x 150 cm
Signed and dated "84-Schneider" lower right
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris



UNTITLED - 1985
Acrylic on paper - 150 x 150 cm
Signed and dated "Schneider 85" lower right
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

PAINTING LARGE SHEETS OF PAPER

The commission of 1983, exhibited in the booth of the Galerie Patrice Trigano at the FIAC, encouraged Schneider to renew his artistic practice. In fact, he who no longer painted large format works on canvas due to arthritis and having undergone several operations, had to find a new way of working.

For the first time, Gérard Schneider then asked his wife, the artist Loïs Frederick, to assist him with his painting. She prepared the colours, changed the water, rinsed the paintbrushes... Schneider who at that time walked with the help of two walking sticks, painted the sheets flat on a table. He held himself up with one hand and painted with the other. Gérard Schneider applied his brush very quickly to a sheet of wet paper. He painted "wet", like you paint frescoes, a fresco. This mural painting technique consists of working zone by zone (by *giornata*) in fresh plaster, so that the plaster holds the pigments as it dries. Gérard Schneider's familiarity with the techniques of mural painting in this way inspired his large works on paper. Loïs Frederick remembers: "It was extraordinary! This exhibition was extremely successful. This work by Schneider, very free, vibrant, highly expressive, was especially well received."



Gérard Schneider in his studio, Paris, 1985



UNTITLED – ca. 1985
Acrylic and metallic papers on paper - 150 x 100 cm
Signed "Schneider" lower right
(Artwork in the photo above)
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris



UNTITLED - 1985
Acrylic on paper - 150 x 150 cm.
Signed "Schneider - 85" lower right
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris



UNTITLED - 1985
Acrylic on paper - 150 x 150 cm.
Signed "Schneider 85" lower right
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

During these late years, Gérard Schneider allowed us to contemplate a majestic and lyrical epilogue to his creation, still driven by "the need to create absolutely autonomous art, instinctive and intuitive creation." A magnificent "swan song", these large sheets of paper are pure abstractions: "the artist's expression by which he makes his emotions objective."