

ARTFORUM

Joan Mitchell

GALERIE MAX HETZLER | BLEIBTREUSTRASSE
Bleibtreustrasse 45
November 10–January 18

In 1968, Joan Mitchell moved from New York to the village of Vétheuil, France, not far from Claude Monet's gardens at Giverny. In terms of her facture, one can sense the art- historical traditions attached to the places where Mitchell's art took shape: AbEx and French painting at the turn of the twentieth century, and particularly the key concerns of the latter with light and landscape.

There are ten canvases in Mitchell's debut exhibition at this gallery: The earliest dates from 1951, and the latest is from 1990–91, shortly before she died. Compellingly, a number of the works escape a particular time frame and come across as remarkably fresh, vivid, and contemporary. What Clement Greenberg reportedly called the "gestural horror" of her work seems here a lyrical and powerful form of gestural abstraction.

Mitchell herself was clear about the importance of nature for her art: "I paint from remembered landscapes that I carry with me—and remembered feelings of them, which of course become transformed. I could certainly never mirror nature. I would more like to paint what it leaves with me." The large-scale diptychs *Sunflowers* and *Trees* (both 1990–91) are perfect examples of this. Clear and simple in composition, powerful in color, the sunflowers appear as fireworks in blue, green, red—everything but sunflower yellow, it seems. Meanwhile, the trees take shape as a rhythm of vertical color stems, abstracted to such an extent that the title could also have been *People*. Denser and even more complex in figuration is *Untitled*, 1967, wherein a bright red lights up in a mixture of blues and greens, together forming delicate disorder.



Joan Mitchell, *Trees*, 1990–91, oil on canvas, diptych, 7' 2 3/4" x 13' 1 1/2" overall.

— Jurriaan Benschop