

Miette



NY ARTS



THIRD FLOOR

Jean Miotte
Spirit of Defiance
 September 7 - November 18

Permanent Collection Gallery
Miotte: 1987 - 1993

Miotte Gallery
Miotte: 1994 - 1998

SECOND FLOOR

Mezzanine
Miotte: 1970 - 1986

Gallery III
Miotte Paintings: 1949 - 1970

Gallery IV
Miotte Works on Paper: 1946 - 2006

Gallery V
Miotte Tapestries and Ceramics

FIRST FLOOR

Gallery I
Miotte Paintings: 1996 - 2006

Gallery II
Miotte from Figuration to Abstraction

Media Center
Selection of Biographical Memorabilia



Jean Miotte

Kate Lowenstein

In 1948, the Paris-born Jean Miotte moved to London to immerse himself in the performances of the acclaimed Russian ballet. The 22-year-old mathematician and engineer had not yet chosen a career in art, but the arcs and sweeps of the dancers he watched imprinted themselves in his memory for what would become a lifetime of artistic inspiration. Fifty-eight years hence, Miotte is 80 years old and still painting in bold, mesmerizing strokes that evoke balletic moves of energetic bodies.

Born in 1926, Miotte came of age in a time when artists were intent on finding a language to transcend the chaos and violence of their war-torn world. The young painter's first oils and gouaches were figurative, depicting gaunt people in frightening, oppressive surroundings, but even then the work was clearly more about color and contours than allegory or realism. Soon, his work would explode into abstraction, never again returning to the human form or landscape. Thus, it was early in his career that Miotte joined the ranks of Jean-Paul Riopelle, Emil Schumacher and Shiraga Kasuo in their gestural art, or "other" art (so dubbed by Michel Tapié in his 1952 book), which broke traditions of painting as it was known.

The works Miotte created in the late 1950s and 60s contained themes that would persist through decades of his artmaking: swathes of dark color collide with explosions of orange, red and blue. The canvases in his first solo show, at the Lucien Durand Gallery in Paris in 1957, were dominated by black, with clipped, heavy brushstrokes that convey a sense of frustration and doom. In the years following, as his career picked up with the 1958 attention from noted art dealer Jacques Dubourg and the 1959 representation in the Paris Biennale, the strokes of paint grew more fluid and graceful: Miotte was coming into his own.

In moments, these looser ebony strokes are powerfully reminiscent of Chinese calligraphy: Purposeful lines criss-cross in character-like shapes, such as in the 1960 painting, *Le Souffle*. While Miotte did not directly have any Asian influences in his work, his process—then and now—is undeniably similar to that of Zen painters. After lengthy stretches of contemplation, he starts painting directly, without the intermediate step of studies or sketches. This is perhaps the defining feature of Miotte's work, and what ties the painting so directly to dance: the art is in the moment, which is unplanned and characterized by impromptu energy.

The immediacy of the technique called for quick-drying paint, so

in 1971, Miotte made the switch from oil to acrylic. At the same time, the work changed. Instead of the dense, edge-to-edge compositions of such saturated, bursting pieces as *Incendiaire* (1958), the paintings became simplified. No longer applying color in wide bands that butted up against each other, Miotte started instead producing canvases with minimal blotches and lines on expanses of white, such as in *Soledad*, 1974 (which was named for the California home of civil rights activist Angela Davis), and later began making minimal dashes of paint on a completely untouched ground, such as in the lightly marked *raw linen* of *Naitre* (1977). This reduction perhaps heightened the work's similarities to Zen painting: Swipes of color on otherwise blank surfaces were the perfect visual representations of deep thought punctuated by action.

It was perhaps this calligraphic quality that inspired Chinese officials to invite Miotte to show his work in Beijing in 1980. He was the first Western artist to exhibit there after the end of Mao's regime. At the time, abstract painting was considered revolutionary and scandalous in China; consequently the show was a hit with many young people and considered abominable by others, as it was wildly different from the Communist Realism style that had theretofore been the only art form allowed in the country. In the 80s, Miotte's work was exhibited throughout Asia while at the same time enjoying widespread recognition in Europe. He was also showing occasionally in Manhattan, where he acquired a studio in 1978. The paintings from this period have a renewed exuberance, perhaps a reflection of the buzz of life in New York at the time.

In canvases from the past two decades, there is a visible return to some of the techniques Miotte employed in the late 50s and 60s, with the added finesse of his inevitable development as a master of composition and color. *Le goût de l'été* (2005) offers an example of this. In it, we find the dense, saturated color of the early work intermingled with the graceful lines that characterized his more minimal period. Miotte has remained within the realm of abstract painting for his entire career, and yet his work shows as much—if not more—development than that of an artist whose focus continually changes. Despite the evolution his painting has undergone, he has nevertheless stayed true to the original goal of finding a language that transcends culture and politics; the work is appreciated all over the globe. Miotte's wide-ranging audiences have in common an innate human ability: to appreciate the deft expression of ineffable experiences—passion, energy and grace.



Incendiaire, 1958 / Jaillir, 1960

Instant Ebloui, 1979



Vivre Libre, 1989



Rencontre, exaltee, 130cmx195cm, 2001

Eight dancers and a musician directed by Wendy Osserman embody the space, color, gesture and feeling of large abstract paintings by Jean Miotte. These are part of a retrospective exhibit, Spirit of Defiance, which fills three floors of the museum. During the events, viewers can choose to see the performers and paintings from multiple places as they move through the cavernous gallery space. Paintings which first appear in the background seem to move forward and merge with the dancers as the perspective continually changes. The proximity of the performers to viewers dissolves boundaries between observer and observed. Jean Miotte describes it as, "A magnificent evening where Dance opens the spirit to Painting."

"Like dancers, his fluid structures are vigorous and delicate, firm and fleeting," writes John Yau in the introduction to the book, Miotte by Karl Ruhrberg. The paintings demonstrate a continual search for renewal through abstract vocabulary, emphasizing Miotte's unique gestural quality which has such an affinity with dance. The artist has said, "dance, choreographic expression seems to me to be the most acute gesture, instant and intangible, once given and then forever captured by the eye: movement, shifting lines, fixing them in our imagination and in time – abstract art par excellence."



"Like dancers, his fluid structures are vigorous and delicate, firm and fleeting,"



Daniel Rothbart & Jonas Mekas on Miotte Vu Par Ruiz

DKR: Would you discuss the way Jean Miotte's painting complements the medium of cinema?

JM: Painting and cinema are two different arts and every art is an art in itself. But all muses are on the same Olympus and they talk to one another. I can tell you why I like Ruiz's film. In the first place I like it because it does not tell what Jean Miotte's paintings are all about. Rather it is about the process of painting, struggling, sweating, getting tired, and fighting. It is one of the best films I have seen that deals with the struggle and hard work of making a painting. For me that is the essence of this film.

DKR: Could you discuss Ruiz's technique of mounting a camera directly on Jean Miotte's brush?

JM: That subjectivity is characteristic of Ruiz's camera work in all of his films. He finds the most unique angles that nobody else would even think of, and he is very sensitive to whatever else is happening around with light and shadows. His inventiveness has no end. That's one of the things that makes his films interesting. No matter what the subject is, he explores the very essence of the location or place.

DKR: Could you discuss the notion of gesture in Jean Miotte's painting and Raoul Ruiz's cinematography?

JM: The way I see it is: there is this canvas in front of you and Miotte is surging to make the first attack, because there is a fight going on between him and this canvas. The film has everything to do with this intense moment when he is puffing and groaning and talking to himself. Miotte's paintings jump out of him with a certain immediacy. Gesture for me is the very physical gesture of an attack. There is a lot of that in what Ruiz recorded. I don't think Miotte did that just for the film, I think that's the way he works. And of course he's not the only one, others from the Action Painting period worked similarly. This is one of the films for anybody who wants to study artist's at work. That is what it means to make a work of art, to struggle and fight like a boxer in the ring.



PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

U.S.A.:

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York;
The Brandeis University, Rose Art Museum, Massachusetts;
Cooper Hewitt Museum, The Smithsonian Institution's National
Museum of Design, New York;
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
The Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, North Carolina;
The Chelsea Art Museum, New York

France:

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris;
Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, Paris;
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris;
Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris-La Défense;
Musée Sandelin, Saint-Omer;
Musée d'Art Contemporain, Dunkerque;
Musée de l'Estampe de la Ville de Roquebrune-Cap Martin;
Musée Bertrand, Châteauroux;
Musée de Berck-sur Mer;
Fondation Prouvost, Marcq`en-Baroeul;
Fondation d'Art Contemporain, C.N.I.T., Paris-La Défense;
Opéra National Paris-Bastille;

Germany:

Museum Ludwig, Cologne;
SMPK, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin;
Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, Munich;
Saarlandmuseum, Moderne Galerie, Saarbrücken;
Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund;
Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky
Hamburg;

Spain:

Museo popular de arte contemporáneo de Villafamés,
Villafamés; Castellón de Plana
Museo Fundación Cristóbal Gabarrón, Valladolid

Netherlands:

Museum of Maasslouis, Maasslouis;

Denmark:

Ny Carlsberg Fund, Copenhagen

Monaco:

Le Croix Rouge Monegasque, Monte-Carlo;

Lebanon:

Museum Sursock, Beirut;

Brazil:

Museo de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro;

Mexico:

Cultural Centre of Cuauhtémoc, Cuauhtémoc;

Singapore:

National Museum of Singapore, Singapore;

Bangla Desch:

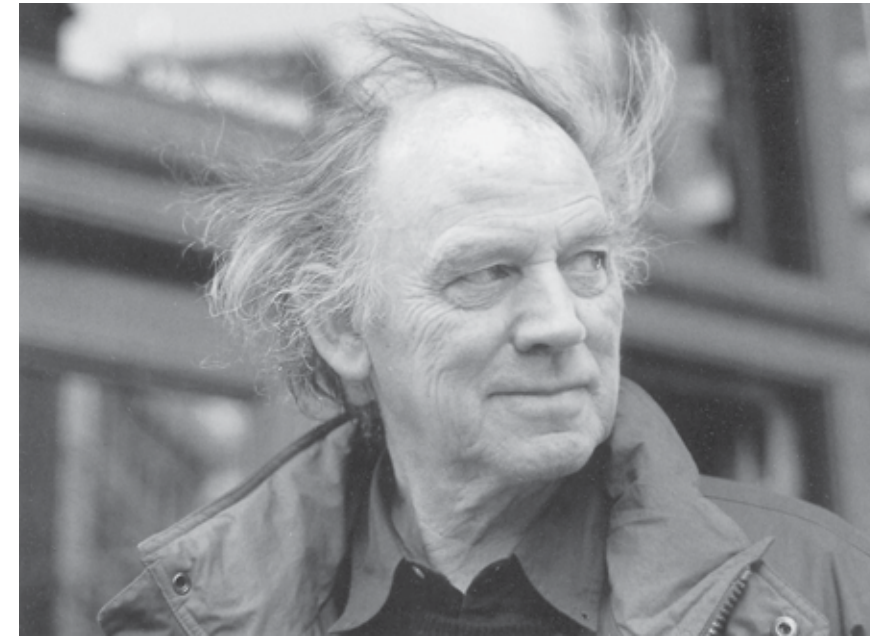
Bangla Desh National Museum, Dhaka;

Taiwan:

Taiwan Museum of Art, Taichung;



Ekta / Martien, bronze, 2005



Jean Miotte

Jean Miotte, (b.1926) came of artistic age in the decade after World War II when non-figurative gestural abstraction was emerging on both sides of the Atlantic as the contemporary artistic language. The term, "L'Art Informel," was coined by the French critic, Michel Tapié, to connote "without form." The negation of traditional form, a radical break from established notions of order and composition, was particularly suited to a cultural environment born out of the circumstances of postwar Europe where abuse of morals and fascist ideology had led to such horror and destruction. While Informel is often regarded as the European equivalent of Abstract Expressionism, it is distinguished from its American counterpart by a loss of faith in progress and the collective possibilities of an avant garde. Rather, the artists who came to be grouped as Informel – Jean Miotte, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Emil Schumacher and Kazuo Shiraga, among others – claimed an individual freedom embodied in the spontaneity of the gestural brushstroke. Miotte developed a vocabulary of bold, quasi-calligraphic markings whose vaulting, liquid jets and arcs of paint were at once suggestive of the body in motion while at the same time denying corporeality. Of prime importance for Miotte was the aspiration for this gestural, abstract language to create a bridge between cultures, to break beyond national barriers of geography or expression to form a truly international language.

The power and transcultural appeal of this painting was soon seen in its international reception. Miotte was

invited to exhibit throughout Europe, America, the Near and Far East long before the concept of globalization was current in artistic terms. But whereas globalization tends toward cultural uniformity, Miotte's work fostered individual dialogue within each culture. While Miotte's work remains committed to the Utopian aspects of gestural abstraction, he has continued to grow, fighting the repetition of a signature style, constantly pushing the boundaries and possibilities of the line, the gesture and the liquidity of paint.

The Chelsea Art Museum serves as home to the Miotte Foundation, which is dedicated to conserving the work of Jean Miotte, continuing research and bringing the work of Informel to American audiences.





Miotte



CHELSEA ART MUSEUM
HOME OF THE MIOTTE FOUNDATION

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