

CHEIM & READ

PRESS RELEASE

Cheim & Read is pleased to announce

JOAN MITCHELL *FREMICOURT PAINTINGS 1960-62*

Opening May 10, continuing through June 25, 2005.

After moving to Paris in 1959 Joan Mitchell began painting in a studio on the rue Fremicourt. This exhibition will feature major paintings created from 1960-62 borrowed from the Joan Mitchell Foundation and private collections.

The following are excerpts from Klaus Kertess' catalogue essay that accompanies the show.

In 1960, Joan Mitchell unleashed wild winds upon her paint that roiled her canvases with furies threatening to sink her painting in chaos. Exploiting almost every possible means of her hand's making – finger smearing, paint flinging, paint dripping, paint squeezed directly from the tube, brushstroking. So urgent did her need to paint seem to be, that the mediation of the paintbrush was largely denied its conventional primacy in favor of the hand's direct intervention. However, this risky urgency relied as much upon deliberation and discipline as upon spontaneity. Discipline liberated improvisation and vice versa. The fusion of paint's liquidity, Mitchell's deep memories of nature and her agitated defiance of mortality that had marked her paintings since the mid 1950s acquired a still more vibrant intensity.

*Mitchell arrived in New York, in 1949, after a yearlong fellowship in France, bringing along her early love of van Gogh and the lessons of Matisse and Cezanne acquired at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, in her native city. She had already been impressed by Gorky and Kandinsky during her 1947 stay in Brooklyn; and, in 1950 was overwhelmed by de Kooning's painting at the Whitney Annual. De Kooning's liquefying warp of the Cubist grid and the agitated physicality of his paintings such as *Attic* (1949) with their riotous tumult of amorphous organic forms emboldened Mitchell's hand. The near-grisaille palette of her paintings created in 1953, as well as their shifting layers of strokes reflect the influence of the black and white, urban abstractions de Kooning painted between 1948 and 1949. However, the long, linear thrusts of Mitchell's paint strokes reveal themselves more clearly than the homogenous blending de Kooning's strokes. Mitchell's erratic webs of linearity were also influenced by Cezanne's shorter, discreet strokes – as – building – blocks of structure, as well as by Mondrian's aeration of Cubism between 1911 and 1917. Her markmaking radiates centripetally and centrifugally around the center of the canvas,*

unlike the all-over spread favored, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, by de Kooning and the other Abstract Expressionists. And the organic references to body parts so endemic to de Kooning's art were eschewed by Mitchell. Still in her twenties, she had arrived and quickly won the respect of her mentors, de Kooning and Kline, as well as the support of such as Thomas Hess, the editor of Art News, then the premier art journal.

In 1955, Mitchell began to spend time in Paris and moved there permanently in 1959. Her move not only brought her closer to Matisse and van Gogh but also partially shielded her from the proselytizers of gestural painting's demise in New York. She aroused her paint into denser, richer furies that might surge with the ocean's rage or fly into a lyric gale of landscape allusions. In Paris, Mitchell began a relationship with Jean Paul Riopelle (not quite as tempestuous as her paintings), formed a deep friendship with Beckett, and hung out with the likes of Giacometti. While she continued to regard herself as a New York painter and maintained her friendships there, Mitchell's life in France further enriched her painting.

Throughout her life, the severe illness and/or death of friends and family would often churn through Mitchell's painting and bring her morbidity to the fore (she habitually forbid her friends to say "good by"). Her mother's struggle with cancer, beginning in 1960, is likely to have spurred a still more forceful turbulence in her work. Emotional turbulence conjoined with the vibrant struggle to master her painting. Often the works exhibited here have a deep darkness at their core that catalyzes the explosive markmaking in, around, and over that darkness. One such painting Fremicourt (1961-1962) is titled with the street where Mitchell's Paris studio was located, as if to remind us that her furies of paint are not so much about self-expression as about the complex struggle of making a painting. Hers was a making about transmuting her intense feelings into a visual valiance that challenges the darkness of mortality's inevitable destruction. In her studio she dared procedures to survive the chaos of transience. The fuming splatters, messy blurring wipes of hand or cloth, violent surges of fiery trails squeezed directly from the tube, and the seemingly haphazard occasional jumble of brushed strokes – all frantically driven toward the right edge of the canvas – threaten to unmoor the plane of Mitchell's creation.

Our current exhibition, PAT STEIR: MOONS AND A RIVER, continues through Saturday, May 7, 2005.

For further information, please contact the gallery, T 212/242-7727, F 212/242-7737, or email: galler@cheimread.com.