

PRESS RELEASE

JOAN MITCHELL The Last Paintings

Reception Thursday November 3 from 6 to 8 pm
Exhibition continues through January 4, 2012



Then, Last Time IV 1985 oil on canvas
102 x 78 3/4 in 259.1 x 200 cm
© Estate of Joan Mitchell
Courtesy of the Joan Mitchell Foundation

Cheim & Read is pleased to announce an exhibition of late paintings by Joan Mitchell. The show brings together 13 works, dating from 1985–1992, that represent Mitchell's exploration of painting in the last decade of her life. The exhibition is accompanied by a full-color catalogue with a text by Richard D. Marshall.

Joan Mitchell (1925–1992) moved from Chicago to New York in 1947. Early in her career, she was included in the historically significant 1951 *Ninth Street Exhibition*. Organized by Leo Castelli, the show was renowned for its championship of Abstract Expressionism, and positioned Mitchell with older, mostly male painters: Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline among them. Mitchell met de Kooning early on—inspired by his painting, she sought out an introduction—and was a rare female participant in artistic debates at the notorious Cedar Tavern. In 1952, she had her first solo exhibition at the New Gallery.

In 1959, Mitchell moved to Paris, France. She relocated to Vétueil (outside of Paris) in 1967, and it was there that she spent the last few decades of her life. The French countryside was a strong influence on her work. Mitchell translated its natural beauty into radiating lines and abstract knots of color—her compositions reference water, trees, and floral motifs, and channel the area's unique quality of light and atmosphere. Mitchell's late paintings are especially emblematic of her relationship to her environment—her physical surroundings were linked to an emotional landscape, as if her observations of nature were filtered through an internal sieve. As she said, "My paintings [are]...about a feeling that comes to me from the outside, from landscape...My paintings have to do with feelings."

Though Mitchell abstracted nature, gleaned only its essence, her advocacy for the natural world as a subject finds precedence in the plein air and Impressionist painters a century before. As Marshall elucidates in his essay, Mitchell admired Cézanne, Monet and Van Gogh; their interpretations of the same landscape originated from similarly sensitive perceptions of their surroundings. Non-traditional palettes, and, especially in Monet's case, a decisive deconstruction of the image, brought attention to brushstrokes and paint itself, a concern that was to be paramount for Mitchell and her contemporaries. Van Gogh's sunflowers were also an inspiration. The motif (represented by two paintings in this show) is linked not only to Van Gogh, but also to an allegory of mortality. As in *Sunflowers*, 1990–91, she chose to paint the flowers in a state of decay, reinforcing her desire for the work to "convey the feeling of a dying sunflower."

The last years of Mitchell's life were marked by the deaths of friends and family. Her own health struggles began in the early 80s with the appearance of cancer. Painting became a refuge and an ally. While the late work still evinces a distinct confidence of gesture and mark-making, it is further characterized by an increased sense of freedom. In his essay, Marshall notes a loss of "restraint," an "abandon," a "paring down." Often presented in diptych format, Mitchell's expansive late canvases remain evocative of the landscape, but also provide room to explore a more liberated mark. Brushstrokes are energetic and colors vivid. Punctuated by airy, unpainted areas of canvas, the paintings express a sensation of urgency and immediacy, as if in rejection, denial and resistance to her failing health. Through her late work, she strived for immortality, for a merging with the timelessness and formlessness of nature: "I become the sunflower, the lake, the tree. I no longer exist."

For more information please contact the gallery at 212-242-7727 or gallery@cheimread.com.

Milton Resnick: The Elephant in the Room remains on view through October 29.

Cheim & Read 547 West 25 Street