ALMINE RECH

Jean Miotte
Return to China

Jan 10 — Mar 15, 2025 | Shanghai

Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to announce Jean Miotte's second solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from January 10 to March 15, 2025. In 1980, Miotte was the first Western painter to be invited to show his work after Mao's regime.

Painting is a gesture from within

Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to present twelve paintings by French artist Jean Miotte (1926-2016), one of the masters of Art Informel. Miotte always refused to be associated with any particular school—conveniently forgetting that his work was shown in the "Informel" section at the first Paris Biennial in 1959. He expressed a personal lyricism that found its source in the energy of unresolved gestures—something that differentiates him from other abstract painters of his time.

His artistic impulse contained an inherent anxiety from the acknowledged risk of avoiding the pitfalls of triviality and indulgence. He had to face the possible failure of achieving a painting whose difficulties he strove to resolve through pictorial developments.

Jean Miotte's art is demanding. He made art from a need to paint and his lack of training (except for his occasional time spent in the open art academies of Montparnasse) did not deter him. Miotte wanted to create images where "the tension toward form is a sign." His fleeting influences (Matisse, Robert Delaunay, artists of the Quattrocento discovered during a trip to Italy, and Flemish painters) became part of his image-producing imagination in his own personal artistic journey.

Miotte's unique style could be described as insolite (meaning "out of the ordinary or quirky") from the title of a painting from 1949, and it stems from his deceptively varied artistic approaches. This is one reason that his work was not understood amid the dominance of the Nouvelle École de Paris. Miotte spent part of each year in New York, where he first went in 1961 after receiving the Ford Foundation Prize. He also established friendships with American artists in France in the 1960s, particularly with Sam Francis, whose luminist concerns he shared, and also with Riopelle and Joan Mitchell. For these reasons, his approach was misunderstood and his work was incorrectly equated with New York expressionism. Despite this misunderstood opposition between the École de Paris and the New York movement, as of the late 1960s informed French critics such as Alain Jouffroy, Marcelin Pleynet, and Jean-Clarence Lambert recognized Miotte as an abstract painter involved in transmutation according to the principle of a mental composition of the image. This image referred to no model outside the specific language of his painting. Miotte's travels to China and Japan did not interfere with his personal stylistic approach. While some experiments brought him close to Asian painting, his painting had nothing calligraphic about it.

Gesture was primary, as the expression of an existential experience. It led him to a lyricism that was inseparable from a philosophical and spiritual lived experience and from a musical and choreographic world that was familiar to the artist. The creation of arcane signs and their thought-out rhythm called for the simultaneous use of the brush, the palette knife, and the painting knife. The evocative power of a world determined by opposing forces underpins what is truly a metaphysics of the image. Through the vitality, transparency, and richness of the paint, the visual field developed the personal value of the colors within a palette emphasizing white.

Thus the visual space is inseparable from color in Miotte's work.

Miotte was a born colorist. He used color according to a personal perception that absorbed a whole range of emotions whose unifying movement he constantly questioned. He questioned color in its sounds, with its most vibrant accents divided by spatial fragmentation. The 1970s and early 1980s were conducive to an explosion of forms that renewed his vocabulary with dynamic, joyful colors. Winding shapes and arabesques recall Miotte's enduring interest in choreography.

In the late 1980s, he created a cycle aiming for the synthesis of a perfectly identifiable language. This expression was intended to unite his thought and sensation, a spontaneity born of elegance and refinement that were very French.

Jean Miotte's style transcends the life of forms in a metamorphosis combining grandeur and intimacy, seriousness and exuberance.

With color the seduction is complete. It erases any concern. It makes us complicit in the work by opening a dialogue that can no longer be interrupted.

— Lydia Harambourg, historian, writer, art critic, Correspondent Member of the Institut de France, Académie des beaux-arts