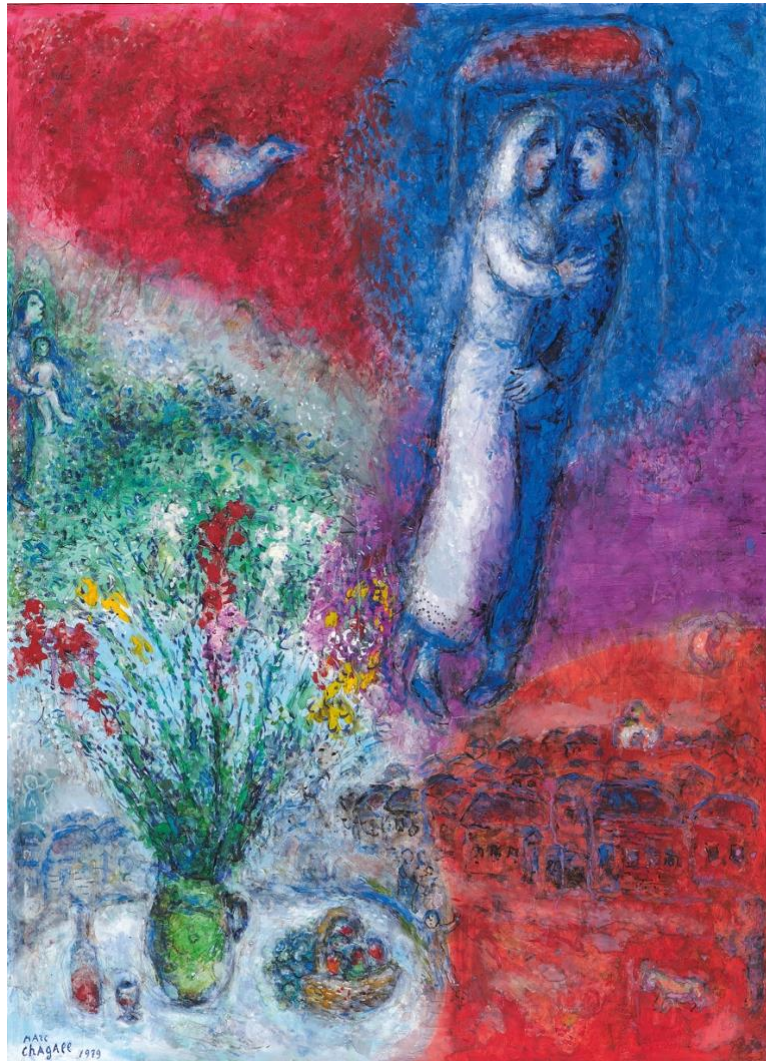


GALERIE BOULAKIA

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

# MODERN MASTERS



9 MAY – 15 JULY 2023

Galerie Boulakia presents MODERN MASTERS, a vibrant collection of modern masterpieces spanning from the 1950s to the present day. MODERN MASTERS displays a carefully curated selection of artworks realised by some of the leading artists of the twenty-first century, including Marc Chagall, Pierre Soulages, Joan Miró, Hans Hartung, Jean Dubuffet, Raoul Dufy, Karel Appel, Pierre Alechinsky, Wifredo Lam and Kenny Scharf. This exhibition provides a spectacular insight into the stylistic changes and developments of major artistic masters working within the last 70 years.



Pierre Soulages, *Peinture*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 117 x 130 cm

*"I always loved to paint. As a kid, I liked to dip my paintbrush in black ink. They gave colours to me to use, but I didn't like them very much."* – Pierre Soulages

In 1979, French painter Pierre Soulages began exploring variations on the unique field of expression that he termed *Outrenoir*, or 'beyond black', inflecting light through various textures of black, transcending darkness to make the colour a source of light, leaping from the work. This infinite quest for the uncharted possibilities of the colour black is characterised by a plethora of formal structures which accommodate its exploration.

*Peinture*, 2007, is part of an important ensemble of works begun in 2007 which propose a new iteration of the multifaceted reality of black. Deep scores run across the painting at a slant, forming two separations that divide the canvas into thirds. The furrows are placed end to end, creating two grooves that bring rhythm to the piece, creating reliefs of shadow and radiance. Indeed, the slightest movement of the spectator – the slightest change in the orientation of the lighting – sends the light waltzing in a new direction. Playing on a complex rapport with shine, this painting explores the luminous potential inherent to the *Outrenoir*.



Marc Chagall, *Les Mariés*, 1979, tempera on masonite, 110 x 80 cm

*"Art must be an expression of love or it is nothing."* – Marc Chagall

Marc Chagall was a French-Russian artist whose work anticipated the dream-like imagery of Surrealism. Over the course of his career Chagall developed a poetic, amorphous, and deeply personal visual language. Attending art school in St. Petersburg in 1909, Chagall fell in love with Bella Rosenfeld, a 19-year-old daughter of a wealthy Russian jeweller. Seven years her senior, the pair shared a unique, romanticised way of seeing the world. Bella swiftly became his muse, and the young fiancée was to appear in his paintings for the rest of his life. The recurrence of the two lovers in his work, often overlooked in favour of the circus scenes, mythical creatures and magicians most associated with the artist, signals the enduring influence that this relationship with Bella had on his approach to painting.

The enchanting, supernatural power which radiates from this painting is obtained through Chagall's unparalleled ability to blur the line between reality and fantasy in art. *Les Mariés*, 1979, was completed just years before his death in 1985. The painting vividly evokes the euphoric feeling of falling in love, depicting himself and his bride floating in the air, giving the impression that the love they felt for each other was so strong, it defied all laws of gravity.



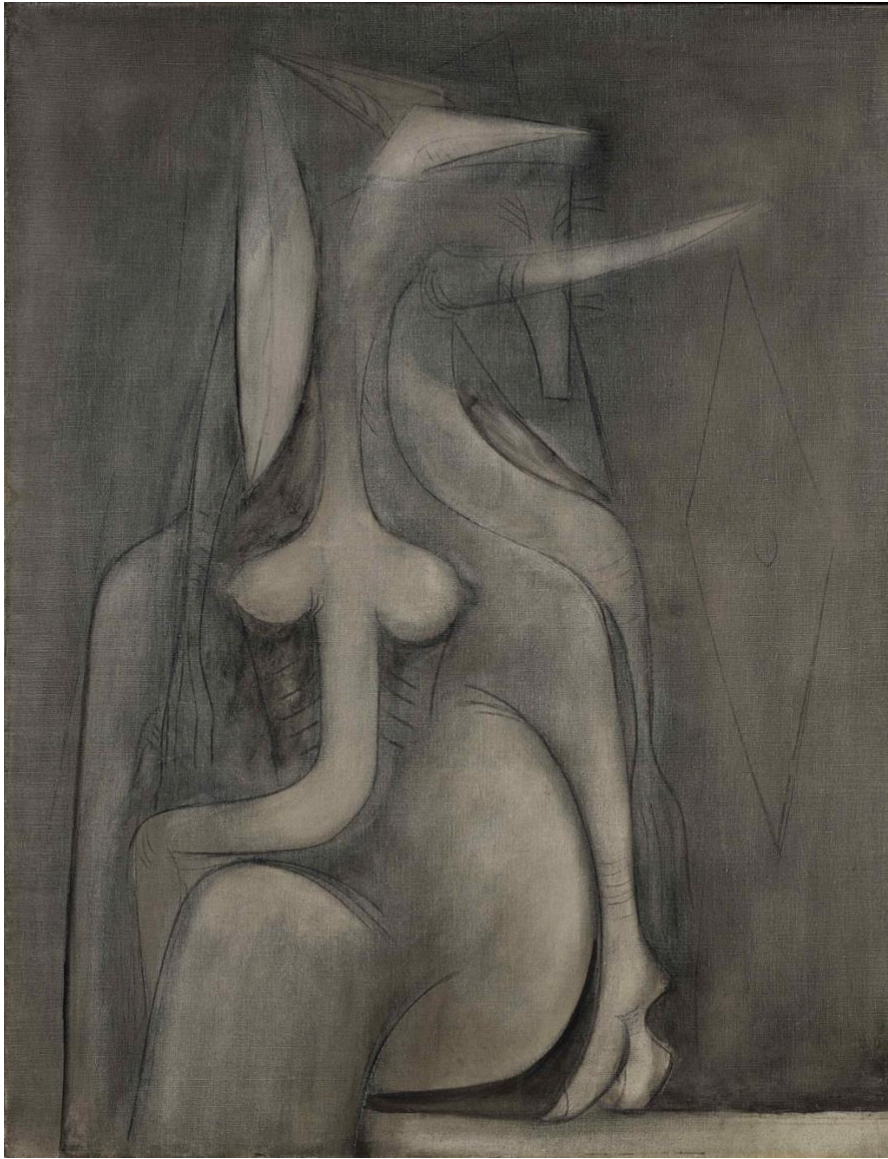
Joan Miró, *Oiseau s'envolant*, 1963, oil on cardboard, 102.5 x 74.5 cm

*"The spectacle of the sky overwhelms me. I'm overwhelmed when I see, in an immense sky, the crescent of the moon, or the sun. There, in my pictures, tiny forms in huge empty spaces."* – Joan Miró

Best known as a Surrealist artist, whose works draw the observer into the subconscious mind through the excellent simplicity of objects depicted in a childlike, yet enchanting manner, Miró's *Oiseau s'envolant*, 1963, celebrates empty space, bringing clarity to the outline of a bird depicted in the centre.

The symbolic and poetic nature of Miró's work fits well within the context of the dream-like subconscious, as championed by the Surrealist group. Birds are a recurring motif in Miró's oeuvre, symbolising freedom, and, in the context of dreams, represent life, rebirth, peace, hope and love.

Throughout his life, the artist fought against conventional and established painting methods, ultimately creating his own unique, pictorial expression. An expression which has come to be recognised worldwide, through the allusive spaces and floating worlds evoked upon the canvas.



Wifredo Lam, *Untitled*, circa 1950, oil and charcoal on canvas, 111.4 x 86.7 cm

*"A true picture has the power to set the imagination to work."* – Wifredo Lam

Cuban artist Wifredo Lam is known for painting fantastical hybrid figures upon his canvases. His vast collection of works demonstrates the extraordinary power of the imagination once freed from the established conventions of both art and society. Lam's palette reduced in the 1950s, as he moved away from the vibrant tones of his 1940s jungle scenes and towards a darker, more refined use of colour which saw blacks, blues and olive browns dominate the canvas. The application of paint became sparse, departing from his crowded, all-encompassing scenes and shifting focus towards specific figures, such as his ambitious pursuit of the Femme-Cheval (Female-Horse). Also referred to as "the mythical virginbeast," it was a symbol greatly explored by the Surrealists, deriving from the revered horse of the deity worshipped by followers of the Orisha, a spirit of the Yaruba religion.

The variations of form and design are endless throughout Lam's investigation of this figure, and he completed no less than thirty different representations of the hybrid Femme-Cheval in 1950 alone. Observing *Untitled*, circa 1950, the figure is presented in a solitary, portrait-like format. Sensually robust and strikingly ferocious at the same time, the Femme-Cheval appears to be at the height of a supernatural transformation. From the hooves and horns to the womanly breasts and elongated neck, the interlocking of horse and female forms create a unique, unorthodox hybrid being. The dark tones paired with the absence of a decipherable background accentuate the isolation of the figure, whose transition is captured in a mesmerising, captivating manner.



Karel Appel, *Têtes dans Tempête*, 1960, oil on canvas, 97 x 146 cm

"Painting, like passion, is an emotion full of truth and rings a living sound, like the roar coming from the lion's breast." – Karel Appel

Born in 1921 in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Karel Appel was an influential Dutch painter whose figurative abstractions were realised through expressive colours and forms. Producing his first real painting on canvas at the age of fourteen, Appel found inspiration in the artwork of children for the rest of his career.

The artist founded the European avant-garde CoBrA movement in 1948, along with key figures such as Corneille and Asger Jorn. Based on the art of spontaneity, their working method drew inspiration from primitive and uneducated art forms. Both Appel's rejection of sophisticated aesthetic style and his celebration of unconstrained artistic experimentation are apparent in *Têtes dans Tempête*, 1960, which sees an array of bright figures unite in bold and vibrant abstraction.

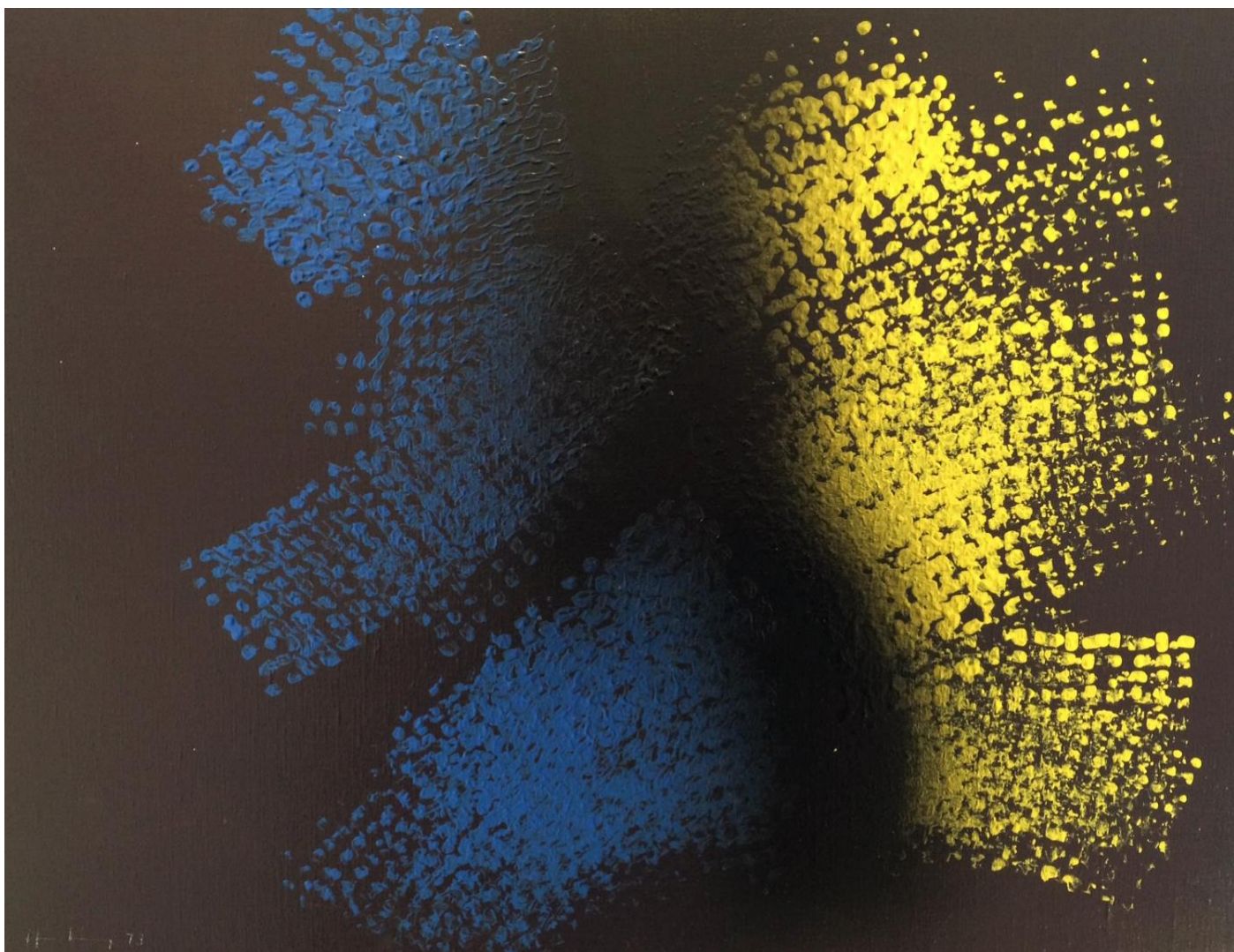


Kenny Scharf, *Infinitum*, 1996, oil and acrylic on canvas, 81.7 x 107 cm

*"I'm constantly doing new stuff. I'm always excited. I'm a one-man tornado."* – Kenny Scharf

American painter and iconic street artist known for his participation in New York City's interdisciplinary East Village art scene during the 1980s, alongside Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring. Scharf's do-it-yourself practice spanned painting, sculpture, fashion, video, performance art, and street art. His inimitable graffiti paintings gained him notoriety, with his work regularly featuring stylized aliens and popular culture icons in tessellated, colourful patterns. Many of Scharf's playful, gestural murals still adorn New York streets to this day.

Born in Los Angeles, CA, Scharf maintained a New York-based practice since completing his BFA in painting at the School of Visual Arts in 1980. However, growing up in post-World War II Southern California, Scharf remained fascinated by television and the futuristic promise of modern design. His early work was strongly influenced by Hanna Barbera cartoons, but he gradually began to transition to biomorphic imagery. *Infinitum*, 1996, is typical of the artist's later style, as colours and shapes collide in cartoon-like chaos.



Hans Hartung, *T1973-H1*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 46 x 61 cm

*“Experience reduced simply to vision allows us to know neither the object nor the world. I don’t exclude seeing, obviously, but sight is not our only mode of perception.” – Hans Hartung*

Best known for his gestural abstract style, Hans Hartung was inspired by the profound humanity of Rembrandt, especially by 'his ability to express with a simple line more than others with immense pictures'. Hartung drew intuitively, acting upon his canvas, and like all Hartung’s works, *T1973-H1*, 1973, is unique.

All aspects of daily life, from politics to literature, seep into his canvas, although it might not be apparent to the eyes. Depicted through various experimental means that the artist has invented with his brush and spray gun, Hartung’s work is more firmly rooted in the history of art and the art of his time than the abstract bold lines and colour contrasts may suggest.

The artist refers to all kinds of sensations, decisions, and feelings within each canvas... it is the rhythms, balances, and moods, both physical and spiritual, that ultimately control the outcome of his pictorial aesthetic.





Hans Hartung, *T1989-L43*, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm

*"The first and most important thing is to remain free, free in each line you undertake, in your ideas and in your political action, in your moral conduct. The artist especially must remain free from all outer constraint." – Hans Hartung*

Best known for his gestural abstract style, Hans Hartung participated in the Art Informel movement by expressing 'with a simple line more than others with immense pictures'. In *T1989-L43*, 1989, Hartung intuitively drew a composition that displays an underlying tension between light, form and colour. By using various experimental techniques like scratching or painting with a spray gun, Hartung transfers rhythms, balances, and moods to the captivating *T1989-L43*.



Jean Dubuffet, *Le voyageur à la pelisse*, 1952, oil on canvas, 60.3 x 72.4 cm

"The image, the artist feels, becomes an object for hallucinatory meditation, like a crystal ball. And the goal of the artist, his ambition, is to conquer souls." – Jean Dubuffet

Born in 1901 in France, Jean Dubuffet was a painter and sculptor who embraced outsider art; best known for founding Art Brut. In favour of what he believed to be a more authentic and humanistic approach, Dubuffet focused on art by those outside official culture and the established art scene, often illustrating extreme mental states, unconventional ideas and fantasy worlds.

Dubuffet moved towards a Surreal style in the 1950s, which saw his alluring canvases evoke a psychological intensity as landscapes became transformed into dreamscapes, or 'landscapes of the brain', as he described. Many of these include fleeting traces of a human presence, as is the case in *Le voyageur à la pelisse*, 1952, where the voyager, wearing a long pelisse, is absorbed into the speckled surroundings. The canvas exudes a profoundly ethereal vision, transporting the viewer into the sublime, illusory world of its creator.



Pierre Alechinsky, *Lie de vin*, 2016, acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, 110 x 130 cm

*"When I paint, I liberate monsters... They are the manifestations of all the doubts, searches, and groping for meaning and expression which all artists experience... One does not choose the content; one submits to it." - Pierre Alechinsky*

Moving to Paris in 1927, Pierre Alechinsky became a part of the CoBrA movement, which are the initials of the three capitals Co for Copenhagen with Jorn, Br for Brussels with Alechinsky and A for Amsterdam with Appel and Corneille, in a shared passion for the freedom of form and colour. After travelling around Japan in 1955, the artist showed a strong interest in Asian artistic techniques, ultimately adopting a style which incorporated processes of Japanese calligraphy. Many of his works feature colourful, intricate borders, contrasting with the freedom of his central compositions, such as in *Lie de vin*, 2016. Alechinsky practices a relaxed painting style of which the finished work embraces the coincidental flaws and imperfections created during the process.

While he celebrates the liberation of form and colour, his paintings can equally be said to act as a liberation of the self. The psychological aspect of painting is therefore fundamental to the artist, as he views each blank canvas as a stimulating opportunity to express himself. Alechinsky produced unique paintings that blurred the conventional division between figurative and abstract style. *Lie de Vin* is a prime example of Alechinsky's unique mixing of mediums and styles. In this wine-coloured canvas, Alechinsky plays with the contrast between the fluid Japanese calligraphy and the more geometric figures and frame, thus offering the viewer a lively and yet intriguing composition.



Karel Appel, *Together in a Landscape*, 1974, oil on canvas, 76 x 101.5 cm

"You have to learn it all, then forget it and start again like a child." – Karel Appel

Karel Appel was a Dutch painter, avid sculptor, and one of the founders of the avant-garde CoBrA movement in 1948. Born in the Netherlands, he began painting at the age of fourteen. Recognised for his ironic imagery, bold brushstrokes and energetic colour, Appel's work received both broad critical acclaim and unfavourable criticisms.

Known for his figurative abstractions and expressive colours, Appel found inspiration in the artwork of children and the rejection of sophisticated aesthetic tastes. He was drawn to the animated, primitive style of Jean Dubuffet in the years following the isolated, repressive environment of WWII in Amsterdam. In the childlike manner of the facial features, painted in thick, black lines against a background of primary colours, Appel's unique style is immediately discernible in *Together in a Landscape*, 1987.



**Raoul Dufy**, *Reception mondaine*, 1941, gouache, 49 x 65 cm

"My eyes were made to erase all that is ugly." – Raoul Dufy

French painter Raoul Dufy was fascinated by the gatherings and receptions of the bourgeoisie at play. The pomp and ceremony of such events with their elegant costumes, constant chatter and raucous music, created a vibrant atmosphere of dazzling colours, lights and sounds, which provided the perfect inspiration for his work.

Created in 1941, *Reception mondaine* is part of a series of gouaches depicting jubilant formal reception scenes Dufy made between 1930 - 1935, and into the early 1940s. These images reimagined an earlier set of tapestries and murals from 1925. Paul Poiret commissioned Dufy to make a set of fourteen tapestries for his presentation at Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs on three lavish barges. While Matisse decorated the 'Amour' barge, Dufy's tapestries of high society and fashion scenes were hung in the 'Orgues' barge which had been transformed into a catwalk.

During the period of creating *Reception mondaine*, Dufy experimented with vertical and horizontal blocks of vibrant colour that flowed beyond the edges of the boldly outlined figures. In *Reception mondaine*, the shock of crimson, blue and yellow, used to highlight the uniforms of the officers and fashionably dressed men and women, reveal the artist's interest in the effects of colour and light, and the evolution of his 'couleur-lumière' theory: "Light is the soul of colour, without light, colour is lifeless".