

SOULAGES

Painting 1946 - 2019



Pierre Soulages © Sandra Mehl

Press conference: Friday, 16 October 2020, 11 am

Exhibition: 17 October 2020 - 28 February 2021

Unfathomable, uncompromising black – the great French painter and pioneer of abstraction Pierre Soulages has devoted his life as an artist to it. Yet black means anything other than darkness or doom to him. To Soulages, black is the counterpart of light; it is black that brings out the multiplicity of light – whether the color is applied with a scraper, wood stain or brush. It is the differences in texture, now smooth, now fibrous, now calm and now tense, which achieve an almost unlimited depth and wealth of nuance when the light shines on them. It is the contrast between dark and light with which he draws the light to the surface from the depths of the black. “I say nothing. I do not portray. I paint. I present” – that is how Soulages himself describes his own radical approach. The artist, now over 100 years old, was born on 24 December 1919 in the south of France, in Rodez (Aveyron). He lives and works in Paris and Sète.

To mark the painter’s 100th birthday late last year, which the Louvre in Paris honored with a high-profile exhibition, Museum Frieder Burda has now succeeded in organizing a major retrospective show of this one-in-a-century artist’s work, gathering together seminal works from the last seven decades. The exhibition is being curated by Alfred Pacquement, a long-standing friend of Pierre Soulages, a connoisseur of his work and one of the most renowned curators in France (for many years, he was director of the Centre Pompidou, Paris) and Udo Kittelmann, director of the Nationalgalerie Berlin. Following the show in Baden-Baden, the exhibition will also be presented in Chemnitz. Some 60 works have been brought together from international collections and the exhibition is being held in close cooperation with the artist himself.

“It’s a minor sensation that this exhibition has been possible in Germany at all,” says Henning Schaper, director of Museum Frieder Burda. “But it is also inherently appropriate. Soulages himself has often said that everything began for him in Germany. In the spirit of Frieder Burda, we continue our tradition of contributing to the fruitful dialogue between French and German art.”

MUSEUM FRIEDER BURDA BADEN-BADEN

Indeed, Soulages' participation as a young artist in the traveling exhibition "Französische abstrakte Malerei" [French Abstract Painting] in 1948/49 was crucial to the early renown of his oeuvre. His first retrospective took place in Germany, too: in the Kestner Gesellschaft Hannover in 1960. He is the only artist to have taken part in the first three editions of documenta in Kassel in 1955, 1959 and 1964. Most important of all to Soulages, however, was the immense and early respect of his German fellow-informalists – including Willi Baumeister, HAP Grieshaber, Karl Otto Goetz, Rupprecht Geiger, Fred Thieler, Hann Trier and, especially, Fritz Winter.

Yet Soulages' treatment of the color black was subject to its own individual development. His first informalist pictures, such as those painted with nut stain of the series *Brous de noix* from the late 1940s, are reminiscent of Chinese calligraphy in their reduction of form. From 1979, with his radical avowal of *Outrenoir*, the *Uber-black*, Pierre Soulages ultimately succeeded in transcending the representative and the symbolic.

Alfred Pacquement and Udo Kittelmann have this to say about their work with the artist: "Pierre Soulages is and remains one of the great artistic personalities of our time. His oeuvre has been inscribing itself into the history of contemporary art for more than 70 years, from his beginnings shortly after the end of World War Two."

The exhibition documents the artist's career from 1946 to today and presents a selection of paintings from European museums and private collections, especially from the Soulages Museum in Rodez and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. – A comprehensive catalogue will also be published.

Further Information and photographs

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