



MERCEDES MATTER (1913-2001)

Untitled

oil on canvas

32 x 30 in. (33 3/8 x 31 x 1 7/8 in.)

81.28 x 76.2 cm (84.77 x 78.74 x 4.76 cm)

2001

38308

PROVENANCE:

Estate of the Artist

Mercedes Matter was an original member of the American Abstract Artists and an influential figure in the Abstract Expressionist movement. Alongside many of her fellow AbEx colleagues like Helen Frankenthaler and Lee Krasner, Matter studied under Hans Hoffman. The market for works by the historically undervalued AbEx women is increasing tremendously as their contributions to the movement gain overdue recognition.

"Untitled" 2001 was Matter's final painting. It was still on her easel when she passed. Matter used visual sources for her paintings, such as the traditional still life, but deconstructed the objects into complete abstraction, maintaining a focus on capturing the energy and relationship between objects and spaces.

Raised in New York, Philadelphia, and across Europe, Mercedes Matter grew surrounded by the arts. Her father was the American modernist painter Arthur B. Charles and her mother, Mercedes de Cordoba, was a model for photographer Edward Steichen. She studied at Bennett College in Millbrook, N.Y. and then in New York City with artists including Alexander Archipenko and Hans Hoffman.

Once out of arts school, Matter worked with the New Deal federal agency the Works Progress Administration, painting murals and other public art projects. While working for the WPA she assisted European modernist Fernand Leger on his mural for the French Line Passenger Ship company.

With her husband, the Swiss graphic designer and photographer Herbert Matter, Mercedes built a life in the emerging New York art scene, befriending artists including Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Franz Kline, Philip Guston, Alexander Calder and Willem de Kooning. Mercedes and Herbert also traveled widely, frequently meeting with European masters such as Giacometti.

Matter went on to teach at the Philadelphia College of Art, Pratt Institute, and New York University. In 1964, she founded the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture, which still teaches emerging artists today. In her own work, Matter frequently worked from still life, abstracting the forms using strong angular lines and mixing the foreground and background. Fiercely uncompromising in her work, Matter would return and rework her canvases again and again, sometimes destroying her work out of dissatisfaction.

In addition to her art and teaching, she wrote articles on artists, including Hofmann, Kline and Giacometti. She wrote the text for a book of her husband's photographs of Giacometti, published in 1987, four years after his death.

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