



## HANS HOFMANN (1880-1966)

### Baal

#### M-1128

Signed lower right, "Hans Hofmann"

oil on canvas

59 3/8 x 47 1/4 in. (68 x 56 x 3 1/8 in.)

150.81 x 120.02 cm (172.72 x 142.24 x 7.94 cm)

1947

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#### PROVENANCE:

Andre Emmerich Gallery, New York  
Estate of Hans Hofmann  
Ameringer & Yohe Fine Art, New York  
Private Collection, New Jersey

#### EXHIBITION:

New York, New York, Betty Parsons Gallery, *Hans Hofmann: Recent Works*, March 24 - April 12, 1947, as *Phoenix III*  
Saint Paul, Minnesota, Minnesota State Fair, as *Phoenix III*, 1947  
Paris, Galerie Maeght, *Hans Hofmann, Peintures*, January 7 - February 9, 1949  
New York, New York, Andre Emmerich Gallery, *Hans Hofmann: The Post-War Years: 1945-1949*, January 12 – February 18, 1989  
New York, New York, Ameringer Yohe, *Hans Hofmann: The Unabashed Unconscious; Reflections on Hofmann and Surrealism*, March 30 – April 29, 2006

#### LITERATURE:

Andre Emmerich Gallery, *Hans Hofmann: The Post-War Years: 1945-1949*, New York, 1989, pl. 5 (illustrated in color)  
Jed Perl, *Hans Hofmann, the Unabashed Unconscious: Reflection on Hofmann and Surrealism*, New York, 2006, p. 36 (illustrated in color)  
Suzi Villiger, *Hans Hofmann: catalogue raisonne of paintings, volume II*, Surrey, 2014, HH cat. no. 1137-1947, p. 392 (illustrated in color)

Hans Hofmann's *Baal* channels the charged energy of its evocative title, rooted in ancient Semitic tradition. The name refers to a lord or master but also carries associations with primal forces of nature, chaos, and creation. Hofmann's work reflects this duality, blending structured design with the untamed vitality of gestural abstraction to create a composition oscillating between entropy and order.

Painted at age 65, *Baal* also showcases Hofmann's willingness to revisit earlier disciplines while addressing the challenges of mid-century abstraction. Its vibrant palette and bold use of complementary colors, particularly the juxtaposition of red and green, heightens the painting's dynamism. His muscular brushwork also reflects his lifelong experimentation with the tension between form and freedom; undulating lines and biomorphic forms evoke the surrealist influence of Miró and the spiritual resonance of Kandinsky's gestural abstractions. Like these predecessors, Hofmann sought to translate "inner necessity" into visual expression, guided by his fertile imagination. Yet the planal elements and curvilinear shapes of *Baal* also reflect the influence of improvisational

painting, a hallmark of Abstract Expressionism as practiced by contemporaries like Arshile Gorky, among others. It is a composition that teems with movement and energy, suggesting a cosmos in flux—chaotic yet deliberate.

Exhibited the same year at Betty Parsons Gallery in New York, *Baal* signals Hofmann's evolution as a master and innovator. With its vivid dynamism and symbolic title, the painting epitomizes Hofmann's ability to infuse abstraction with elemental power, crafting a deeply personal exploration of form and color.

Hans Hofmann is one of the most important figures of postwar American art. German born, he played a pivotal role in the development of Abstract Expressionism as an influential teacher of generations of artists in both Germany and America.

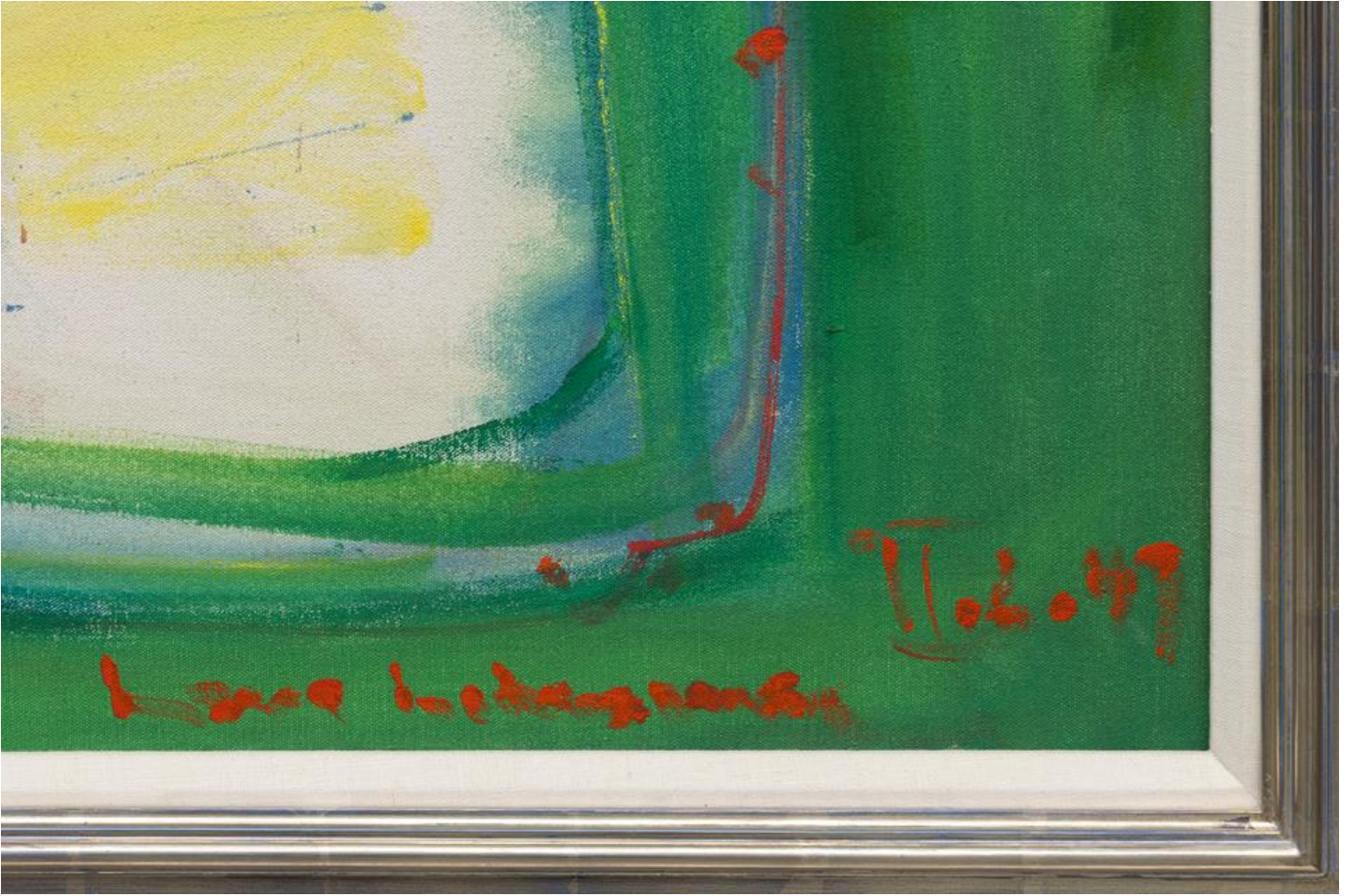
Born in Bavaria and educated in Munich, Hofmann studied science and mathematics before studying art. Moving to Paris in 1904, he studied at both the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere and the Academie Colarossi and was influenced by Picasso, Braque, Delaunay, Leger and Matisse, many of whom he met and became friendly. Hofmann moved back to Munich after WWI and opened an innovative art school, transmitting what he learned from the avant-garde in Paris and attracting students from Europe and the United States.

In 1930 Hofmann went to teach at the University of Berkeley and in 1932 settled in New York where he taught art at the Art Students League and later again opened his own schools in Manhattan and Provincetown, Mass. For eager young American artists constrained by the aftermath of WWII and the Depression, contact with Hofmann served as an invaluable connection with European Modernism. Noted art historian Clement Greenberg called Hofmann "in all probability the most important art teacher of our time." His school remained a vital presence in the New York art world until 1958 when the then seventy-eight year old Hofmann decided to devote himself full-time to painting.

Combining Cubist structure and intense Fauvist color, Hofmann created a highly personal visual language, continuously exploring pictorial structures, spatial illusion and chromatic relationships and creating volume through contrasts of color, shape and surface. Also a prominent writer on modern art, his push/pull theory is a culmination of many of his ideas and describes the plasticity of three-dimensionality translated into two-dimensionality. Due to a dazzling burst of creative energy when he was close to 70 years old, his most highly recognizable canvases are from the late 1950's and 1960's, paintings of stacked, overlapping and floating rectangles and clear, saturated hues that assured his reputation and cemented him as a key member of the Abstract Expressionists.

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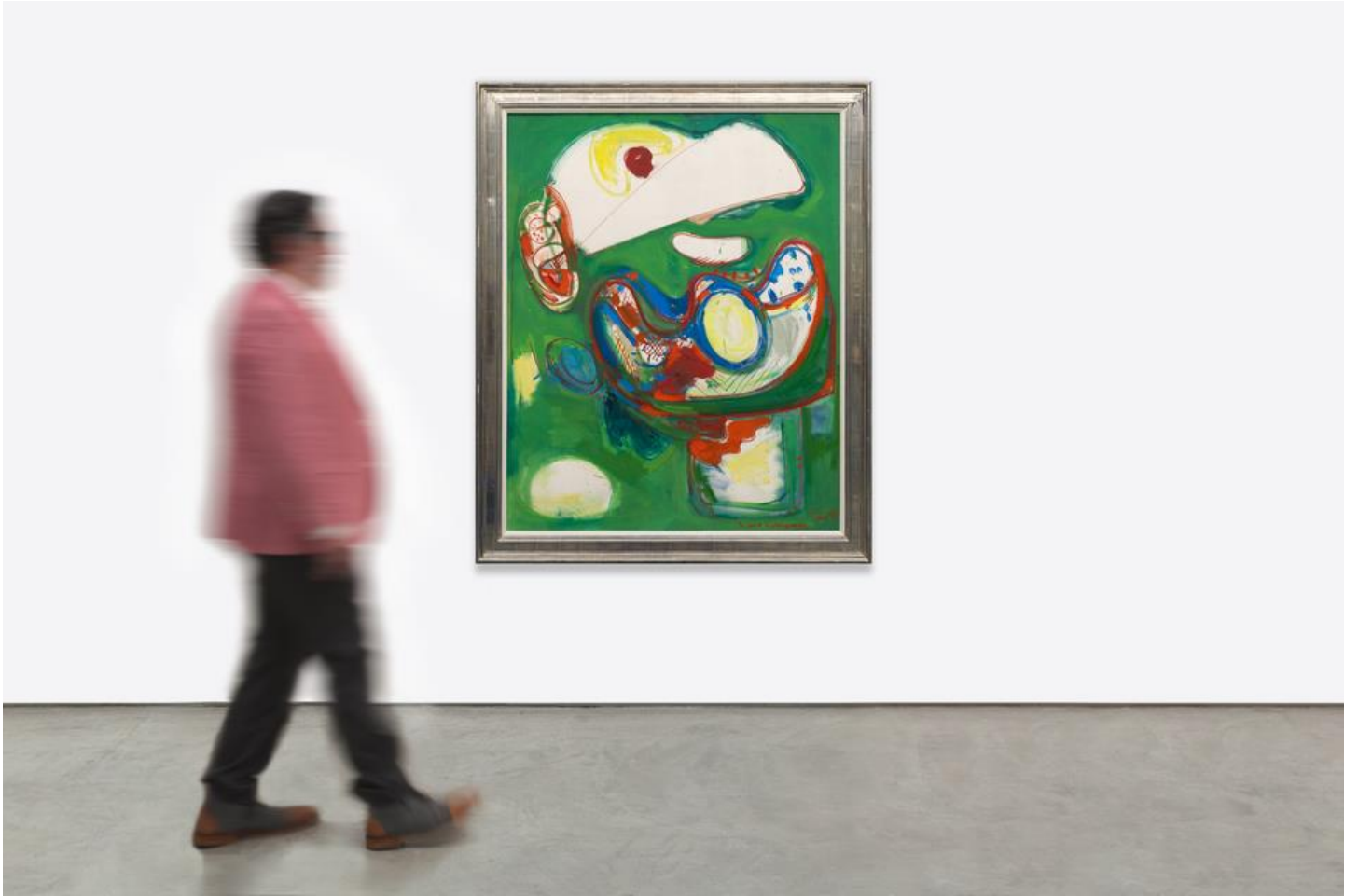














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PAINTING STATE

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1947

60x48

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