

CHEIM & READ



Serge Poliakoff. *Composition Abstraite*, 1959, Gouache on paper. 24 x 18 inches / 61 x 45.7 cm.

Serge Poliakoff *Gouaches 1938–1969*

May 20 — September 25, 2021

Cheim & Read
23 East 67 Street
New York NY 10065

Cheim & Read is pleased to present *Serge Poliakoff: Gouaches 1938–1969*, an exhibition devoted to the works on paper of the Russian-born painter who lived and worked in Paris. This show follows the survey of Poliakoff's work held at the gallery in 2016, which was the artist's first solo exhibition in New York in thirty-five years. *Gouaches 1938–1969* opens on May 20 and runs through September 25, 2021.

Serge Poliakoff (1900-1969) has long been considered a painter's painter: Sean Scully has written an essay to accompany the current exhibition; Amy Sillman selected his *Composition*, 1956, for *The Shape of Shape*, her acclaimed 2019 Artist's Choice show at the Museum of Modern Art; Joe Fyfe curated the 2016 exhibition and wrote its catalogue essay. Fyfe also worked with Cheim & Read to organize the 2020 exhibition of the late American painter Kimber Smith, who also lived and worked in Paris.

"Poliakoff," Fyfe noted, "was one of the 'Nouvelle Ecole de Paris,'" or the New School of Paris, "a group of artists who came a generation after Picasso, Léger, Matisse, Miró, and Braque." Like the Abstract Expressionists in the United States, he turned to pure abstraction exclusively in the postwar period, although works such as *Bandes colorées* (1937) are evidence that he was already interested in it by the mid-1930s. In May 1936, in a letter to Josef Albers at Black Mountain College, he wrote, "Abstract art is finally taking off in quite a few countries."

Poliakoff, however, never adopted the oversize scale of his American counterparts, and continued to paint in a cramped studio even after he achieved recognition and financial success. The gouaches displayed in this exhibition, which are as small as 8 ¼ by 6 inches and no larger than 26 by 19 inches, underscore that sense of privacy. Their dazzling chromatic array departs from the loaded brushwork of the artist's oil paintings with a freshness, intimacy, and personal touch that revels in the immediacy of pure, vibrant pigment.

Writing about the gouaches in 1950, the French critic Pierre Gueguen stated: "Here is a serious

mind, entirely dedicated to the dream of forms for form's sake, which is the great mystery to be solved for Abstraction. He goes from the geometric purity of archetypes to the quivering of perceptions, held as they are like a tide entering a dike, canal or quay of a port.”

SERGE POLIAKOFF

Serge Poliakoff was born on January 8, 1900, in Moscow. By 1914, he was taking drawing classes, but the Revolution of 1917 disrupted his family life, and in 1920 he slipped out of the country to Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey), where he spent a year. A talented musician, Poliakoff made his way across Europe, accompanying his aunt, a singer, on the guitar, before arriving in Paris in 1924. There he played folk songs in Russian nightclubs at night while taking private lessons in drawing and painting during the day.

In 1929, he enrolled at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Montparnasse, and later at the Académie Frochot in Montmartre while continuing to earn his living by playing guitar. He met his future wife, Marcelle Perreur Lloyd, a half-Irish Frenchwoman, in 1935, and settled with her in London, where he enrolled in the Grosvenor School of Art and, a year later, the Slade School of Art.

Returning to Paris in 1937, where he had his first solo show, he found himself drawn increasingly to abstraction after meeting Wassily Kandinsky, Sonia and Robert Delaunay, and Otto Freundlich. He started making abstract paintings in 1942, and showed them for the first time in 1945. His work has since been the subject of more than two hundred international solo exhibitions, and it has been included in hundreds of group shows. He died in Paris on October 12, 1969.

Poliakoff's paintings, gouaches, and prints are held in more than one hundred public collections, including the Kunstmuseum Bern; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate Gallery, London; and Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, which held a major retrospective, *Le Rêve des Formes* [The Dream of Forms] in 2013.