

JEAN-PAUL JÉRÔME

The Lyrical Abstractions

October 5, 2019 to January 5, 2020

Curator: Constance Naubert-Riser

Co-signatory of the first *Manifeste des Plasticiens* (1955) with Louis Belzile, Fernand Toupin, and Rodolphe de Repentigny (Jauran), Jean-Paul Jérôme and his fellow Plasticiens burst onto the Montréal art scene, clearly setting themselves apart from the Automatiste movement dominant at the time. The Plasticiens championed nonfigurative painting featuring flat planes in decentred arrangements on the canvas and advocated a discipline that would encourage pictorial autonomy.

Jérôme's ink-on-paper works, produced in 1969 and 1970 and never exhibited during his long career, now seem like a sort of parenthesis in a body of work devoted essentially to geometric abstraction.

Influenced by French painting of the 1950s, which he discovered during a stay in Paris from 1956 to 1958, Jérôme pursued his investigation of the many possibilities offered by abstract painting. During the 1960s, he began a dialogue with the more gestural work of Hans Hartung, then undertook a more personal exploration of the resources of op art, the new international trend. In the context of his oeuvre, the sudden production of these inks in 1969 therefore represents a significant rupture—a leap into the unknown.

At first, he used small sketchbooks to try out his hand. A few rhythmic brushstrokes animate the space on each of these pages. He then adopted a new, more fluid medium: Palen's China ink, sold in bottles of different bright, luminous colours. Quickly, Jérôme's relationship with the space of the work was radically transformed.

Attracted to the texture of Japan paper, he placed sheets on the floor of his studio. With a long-handled wide brush, he worked standing up, which enabled him to increase the range of his gesture and the breadth of the entangled traces. Drops of colour, no doubt sprinkled at random, recall the "dripping" technique developed by Jackson Pollock in 1947 to express his passion about painting—a passion that is found in Jérôme's strong, singular personality.

Constance Naubert-Riser, Guest curator

As an extension of the Jean-Paul Jérôme. *Les abstractions lyriques* [The Lyrical Abstractions] exhibition, curator and art historian Constance Naubert-Riser wanted to contextualize the artist's work within the first Plasticiens group, of which Jérôme is a founding member. Selected works from the MAJ's rich collection are hence temporarily integrated into the permanent exhibition *Les îles réunies* [The Reunited Islands].

Together, Louis Belzile, Jauran (Rodolphe de Repentigny), Jean-Paul Jérôme and Fernand Toupin sign the *Manifeste des Plasticiens* [Plasticiens Manifesto] on February 15, 1955, a moment of inception for this pictorial movement.

In the wake of the revolution set in motion by Paul-Émile Borduas and the Automatists in the late 1940s, the Plasticiens appear as a second avant-garde, rejecting the spontaneity of automatist painting in favour of geometric abstraction.

They advocate for the rejection of volume, simplification of space and arrangement of elements. They thus privilege absolute non-representation and reject figurative form, a reproach formulated to the Automatists. The essential plastic elements intrinsic to painting (tone, texture, colours, shapes and line) are at the heart of their concerns: painting should speak only of painting.

Barely a year after the publication of the Plasticiens Manifesto, other artists such as Guido Molinari, Claude Tousignant, Jean Goguen and Denis Juneau form the second generation of Plasticiens. They radicalize the subject of geometric abstraction and argue that the surface must be defined in terms of flatness and non-referential quality, closer to the artistic research of the New York avant-garde.

CHRONOLOGY

1928

Jean-Paul Jérôme was born on February 19, 1928, in Montréal. He grew up in the Montréal neighbourhood of Villeray.

1942

As a student, visits a Van Gogh exhibition at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts. This sparks his art production.

1943

Is admitted to the École des beaux-arts de Montréal at age fifteen.

1949

Receives his teacher's diploma from the École des beaux-arts de Montréal.

1949–51

Studies fresco painting with Stanley Cosgrove at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal.

1951–53

Group exhibition at the Salon du Printemps, Montréal Museum of Fine Arts.

1954

Solo exhibition of his early abstract paintings at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts: marks a total break with figurative painting. Meets Jauran, Fernand Toupin, and Louis Belzile; together they form Les Plasticiens.

1955

Exhibition and launch of the *Manifeste des Plasticiens* at Galerie l'Échourie in Montréal.

1956–58

Long stay in Paris, where he spends time with Hans Hartung, Richard Mortensen, Victor Vasarely, Alberto Giacometti, Martin Barré, Auguste Herbin, and Jean Dewasne. Faithfully attends exhibitions of the latest art at Galerie Denise René, Galerie de France, and Galerie Arnaud, where he has a show in 1957.

1959–73

Teaches at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal and other schools in Montréal and Sorel. Paints in his free time, at his studios on the South Shore of Montréal.

1969–70

In 1968, he sets aside his art production. He returns to his practice in 1969–70 with a large series of gestural ink-on-paper works unrelated to his previous work. This parenthesis closes in 1970, when he definitively returns to painting.

1973–2004

He stops teaching in 1973 to devote himself fully to painting.

1978

In 1978, he becomes a member of the Canadian Royal Academy of Arts, an honour and title awarded in recognition of his contribution to the visual arts and the significance of his body of work.

2001–05

The Musée du Bas-Saint-Laurent presents a retrospective of his work.
Les vibrations modernes tours across Canada.

2004

While still very active, Jérôme dies suddenly on August 14, 2004, leaving on his work table an uncompleted work that he had titled *L'ivresse de la vie* [The Euphoria of Life]. It is estimated that he produced more than five thousand works during his sixty-year career.

JEAN-PAUL JÉRÔME

Montréal, Québec, 1928 – Montréal, Québec, 2004

1. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1970

Ink on Japan paper

66.1 x 101.6 cm

Collection of Robert Jérôme

2. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1970

Three inks on Japan paper

101.6 x 66.1 cm each

Collection of Robert Jérôme

3. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1969

Four inks on Manila paper

16.8 x 24.1 cm; 20.3 x 26.7 cm; 19.7 x 27.9 cm; 20 x 28.6 cm

Collection of Robert Jérôme

4. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1970

Ink on Japan paper

66.1 x 101.6 cm

Collection of Robert Jérôme

5. *Brun parasol* [Brown Parasol]

1970

Three inks on Japan paper

101.6 x 66.1 cm each

Collection of Jacques and Nicole Martin

6. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1969

Ink on Japan paper

66.1 x 101.6 cm

Collection of Robert Jérôme

7. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1970

Four inks on Japan paper

66.1 x 101.6 cm each

Collection of Robert Jérôme

8. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1969

Ink on Japan paper

66.1 x 101.6 cm

Collection of Robert Jérôme

9. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1970

Ink on Japan paper

101.6 x 66.1 cm

Collection of Robert Jérôme

10. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1970

Ink on Japan paper

101.6 x 66.1 cm

Collection of Robert Jérôme

11. *Sans titre* [Untitled]

1969

Four inks on Manila paper

20.6 x 28.3 cm; 19.7 x 28.6 cm; 18.4 x 28.6 cm; 20.3 x 31.1 cm

Collection of Robert Jérôme

FLOOR PLAN

2nd floor

Salle Harnois Groupe pétrolier

