

NAHMAD CONTEMPORARY
980 MADISON AVENUE, THIRD FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10075

GEORGES MATHIEU

FRIEZE MASTERS

October 3 – 6, 2019

Booth C15

LONDON - Perrotin and Nahmad Contemporary are delighted to present a booth dedicated to lyrical abstraction's founder Georges Mathieu. Considered one of the most influential postwar French artist, this presentation will bring together a selection of rare works from the 60's/70's and marks the return of the artist in the United Kingdom since his 1956 exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.

This show follows a special presentation of his work at Art Basel last June which coincided with the announcement of the exclusive and worldwide representation of the Estate by both galleries. Perrotin in collaboration with Nahmad Contemporary will host two exhibitions of unseen works; in Hong Kong this November and Shanghai in March 2020. A monograph with exclusive archive material will be published on this occasion.

"We are honored to work with the Estate of Georges Mathieu, who has entrusted us with the legacy of this visionary artist. Bold and experimental, Mathieu was the founder of Lyrical Abstraction (the equivalent of Abstract Expressionism in Europe) and a pioneer of Action Painting and performative art, with work present in a multitude of museums and prestigious collections around the world. Our decision today to collaborate is an exciting challenge and will reinvigorate Mathieu's legacy internationally," declared Joe Nahmad and Emmanuel Perrotin.

His work is currently on view in the artist-curated exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum "Artistic License. Six takes on the Guggenheim Collection." Richard Prince selected two major works by Mathieu from the museum's collection to be featured in the show (on view until January 12, 2020). Earlier this year, Nahmad Contemporary organized a successful and long overdue solo show of Mathieu's work in New York, featuring four major canvases from the late 70's.

About the presentation at Frieze Masters:

One of the highlights of the booth, *Ecartèlement de François Ravailac, assassin du Roi de France Henri IV*, 1960 was first created for the exhibition "Pompes et Supplices dans l'ancienne France" at the Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain in Paris in May 1960. On this occasion, John Ashbery, the American art critic and poet, wrote in the New York Herald Tribune: "The new paintings of Georges Mathieu on view at the Galerie Internationale are among the finest work he has done so far, and probably establish him as France's foremost abstract painter. (...) The new work has a richness, a completeness, a truth which cannot be ignored, and for

the first time, perhaps, it has that kind of unquestionable authority that Jackson Pollock's best work has. It should convince all but the most stubborn foes of abstract painting”.

Georges Mathieu was fascinated by history; the titles of his works often pay homage to myths. Here the title refers to Jean-François Ravallac, a madman who murdered Henri the IV, King of France, in 1610 and was sentenced to death by quartering. This large painting (250 x 400 cm) belongs to the *Pompes & Supplices* series, at once festive and funeral, like an exaltation of life and death. Here the artist combines a spontaneous gesture to a precise technique, resulting into an organized anarchy of signs and creating a great balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces within the painting. Another highlight of the booth, *La bataille de Gilboa*, 1962, was painted for Mathieu's exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum. Mathieu refers to the Battle of Mount Gilboa (circa 1050 BC) between the Israelite and the Philistine armies, which was a turning point in Israel's political history. King Saul died during this famous battle, while David, the soon to be king of Israel, was away fighting the Amalekites. Georges Mathieu arrived in Tel Aviv 10 days before the opening and painted there 18 artworks for the show. As Dr. Haim Gamzu, then Director of the Tel Aviv Museum, wrote: “(the artwork was) painted in front of a large audience, at the Bezalel Museum, within a few hours. Mathieu (...) appears on the spot, all by himself, swiftly glancing, peering into the deep recessed of his own, and grabbing his paints tubes, his hand gyrating a dazzling acrobatic reel, like a devout dervish wheeling to attrition up to the pic of ecstasy.” Georges Mathieu was very interested in visiting Israel and was very impressed by the mysticism of the country.

Other works on the booth refers to historical episodes, such as *Hommage à Robert le Pieux*, 1958 or *Morienvall*, 1965 once again testifying of Mathieu's erudition and fascination for history. Works from the 70's and 80's will also be on view, showing the evolution of Mathieu's oeuvre to a more refined style, a condensation of signs paving the way to the *epure* of future works.

About the Artist:

Founder of Lyrical Abstraction, Georges Mathieu is considered a pioneer of Action Painting, and public performances. During the 1950s, Mathieu executed large canvases in front of audiences all around the world, a performative aspect that inspired Gutai, the Japanese avant-garde group — their manifesto states their respect for two artists: Mathieu and Pollock — and anticipated the work of Yves Klein and the 'Happenings' in the United States. Often compared to Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, or Zao Wou-Ki, his work has left its mark on the history of painting.

Across Europe and the United States, Mathieu (1921-2012) played a decisive role within abstraction in the late 1940s and early 1950s, during the movement's burgeoning. He diverted from the geometrical abstractions that dominated the previous era with a visual language that favored form over content and gesture over intent, and aimed for uninhibited creative expression. He termed this newfound aesthetic “Lyrical Abstraction”, after a description of his work by French critic Jean José Marchand (1947). His works are characterized by a calligraphic quality of line that he created using long brushes and by applying paint directly from tubes onto the canvas. The immediacy and rapid execution of these distinct methods guaranteed the freedom with which he defined his oeuvre. According to Clement Greenberg, Mathieu was the most powerful amongst European painters. Mathieu's work has been the subject of numerous retrospectives, and is included in more than 80 museums and public permanent collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; the Kunstmuseum Basel; the Kunsthaus Zurich; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Tate, London.

“Mathieu is inimitable because he does not even imitate himself. Each painting is an unpremeditated paroxysm, as unselfconscious as a child’s scribble, or the autograph of a caliph. The sign is elaborated into a signature: a personal symbol, but since it is emitted from the depths of the unconscious, it has the inky intensity of a sepia ejaculation, and the complexity of a serpent’s nest. A painting by Mathieu has power because it registers a direct current of sensibility, and because its calligraphy exposes depths hitherto unknown even to the painter.” Sir Herbert Read