

Molinari: About Some Key Works

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On the good use of classics

In college, I enjoyed flipping through the “little classics” that gathered “selected pages” of great authors. In a short time and in little space, these pamphlets offered a privileged access to their universes, a kind of guide to important works, based on a few particularly significant fragments.

Our exhibition could play a similar role, almost didactically, by first identifying two different passions of Molinari: colour works, on the ground floor, and those using only black, upstairs. Then, by dwelling on two cult series: the famous black-and-white works that occupied the artist during the second half of the fifties and the great *Sériels* from the late sixties. And gravitating around these two centres of attraction—those preceding or following in time—, a few moments of grace isolated from their context, like in the little classics, that constitute so many hinges, passages from one form of writing to another, that denote hesitations, experiments, digressions, changes of course, advancements and regressions. In short, everything that makes a work organic and convivial.

For example, the little *Sans titre* from 1955, which welcomes visitors, is already the culmination of a few months of trial and error—we are at the era where the artist gives himself very short deadlines!—to construct a mural with increasingly geometric planes, less and less numerous, and increasingly flat. But it is also the starting point of a series

of pictorial reductions that will soon bring Molinari into areas where very few viewers will agree to follow him. In the meantime, here are other propositions in which vertical forms resolutely rise to the top (*Sans titre*, 1958 and *Contrepoint*, 1960)—no more “landscapes”!—and which signal the passage of the oil paints, which no longer work in this new style, towards acrylic which the artist will never leave. “Molinari’s geometry,” finely states François-Marc Gagnon, “makes a lie of its name. It is no longer the measure of the earth, but rather a way to leave it. Geometry is liberty. It grasps control of the piece very quickly, but to deliver it from all servitude (imitation of nature, expression of sentiments, propaganda, etc.)”

From then on, things begin to move quickly, and once again Molinari is back to experimenting with vertical lines with varying widths which, at the turn of the sixties, sometimes give way to “traditional” readings (forms on a background), but that soon series of canvases with bands of equal width will teach us to read them *as is fitting*. In this regard, the four *Sériels* of 1968, which had not been shown together since their exhibition at Carmen Lamanna’s in Toronto almost fifty years ago, could constitute a sort of swan song of this great era for Molinari. He told me he was very fond of this body of work born of pastel sketches made in Rome, after his passage at the Venice Biennial. “I was developing ideas”, he would repeat at the time, and he was eager to see, upon his return from Italy, what these simple colour notations would become.

As a bonus, very comfortable on the damaged walls of the vault, we must (re) visit the happy interlude of the 1955 drippings, which signal at once the intensity of the shock felt by Molinari upon seeing Pollock’s large canvasses in person during his first trip to New York,

and his desire to transpose into paintings his graphic experiments which, many months before the canvasses, rendered obsolete all distinction between figure and background.

A speech and an era which evokes, upstairs, the unforgettable *Abstraction* (1955), the founding work of Molinari's entire adventure.

Gilles Daigneault

(about Molinari's paintings exhibited at L'Actuelle in 1956)

"His approach was unparalleled in North American art at the time. I did not discover the black and white works that he had painted in the fifties until later, to understand that this was a fundamental creation, with its recourse to absolute contrasts, their total reversibility, the extreme simplification of the means employed: the search for pure rhythm. Making the artist's acquaintance reinforced my admiration, while the study of his work seemed to me a necessity."

Serge Lemoine, "Guido Molinari, de Montréal à Grenoble", 1998.

"Among so many exhibitions [at L'Actuelle], the most innovative ones will without a doubt have been those of Molinari and Tousignant themselves, in April and May 1956: the "black-and-whites" of one and the "bichromes" of the other are works without precedent, which anticipate almost ten years on the *minimal art* of New York."

Bernard Teyssède, "Un point limite de l'abstraction chromatique", Paris, 1974.