



JOAN MITCHELL (1925-1992)**Bedford III (from The Bedford Series)**

Signed lower right, "49/70 Joan Mitchell"

lithograph

42 3/4 x 32 5/8 (sheet) (46 x 35 1/2)

49/70

1981

32811

PROVENANCE:

World House Gallery

Private Collection, Washington, D.C., 2018

Joan Mitchell is best known for her large abstract paintings made with colourful gestural brushstrokes.

Joan Mitchell was the daughter of poet Marion Strobel and physician James Herbert Mitchell and the granddaughter of civil engineer Charles Louis Strobel. As a teenager, she was a nationally ranked figure skater, winning the Midwest women's championship in 1942. After two years at Smith College (1942–44), Mitchell studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she earned a B.F.A. degree in 1947. She used a postgraduate fellowship to work in France. There in 1949 she married fellow Chicagoan Barney Rosset (Barnet Lee Rosset, Jr.), the soon-to-be owner of Grove Press, an alternative book press. (The couple divorced in 1952.)

In 1949 Mitchell moved to New York City, where she met painters Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Grace Hartigan, and Jackson Pollock and poets Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery. She participated in the landmark Ninth Street Show of Abstract Expressionist art and gained membership in the predominantly male Eighth Street Club (The Club), founded by artists of the New York school (another name for the Abstract Expressionist circle). Mitchell studied at Columbia University and New York University, earning credits that allowed her to complete an M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1952. Between 1953 and 1965 she exhibited regularly at the Stable Gallery in New York.

From 1950 Mitchell's art was exclusively abstract. Her early New York oils attest to the influence of de Kooning. Muscular and gestural, they assert the flatness of the canvas and reveal her intense involvement with the paint itself. In Abstract Expressionist works such as *Evenings on Seventy-third Street*, *To the Harbormaster*, and *Ladybug* (all from 1957), she used lattices of slashing colour to convey memories of her feelings about experiences of particular places.

Beginning in 1955, Mitchell spent long periods in France. In 1959 she moved to Paris, where she lived with her companion, French Canadian painter Jean-Paul Riopelle. In 1967 she purchased land in the village of Vétheuil, about 35 miles (56 km) northwest of Paris. Mitchell's property overlooked the Seine River and included a house where

Impressionist painter Claude Monet once lived. Her paintings from that period manifest her pleasure in the Île-de-France landscape and take inspiration from the art of Monet, along with that of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, and Henri Matisse.

Mitchell's lavish brushwork is characterized by a robust and tumultuous lyricism. She often applied paint energetically, yet her images were slowly and deliberately built. A synesthete, she played music and read poetry in her studio, using sound as a source for radiant and evocative colour. She was seeking, she said, "the feeling in a line of poetry which makes it different from a line of prose."

During the 1960s and '70s Mitchell worked with clusters or blocks of colours. Many of her paintings are multipaneled and large (at least in one case exceeding 26 feet [7.9 metres] wide). In 1983–84 she created *La Grande Vallée*, a suite of 21 paintings inspired by her sister's death and by a friend's story of a childhood paradise. In the years that followed, Mitchell continued to work in cycles, expressing her remembered feelings about specific landscapes at specific times. Her canvases frequently refer to trees, fields, flowers, and bodies of water. In addition to oil painting, she made prints throughout her career, and in later years she turned to pastels.

Mitchell first won recognition in the 1950s as an Abstract Expressionist. During the two decades that followed, however, Abstract Expressionism was eclipsed by Pop art and other movements, and Mitchell's work was less frequently exhibited. Beginning in the 1980s, she again actively showed in New York and Paris. Critics have noted that, while her mature art retained the vigour, materiality, and heroic size characteristic of Abstract Expressionism, it never stopped evolving, and it is ultimately unclassifiable. In the 2000s Mitchell won greater global critical acclaim and market success. The prices paid for her paintings at auction are among the highest ever achieved by a female artist.

(Britannica)

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