



MERCEDES MATTER (1913-2001)

Untitled

charcoal on canvas

38 1/8 x 40 in. (39 x 41 x 3 in.)

38310

PROVENANCE:

Estate of the Artist

LITERATURE:

New York Times, Included in background of artist's obituary

Raised in New York, Philadelphia, and across Europe, Mercedes Matter grew surrounded by the arts. Her father was the American modernist painter Arthur B. Charles and her mother, Mercedes de Cordoba, was a model for photographer Edward Steichen. She studied at Bennett College in Millbrook, N.Y. and then in New York City with artists including Alexander Archipenko and Hans Hoffman.

Once out of arts school, Matter worked with the New Deal federal agency the Works Progress Administration, painting murals and other public art projects. While working for the WPA she assisted European modernist Fernand Leger on his mural for the French Line Passenger Ship company.

With her husband, the Swiss graphic designer and photographer Herbert Matter, Mercedes built a life in the emerging New York art scene, befriending artists including Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Franz Kline, Philip Guston, Alexander Calder and Willem de Kooning. Mercedes and Herbert also traveled widely, frequently meeting with European masters such as Giacometti.

Matter went on to teach at the Philadelphia College of Art, Pratt Institute, and New York University. In 1964, she founded the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture, which still teaches emerging artists today. In her own work, Matter frequently worked from still life, abstracting the forms using strong angular lines and mixing the foreground and background. Fiercely uncompromising in her work, Matter would return and rework her canvases again and again, sometimes destroying her work out of dissatisfaction.

In addition to her art and teaching, she wrote articles on artists, including Hofmann, Kline and Giacometti. She wrote the text for a book of her husband's photographs of Giacometti, published in 1987, four years after his death.

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