

THE CRISIS OF ABSTRACTION IN CANADA

The 1950s





JEAN-PAUL JÉRÔME

b. Montreal 1928

63

Untitled

[Sans titre]

1955

Oil on canvas

76.8 x 92.5 cm

Inscriptions: l.l., JÉRÔME 55

Michel and Martine Brossard,
Montreal

Provenance: Purchased from
the artist, 1987.

Technical Note: The canvas
is jute; the oil has been var-
nished at a later date. (M.H.B.)

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Jean-Paul Jérôme's strictly *Plasticien* period lasted only from 1954 to 1956. He had studied for many years at the *École des beaux-arts* in Montreal (1944–51) and with Stanley Cosgrove, from whom he learned fresco painting. Jérôme then started painting cubist still-lives, which satisfied his taste for asceticism and intimist art, and which led him almost naturally to abstraction. He was greatly impressed by an exhibition of Flemish masters in Montreal in 1944, particularly by van Gogh's highly tactile treatment of the material, leaving small grooves in the paint surface. The impact was overwhelming, nevertheless Jérôme felt himself propelled in the opposite direction, and commented, "I am going toward a style of painting where matter seems to disappear, and becomes smooth as a mirror. I love a contemplative painting."¹

A 1954 statement reveals Jérôme's attempt to reconcile the artistic necessities of an era that demanded a certain "return to order"² with the non-preconceived approach to art inherited from automatism:

What counts is the picture's architecture. And this architecture, as well as the choice of forms, corresponds to an internal push, a dynamism to which the painter is totally committed. This is how it is for me, and I don't have preconceptions when I start to work.... The real content of the

picture is its order. And that's something that cannot be taught. The trade can be taught, but the personality and its extension, which is the architecture of the work, cannot.³

Of all the first group of *Plasticiens*, Jérôme was the one who put the greatest emphasis on dynamic composition, through the play of intersecting acute and obtuse angles, and through the intelligent choice of colour harmony, as is clearly displayed in the two works selected for the present exhibition.

1. Jean-Paul Jérôme, in an interview with Robert Marteau, Montreal, 2 September 1980, *L'Atelier*, booklet no. 1, Service des transcriptions et dérivés de la radio. Montreal: Maison de Radio-Canada, p. 3.

2. For further study into this cyclical tendency towards a "return to order," and the new meanings it takes on each time, see *Le Retour à l'ordre dans les arts plastiques et l'architecture, 1919–1925*. Centre Interdisciplinaire d'Études et de Recherches sur l'Expression Contemporaine, Université de Saint-Étienne, France, 1975, 352 pp.

3. Jean-Paul Jérôme, quoted in Rodolphe de Repentigny, "La peinture, 'un jeu de l'esprit', affirme le plasticien Jérôme," *La Presse* (Montreal), 1 December 1954.