

After thirty years, Georges Mathieu triumphantly returns to New York

By [Béatrice de Rochebouët](#) | published on the 10/01/2019



"Tuz Golu (March 22, 1978)", one of four giant paintings presented in New York this winter. © Georges Mathieu Committee - 2019 Artists Rights Society - ARS New York - ADAGP Paris

INFO LE FIGARO – Undervalued for some time, the French star of the 1950-1970s is about to take his revenge. Featuring four major canvases from the artist's best period, Nahmad Contemporary will present a long-overdue show to restore his popularity in the United States.

The market has been waiting for nearly thirty years for a masterful exhibition by Georges Mathieu in the United States. To show him in New York today, in this city where he was so well received by the critics who discovered his paintings in the early 1950s at the Stable Gallery, then at Sam Kootz and Alexander Iolas, is a sign of recognition for this giant of lyrical abstraction. After being out of fashion for years, his work is now starting to interest the market again. It also marks the beginning of an international reappraisal of his unjustifiably low prices.

Nahmad Contemporary gallery on Madison Avenue has taken up the challenge by featuring four monumental canvases (2.5 x 6 meters) painted in 1978. It was Joseph Nahmad's idea, known as Joe, brother of Helly, both sons of the great David Nahmad. "The paintings come directly from the artist's estate, via his son, and were specially made as the centerpieces of Mathieu's retrospective at the Grand Palais in 1978," explains Joe Nahmad, who accomplished the amazing feat of raising these huge canvases to his third-floor gallery.



"Samsun (March 21, 1978)". © Georges Mathieu Committee - 2019 Artists Rights Society - ARS New York - ADAGP Paris

"We should not forget that Mathieu is one of the pioneers of post-war abstraction, and founder of lyrical abstraction from 1947," adds young Joe. "His masterly paintings are on the scale of an American abstract expressionist. All major American museums have one or more pieces by Mathieu," he adds. "It's surprising that we are the first to be presenting Georges Mathieu in the US for the first time in over 30 years."

During the 1950s, Mathieu executed large canvases in front of audiences, a performative aspect that rivaled Gutai, the Japanese avant-garde group, and anticipated the work of Yves Klein and the "Happenings" in the United States.

With offbeat and poetic titles, **Souvenir de la Maison d'Autriche** (February 2, 1978), **Samsun** (March 21, 1978), **Tuz Golu** (March 22, 1978) and **Zonguldak** (March 30, 1978) are four of seven monumental canvases the artist specifically executed to accompany his 1978 retrospective at the Grand Palais in Paris, as the *pièces de résistance* of his lyrical abstraction. One painting from this series of seven is now part of the Centre Georges Pompidou's permanent collection. This demonstrates the historical value of these pieces shown in New York, whose prices are confidential.



"Souvenir of the House of Austria (February 2, 1978)". © Georges Mathieu Committee - 2019 Artists Rights Society - ARS New York - ADAGP Paris

How much might these monumental works be worth in the US? Probably around one and a half million euros. These prices are in line with those obtained recently in private sales. In particular, one which sold for two million euros in June 2018 at Art Unlimited during Basel Art fair—*Hommage au Connétable de Bourbon, 1959* (2.5 x 6 meters), which Mathieu painted in public on April 2, 1959, in just 40 minutes, accompanied by Pierre Henry's music at the Fleischmarkt Theater in Vienna. Presented at the fair by Parisian art dealer

Franck Prazan, the work sold within hours to a private Swiss collector. For Prazan, an advocate of the artist's historical works from 1940 to the 1960s, this was a great secondary market transaction.

Attitudes have changed. The family, and especially his widow, at the head of the Mathieu committee founded by Édouard Lombard, also wishes to restore the market for this artist. Working with the committee, Daniel Templon presented an exhibition in Paris that caused a stir. Installed on the walls of his gallery at Rue Beaubourg, the massive 2.5 by 4 meter canvas entitled "*L'écartement de François Ravallac, assassin du Roi de France Henri IV*" (1960), which refers to the assassination of May 27 1610 at Place de Grève in Paris, made an impression on everyone. Even people who swear only by contemporary art have come to admire this painting of museum quality, which hasn't been sold yet and is being held for an important museum or significant collection.



"Tribute to the Constable of Bourbon [author of the sack of Rome (1527)], painted in public in Vienna on April 2, 1959. Courtesy Applicat-Prazan, Paris © Adagp, Paris 2019

With the ground having been well prepared in Paris, Joe Nahmad's exhibition will be a blockbuster event in New York. Present at all major art fairs, including Frieze Masters and FIAC, the gallery boasts an A-list of US and foreign collectors. Mathieu, who is often compared to Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Pierre Soulages or Zao Wou Ki, should take off. But it will be some time before his prices reach the tens of millions of dollars those artists fetch...

Nahmad Contemporary, 980 Madison Avenue, Third Floor, from January 11 to February 23, 2018.