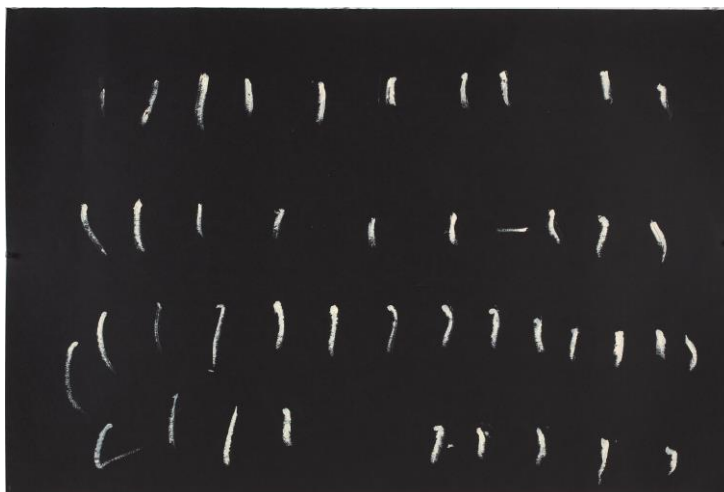


# GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



*Untitled*, 2014, oil pastel on paper, 67.5 x 100 cm / 26 1/2 x 39 1/3 in.

Photo: Adam Rzepka.

## **PIERRETTE BLOCH**

### ***Différence et répétition***

7 May – 29 June 2024

Opening on Tuesday 7 May 2024 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Galerie Karsten Greve has actively supported the work of Pierrette Bloch since 2011. In this new exhibition entitled *Différence et répétition* (*Difference and repetition*), we unveil a novel selection of more than 70 works illustrating the variety of her pioneering artistic approach, based on the reiteration of a gesture that is ever new. A bilingual (French/English) catalogue will be published along with the exhibition. It contains previously unpublished texts by Julie Enckell Julliard (Swiss art historian, curator and art critic and former director of the Musée Jenisch Vevey) and Lucia Pesapane (curator of the exhibition and director of artistic programming at the Monnaie de Paris (Paris Mint)).

Deeply rooted in the practice of drawing, which she brought to the fore of contemporary art research, Pierrette Bloch's work displays an innovative approach through the artist's ability to imbue abstraction with a new sensitivity and poetry. Born in 1928, she and the artists of her generation such as Cy Twombly and Pierre Soulages, shared the desire to capture the essence of art by using the morphological components of pictorial art. For over sixty years, dots, lines and the relationships she formed with her surfaces, depending on the material used, were the founding principles of Pierrette Bloch's work. The artist expressed her creative force through a seemingly silent oeuvre. Her work is characterised by a sparsity of means – ink, oil pastels, pastels and horsehair – and colours – black and white – with which she was able to create an extremely free oeuvre. Her work thus becomes a journey for the gaze, which moves over the surface to the rhythm of a dance created by the relationships between the marks of the creative gesture and the support.

It was towards the end of the 1960s that Pierrette Bloch abandoned painting to explore collage and drawing. While her collages were initially architectonic compositions made of inked, torn pieces of paper layered on hardboard, they evolved in around 1970 to 1972 to integrate bits of drawings she had initially discarded. She cut them using scissors and reassembled the fragments thus obtained in a deconstructed patchwork that thrummed with a new rhythm.

In her Indian ink on paper works – which Pierrette Bloch began to systematically produce from 1971 – she accorded the surface of the support and the marks left by the ink the same artistic value: the relationship between black and white, like that between filled and empty space, was what made the unity of the works. As black is the predominant colour of the

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compositions, it marks the support and resonates through its unlimited range of hues, always a result of chance – a drop of water more or less, a hesitation in the artist's gesture, stronger pressure from her hand. Each drawing thus invites viewers on a ramble in which the unexpected is the rule.

Pierrette Bloch's privileged relationship with the present transformed her drawings into adventures for the spirit wherein the serial nature of the artist's gesture underlines its diversity, not its sameness. Her work reveals a temporality linked to the current moment, a spontaneity and the joy of playing a game the rules of which – if it even has any – were formulated as the image was being created. It is this lack of laws, this deliberate transcendence, that differentiates Pierrette Bloch's work from writing, with which she has, nevertheless, often been associated. For her, it was the language generating artistic creation that directed the deployment of signs, not the search for a meaning.

Shapes, space and colour are thus the morphological components that make up her discourse and that can be found in the horsehair works Pierrette Bloch produced from 1979. Her horsehair mesh is indissociable from her inks on paper insofar as they are linked by the same repetitive gesture, the same part left to chance and nuance, and even the same planarity. From around 1982 to 1984, the mesh unwound and became horizontal and separate from the surface of the wall. "I chose horsehair thread for its linear aspect, its sharpness, its shadow", said Pierrette Bloch. That shadow, which duplicated the work by its projection, mattered almost more than the horsehair itself and, for a long time, guided the very gesture of the artist who "was writing the space", to use the words of Luc Lang in his essay *Le corps exténué* ("The exhausted body").

Like her works on paper, her horsehair sculptures are striking in their diversity, colour, density and rhythm. The knots, sometimes tight and sometimes loose, are arrayed along the nylon in compositions that are up to 12 metres long. The horsehair mesh sometimes unwinds and becomes one with the transparent thread. Sometimes, on the contrary, the knots cluster in the same place and form seemingly dozens of ellipses on the support, like whole notes on a staff. Finally, the artist's gesture becomes bolder, freer in places, the horsehair liberating itself from its mesh and taking up room on the thread to project its shadow in loops and arabesques on the supporting wall.

Through the variety of the showcased works – ink on paper in various formats, collage, horsehair mesh and thread – produced between 1971 and 2017, this new exhibition shows the scope and diversity of Pierrette Bloch's work and pays tribute to that great soul of abstract art. While it is true she lived a modest life, keeping away from worldly spheres, her relationships with the most influential artists of her generation were sincere and enduring. Her work resonated not only with the experiments conducted in the field of abstract art in the 1950s and 1960s, but was also pioneering in the supports chosen and materials used, far outside the limits imposed by traditional painting. With her curious spirit and way of playing with matter, Pierrette Bloch was considered a precursor to the Supports/Surfaces group, which was operational in France between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

Pierrette Bloch (1928-2017) spent her childhood between Paris and Switzerland, where her family found refuge during the Second World War. In that time, she found her calling as an artist when she discovered the Prado collections, which were then in exile in Geneva. When she returned to Paris in late 1945, she decided to devote herself to that path. She was admitted to Jean Souverbie's workshop, where she took a drawing course. Between 1947 and 1948, she studied under André Lhote and Henri Goetz and, in 1949, met Pierre Soulages. That absolutely decisive encounter led to a friendship that would mark the rest of her life. Pierrette Bloch's first exhibition was held at Galerie Mai in Paris in 1951. Many more followed, in prestigious national and international museums. In 2002, the Centre Pompidou devoted a major solo exhibition to her and, in 2014, her oeuvre was presented at the Museum Pfalzalerie Kaiserslautern, Germany, under the title *Pierrette Bloch – Punkt, Linie, Poesie* ("Pierrette Bloch – dots, lines, poetry"). The same year, the Musée Jenisch Vevey, Switzerland, paid tribute to her with her first retrospective, *Pierrette Bloch: L'intervalle* ("Pierrette Bloch: the interval"). In 2024, *Discrete series: Pierrette Bloch, l'amie peintre*, ("Discrete series: Pierrette Bloch, the friend and painter") celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Musée Soulages. A vast retrospective will be dedicated to Pierrette Bloch at the Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain de Saint Étienne Métropole in 2025.

In her lifetime, her works were included in major public collections such as those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art in New York, the MAMCO in Geneva, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Yokohama Museum of Art in Japan and the Centre Pompidou and Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris. Her works can also be found in the collections of the Fondation Louis Vuitton, the Musée de Grenoble, the Musée Picasso in Antibes, the Musée Fabre in Montpellier and many regional contemporary art collections. In 2005, she won the Maratier Prize awarded by the Pro mahJ Foundation. Galerie Karsten Greve has represented the artist since 2011.