

The Trinity College Dublin Art Collections

Artist: Pierre Soulages
Title: *Grey Composition*
Medium: aquatint etching
Edition: 48 of 100

b. 1919, Rodez, France

Pierre Soulages is a French painter, printmaker and sculptor. He was greatly impressed as a boy by the Celtic carvings in the museum at Rodez and by the architecture and sculpture of the Romanesque abbey of Ste-Foy at Conques. In 1938 he went to Paris for the first time, where he visited the Louvre and saw exhibitions of Cézanne and Picasso. He was encouraged to enter the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts. In 1941 he continued his studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, but spent most of the war working clandestinely to avoid forced labour in Germany. He was unable to paint much during the Occupation, but he became aware of abstract art through his friendship with Sonia Delaunay, whom he met circa 1943.

In 1946, Soulages moved to Courbevoie outside Paris where he soon began to work in a completely abstract style. His earliest abstract pictures contain broad, straight and curved brushstrokes like bars forming a compact and centralized image against a white background; some of these were painted with walnut stain on paper. They were followed by paintings in oil, often on a much larger scale, with heavy black bar-like strokes overlaying patches of white or colour, which seem to glow from behind with an inner light. Although their severe, monumental character and preoccupation with black set them apart from almost all other Parisian abstract painting of the time, which was mostly very colourful, he was soon recognized internationally as one of the major figures in the post-war abstract movement. In the course of the 1950s his brushstrokes tended to become looser and more rhythmical, until by the mid-1960s broadly brushed shapes extended right across the canvas in a gestural character somewhat reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism. Some of these pictures were made by using trowels or knives to scrape off parts of the upper layer of paint to reveal the red, yellow or blue underneath.

Instead of relying on improvisation, he built up his forms very deliberately, often over a period of several months, and aimed to achieve a formal, balanced beauty. He gave his paintings no title or identified them only by the date of their completion.

Soulages has exhibited at many renowned international galleries, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim NY, both in New York, the Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, the Tate Gallery in London, Palais des Beaux-Arts Charleroi and the Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo.

Information contained in this article is from The information contained in this article is taken from George Dawson: *An Unbiased Eye* (ed. Catherine Giltrap, 2010), www.oxfordartonline.com and www.pierre-soulages.com