



HANS HOFMANN

(Weissenburg 1880–1966 New York City)

The Tree. 1944.

Oil and gouache on wove paper (double sided).

Signed lower right: Hans Hofmann.

73.5 x 58.5 cm.

Provenienz : - André Emmerich, New York, Art Basel. - Purchased from the above at Art Basel by the present owner, since then private collection Switzerland. "Abstract Expressionism was and is just as European, since it was born in Munich." Michel Seuphor Hans Hofmann was born Johann Georg Albert Hofmann on 21 March 1888, in Weissenburg Bavaria, the second of five children. Little is known about his artistic talent as a child. With the move to Munich, where his father worked as a

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civil servant in the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior, the young Hans Hofmann arrived in the most important city after Paris for the avant-garde before the First World War. It is here where his education began, shaped by the city's unbelievable art collections and the emerging modern art, represented by the founding of the artist group "The Blue Rider". Soon the Berlin art dealer Bruno Cassirer became aware of Hofmann's work and provided him with the financial support of Philipp Freudenberg, whereby it was possible for the young artist to go to Paris in 1904 and to live there for 10 years. There he immersed himself fully in the art scene, got to know the artists of the avant-garde, made friends with Robert Delaunay amongst others and met the German dealers Richard Goetz and Wilhelm Uhde. With the outbreak of the First World War, Hofmann returned to Munich. Since Freudenberg's financial support came to an end with the onset of the war, the artist applied to the state for permission to open an art school. Initially conceived as a school for art therapy to treat soldiers, Hofmann, trained both in Munich and Paris, proved to be an outstanding teacher, who in the 1920s was able to entice American artists such as Louise Nevelson and Alfred Jensen to Munich. It was not only the artistic offering "the Cubist compositional theories and bold palette of Fauvist and Orphist colors" (quote: Rogala, Dawn V.: Hans Hofmann. The artist's material, Los Angeles 2016, S. 13), but also the teacher training which established the outstanding reputation of the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts. With National Socialism on the rise in Germany, Hofmann's American students increased their efforts to transfer the school to the US. He travelled there to the US a few times, in order to teach at the California School of Fine Art as well as the University of California in Berkeley. In 1932 he travelled to the East Coast in order to deliver lectures to the Art Students League in New York. In 1933 he opened his own art school in New York, and shaped art education in America for over 20 years, and, through pupils such as Josef Albers, Ray Eames, Dan Flavin, Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler, exercised an unbelievable and above all lasting influence over the art of the second half of the 20th century. By the outbreak of the Second World War, the art scene in New York had received an incredible creative boost through the numerous immigrants

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from Europe (the German Hans Hofmann, the Russian Mark Rothko, the Armenian Arshile Gorky and the Dutchman Willem de Kooning). It was a time of experimentation, the conclusion of which was the emancipation of American Art. Hans Hofmann, who was one of the oldest exponents of Abstract Expressionism, described this period – the 1940s – as follows: “My work comes along in a rather experimental period (in) which I find myself (placed) on the way to the highest freedom.” (Hans Hofmann) Although always referred to as a group, they were, rather, a loose band of artists, bound together by Abstract Expressionism. They knew one another, visited one another’s studios and discussed art, but each artist went their own way and found their own typical form of expression. Hofmann’s work is characterised by contrasts, which arise constantly: representation and abstraction – colour and form – geometry and gesture – surface and depth. These aspects interested the artist and he explored them throughout his life. In the present work on paper from 1944, the influence of Surrealism is still evident, but we can also see the struggle between representation and abstraction, since the tree of the title is quite recognisable, but at the same time the tree is abstracted to such an extent that the viewer has to look very carefully. The circle and the almost straight elevated black beam are aspects of geometry, which are, however, superimposed by gestural elements. Hofmann uses a broad colour palette and includes black as a colour. Through the powerful palette there is a constant battle between colour and form, which comes to the fore wonderfully in this work. A further favourite motif for Hofmann is apparent in “The tree”. That is to say “another steadfast protagonist: the work on paper. Serving as artistic collaborator, muse, and laboratory all in one, paper is the surface on which Hofmann shapes, refines, and propels his life’s work as an artist.” (quote. Polednik, Marcelle, et al.: Hans Hofmann. Works on paper, London 2017, p. 12).

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