

# GAGOSIAN GALLERY

November 8, 2010

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **GAGOSIAN GALLERY**

456 NORTH CAMDEN DRIVE

BEVERLY HILLS CA 90210

HOURS:

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Tue – Sat 10:00am – 6:00pm



## **JOAN MITCHELL: *The Last Decade***

**Saturday, November 13 – Thursday, December 23, 2010**

Opening reception: Saturday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, from 3 to 5 pm

*I carry my landscapes around with me.*

--Joan Mitchell

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to present “The Last Decade,” an exhibition of fourteen paintings by Joan Mitchell produced during the last ten years of her life. The show is curated by art historian Richard D. Marshall.

Mitchell is recognized as a principal figure – and one of the few female artists – in the second generation of American Abstract Expressionists, after the aesthetic breakthroughs of Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline. Her early works are characterized as turbulent and related to personal bereavement. This turbulence is often expressed in opposites: dense versus transparent strokes, warm versus cool palettes, gridded structure versus chaos, and choppy versus continuous brushstrokes. Working for the most part on multiple panels or large-scale canvases, she strived to evince a natural, rather than constructed, rhythm from the composition, which emanated from the expansiveness of her gesture and from her uninhibited use of color.

Many of the later works reflect the circumstances of Mitchell’s own life. From the death of her friends to struggles with her own health, painting became an extension of her experiences, as well as a temporary respite from them. With a palette alternating between optimism and sobriety, Mitchell’s paintings reflect the full emotional range of her reactions and memories during these years. The series *La Grande Vallée* refers to the secluded outskirts of Nantes in Brittany, France; although Mitchell had only heard about this location through her friend Gisèle Barreau, she captures the luminosity, wildness and freedom of this natural sanctuary. While *La Grande Vallée* commemorates the death of her sister and Barreau’s cousin, four paintings in the same series are dedicated to living friends. Unlike many of Mitchell’s other works where the unprimed white canvas is a compositional element, paintings such as *Then, Last Time IV* (1985), and *XVI, Pour Iva* (1983) (dedicated to Mitchell’s dog) are densely covered with energetic and vividly hued brushwork.

(Continue to page 2)

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Elsewhere, Mitchell favored the diptych format both for the ease it provided due to her increasingly compromised mobility, and the greater horizontal dimension that it afforded. She worked on the two panels separately and often did not join them until she had finished painting. The dense blues and yellows of *Row Row* (1982) on the left panel complement and contrast with the blues and violets of the right panel although there is no overlap of the paintwork on each side. Mitchell sought to depict the elements of nature that most engaged her. In *River* (1989) and *Rivière* (1990), the vivid and varied palette that she applied with short and highly animated brushstrokes recalls the ways in which Monet treated water lilies and poplar trees in his late work. And like van Gogh, who painted his iconic sunflowers following his move from Paris to Arles, Mitchell began to paint sunflowers when she relocated from Paris to the Seine valley, where they thrive. With *Sunflowers* (1990–1991), a lushly hued diptych on unprimed canvas, she captures both the sense of promise that the flowers inspired in her, together with the intimation of their limited lifespan. During the last ten years of her life, she frequently revisited this motif, commenting that she wanted her paintings "to convey the feeling of the dying sunflower."

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition with an essay written by the show's curator, art historian Richard D. Marshall.

Joan Mitchell was born in Chicago in 1925 and studied at Smith College and The Art Institute of Chicago. She moved to France in the late 1950s and in 1967 she settled in Vetheuil, where she lived until her death in 1992. Her work has been exhibited extensively worldwide. Retrospective surveys include "Joan Mitchell Pastels," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1992); "The Paintings of Joan Mitchell," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2002); and "The Paintings of Joan Mitchell," Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama (2003), travelled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas and The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC through 2004. Her work is part of numerous public collections including Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Tate Collection, London; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

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