GAGOSIAN

Extended through June 27, 2020

SIMON HANTAÏ

LES NOIRS DU BLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR

Opening reception: Sunday, October 13, 3–6pm
October 13, 2019–March 14, 2020
26 avenue de l'Europe, Le Bourget

Simon Hantaï in his studio, Meun, France, 1967. Artwork © Archives Simon Hantaï/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Édouard Boubat

September 10, 2019

Gagosian is pleased to announce the representation of the Estate of Simon Hantaï (1922–2008). To inaugurate Hantaï's representation, *LES NOIRS DU BLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR*, an exhibition of black-and-white paintings and prints dating between 1951 and 1997, will be presented at Gagosian Le Bourget.

Hantaï is best known for originating the technique of *pliage* (folding), in which a canvas is crumpled and knotted, uniformly painted over, and then spread out to reveal a matrix of abstract alternations between pigment and ground.

Born in Bia, Hungary, Hantaï studied at the Budapest School of Fine Arts from 1941 to 1946 before moving to Paris in 1948 to study and then—in the wake of the escalating Sovietization of his homeland—deciding to stay. In Paris, he joined André Breton's circle of Surrealists, completing several fantastical biomorphic paintings before encountering the work of Jackson Pollock and breaking with Surrealist ideologies in 1955. Pollock's action paintings directly inspired Hantaï's own turn toward monumentally scaled abstraction. Hantaï began creating *pliage* paintings in 1960, conceiving of the process as a marriage between Surrealist automatism and the allover gestures of

Abstract Expressionism. The technique dominated the work he made during the rest of his career, reemerging in diverse forms.

Although many of Hantaï's works of *pliage* feature jewellike hues, he also created a number of these works featuring only black paint on bare canvas. *LES NOIRS DU BLANC, LES BLANCS DU NOIR* explores this subset of the artist's oeuvre: unmediated by color, the monochromatic paintings and prints celebrate the aesthetic form of the crease and document Hantaï's evolving relationship with the act of painting.

On view are four large-scale oil and acrylic paintings from Hantaï's series of *Études*. Produced in the late 1960s at the height of his experimentation with the *pliage* method, the series illustrates his efforts to eliminate the artist's hand from the painting process. Featuring a network of crisp creases of unpainted canvas spanning the composition, the *Études* conjure familiar images from nature—an undergrowth of leaves, perhaps, or a flock of birds in flight—but ultimately dissolve into pure abstraction.

Hantaï became a French citizen in 1966 and gained increasing recognition over the next two decades, culminating in an invitation to represent France at the 1982 Venice Biennale. Months later, however, he withdrew from the public eye, refusing to exhibit new works until 1998. Following this period of seclusion, Hantaï began altering his existing pieces—namely, one set of enormous *pliage* paintings exhibited in 1981 at CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux. He photographed these 50-foot-long paintings from an angle and created black-and-white silkscreen prints from the distorted photographic images, which he cropped vertically and printed amid stripes of white canvas. To Hantaï, silkscreen printing and *pliage* were inherently linked; both involved repeating an established technique to produce subtle variations.

For his *Laissées* (*Leftovers*), Hantaï sliced the Bordeaux paintings into smaller sections and displayed each one as a new work in itself. Paradoxically, by taking a craft knife to the large compositions, he simultaneously inflicted an irreversible act of violence upon his own art and preserved the most fundamental visual components of his *pliage* paintings. Hantaï continued to work largely in isolation until his death in 2008, leaving behind a corpus of fractal-like compositions whose surfaces dramatize the intersection of intentional and incidental mark making.

Simon Hantaï was born in 1922 in Bia, Hungary, and died in 2008 in Paris. Collections include CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, France; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Ludwig Museum, Budapest; Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Exhibitions include *Hantaï, Rétrospective*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris (1976); *1960–1976*, CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux (1981); 40th Biennale di Venezia (1982); *Donation Simon Hantaï*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (1997); *Hantaï, Collections du Musée national d'art moderne-Centre Pompidou et autres collections publiques françaises*, Musée d'Art Moderne, Céret, France (1998); *Werke von 1960 bis 1995*, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, Germany (1999); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2013); Villa Medici, Rome (2014); and *Hantaï*, Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2014).

#SimonHantai

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