



Contemporary & Post-War Art | Prints & Multiples (635)

Wed, 7th Apr 2021, Live Online

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Lot 42

Estimate: £10000 - £15000 + Fees

CLEVE GRAY (AMERICAN 1918-2004) REACH #2

Signed and inscribed with title and dated 2002 verso, acrylic on canvas

128.25cm x 172.27cm (50.5in x 68in)

Exhibited: Loretta Howard Gallery, New York

Lyon & Turnbull are excited to present for sale a wonderful example of the mature work of the American artist Cleve Gray. Gray, who passed away in 2004, was a significant artist within Post War Modernism, and is largely associated with the schools of Abstract Expressionism, Lyrical Abstraction and the Colour Field movement.

Born in New York city in 1918, Gray saw active service in World War II, serving in the signal intelligence service in Britain, France and Germany, where he rose to the rank of sergeant. After the liberation of Paris, he was purportedly the first American GI to make an introduction to Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein. Remaining in Paris for some time after the War, he undertook training with the French artists André Lhote and Jacques Villon, becoming deeply influenced by Cubism during this period.

Returning to America in 1946, Gray gradually relinquished his Cubist tendencies. In the 1960s he developed a friendship with Barnett Newman, a key figure within American Abstract Expressionism and one of the fore runners of the Colour Field and Minimalist movements, characterised by its utilisation of hard-edged blocks of saturated colour.

Gray absorbed this influence but never abandoned painterly brushwork completely, and his mature work is distinguished by flat planes of colour over which he creates gestural, calligraphic marks. The work offered here for sale is a quintessential example of this style. He had gradually moved from oils to acrylics in order to more effectively create limpid washes of colour on his canvas, resulting in a hazy effect which nods to peers including Mark Rothko and Newman. This adoption of almost calligraphic mark-making evidences his interest in the Chinese practise of Zen painting. Though never directly representational, his marks nevertheless encourage his viewers to project our own reading, rooted in our understanding of the natural world; from the tails of comets to the swooping flight of a bird.

Gray's work is represented in many major collections including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of Art in New York.