

ARTFORUM

Joan Mitchell

CHEIM & READ

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For Joan Mitchell, painting was a suspended kinesthesia, an act that both dilated and disallowed bodily control, like riding a bicycle with no hands. Displayed here in a four-decade sweep alongside pastels and watercolors, her canvases make a case for the mnemonic. Though never explicitly figurative, they suggest scenes less seen than remembered. Each collects moods manifesting as gestures: dense clots, gooey smears, and wispy sprays. Together, they vex binaries of facture and image, positing the mark as a device that joins materiality and affect.

In 1959, Mitchell quit New York for France, eventually settling on 12 Avenue Claude Monet in Vétheuil. *Heel, Sit, Stay*, 1977, channels the founding Impressionist's favored theme—nature, imaged on water—creating a surface that we both skip across and peer through. Each side of the ten-foot-tall diptych riffs on the other. The right side collects tufted, saturated strokes; the left responds in a springy staccato. Complementary colors organize the scheme: Rusted greens round into bruised reds, and cobalt blues appose acid yellows, like sunshine hitting shade. All around, paint piles up and runs down, obtaining a state between stillness and motion.



Joan Mitchell, *Heel, Sit, Stay*, 1977, oil on canvas, 110 x 126".

Nearby, an untitled eight-part pastel from 1978 asserts a tenuous horizon. Dashes of fuchsia and lime hyphenate adjoining pages, while tangles of black anchor their spread, obeying borders. White scumbles passages of lavender and azure, dissolving discrete strokes into a cumulous haze. Spread across so many sheets, space resolves into a fragmented continuity. As in the best of Mitchell's paintings, the composition sinks toward the edges of our vision, immersing us in a realm where landscape loosens into feeling.

— Courtney Fiske

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