



Jean Neuberth

1915–1996

Jean Neuberth was born on November 10, 1915, in Paris, into a household saturated with music. His mother taught French at the Lycée Lakanal and was a gifted harpsichordist; his father was principal violist of the Concerts Colonne and a soloist on the viola alta. The family soon left Paris to settle in Bourg-la-Reine, but the musical inheritance remained. Jazz in particular took hold of the young Neuberth, and music would remain a touchstone for his thinking about painting throughout his life.

Before he became a painter, Neuberth's life took a series of unlikely turns. He served as a military aviator and trained as a parachute acrobat. He worked in theatre. In 1942 he was a member of a symphony orchestra in Montpellier, where he lived for a period, while also working as a bar pianist, a night watchman, and a radio presenter. It was the life of a man who moved through the world restlessly, absorbing it.

His encounter with painting came through Henri-Jean Closon, one of the very first French abstract painters, whom he met in the 1930s. Neuberth participated from 1937 in the rare exhibitions of abstract art then being organized in France, resumed his studies with Closon in 1941, and committed entirely to painting from 1942 onward. In 1949 he co-organized, with Francis Bott and the critic and painter Michel Seuphor, an exhibition of abstract art at the Musée de Nîmes. The following year the Musée de Montpellier dedicated a solo exhibition to him, and after 1950 he participated in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris.

His compositional approach evolved across several distinct phases. In early work, a continuous arabesque traced its path across the canvas surface, carrying what one source described as the nostalgia of former evolutions in the sky, a reference unmistakably linked to his years as an aviator. From there his work turned to gouache, exploiting its material properties for effects that were less aerial and more meditative. In the 1970s he abandoned gouache for drawing and collage, and his pen drawings of this period were noted for their rigorous precision, recalling the poetic graphic work of his close friend Michel Seuphor. He also illustrated literary publications for the Cercle des Bibliophiles in Geneva, La Guilde du Livre in Lausanne, and the Encyclopédie des Musiques Sacrées in Paris.

From 1950 until 1993 Neuberth did not exhibit publicly. When he finally returned, it was with a retrospective titled *Parcours du secret* at the Galerie Sculptures on the rue Visconti in Paris, in the company of work spanning four decades. Pierre Carmes, writing in 1993, described him as “one of the most active representatives of lyrical abstraction.” Despite several serious health challenges, including a hemiplegia, Neuberth continued working until his death in Chantilly on March 16, 1996. A posthumous retrospective, *Jean Neuberth: Gouaches and Drawings 1959–1992*, was held at the Place Neuve Gallery at Vers-Pont-du-Gard in 2002. His work is documented in Michel Seuphor's landmark 1957 *Dictionnaire de la Peinture Abstraite*.