



# Maurice Morel

1908–1991

Maurice Morel, known as l'Abbé Morel, was born on March 28, 1908, in Ornans, a small town in the Franche-Comté region of eastern France, the same town where Gustave Courbet was born more than half a century earlier. He came to Paris as a young man and in 1925, at the age of seventeen, was encouraged to paint by his friend the poet and artist Max Jacob, who organized his first exhibition.

Morel was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1934, a vocation that did not diminish his artistic ambitions but gave them their ultimate subject. Where other artists of the clergy championed modern art at arm's length, commissioning secular figures to make sacred work for the Church, Morel made it himself, working throughout his career in a modernist idiom he believed was not in tension with religious feeling but was its most honest expression. He established a painting studio with Jean Bazaine, one of the central figures of the Nouvelle École de Paris, and aligned himself closely with Alfred Manessier, whose lyrical abstractions in paint and stained glass defined a generation of French sacred art.

Morel is classified as a painter of the Nouvelle École de Paris and a significant figure in the broader movement of lyrical abstraction that emerged from the 1940s onward, a movement that counted Bazaine, Manessier, Jean Bertholle, and Jean Le Moal among its principal voices. All had participated in the landmark 1941 exhibition *Vingt Jeunes Peintres de Tradition Française*, which asserted a non-figurative, vividly colored painting rooted in the Romanesque religious tradition. Morel shared their convictions. He believed that abstract art, far from being inaccessible or spiritually empty, was “the most concrete” form of expression, arriving closer to truth precisely because it shed the distractions of representation.

His work spans painting, drawing, and stained glass design, with his mature paintings showing the densely colored, formally structured character that links the Nouvelle École de Paris to the lyrical abstraction of mid-century France. His drawings range from spare ink studies recalling the influence of Max Jacob to more expressionistic figure work bearing the influence of Georges Rouault, another of his mentors. Solo exhibitions were held at the Galerie Roque in Paris in 1963, and his work appeared at Galerie de l'Exil, 18 Avenue Matignon, Paris. He is documented in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and in Le Delarge's *Dictionnaire des arts plastiques modernes et contemporains*.

Maurice Morel died in Paris on February 15, 1991.