

## BMA TO OPEN MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE ON ARTIST JOAN MITCHELL IN MARCH 2021

*Co-Organized by BMA and SFMOMA, Joan Mitchell  
Offers New Scholarship on Mitchell's Vision, History, and Artistic Process*

BALTIMORE, MD (UPDATED December 8, 2020)—Joan Mitchell has long been hailed as a formidable creative force—a woman artist who attained critical acclaim and success in the male-dominated art circles of the 1950s, and then went on to make her own distinctive way in the world for four decades. From March 21 through July 18, 2021, The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will present a comprehensive survey of Mitchell's oeuvre that establishes a new depth of scholarship on her work. Titled *Joan Mitchell*, the retrospective will feature approximately 60 works, including rarely seen early paintings and drawings, the vibrant gestural compositions that established her career, and large-scale, colorful, multi-panel masterpieces from her later years. With suites of major paintings as well as sketchbooks, charcoal drawings, and pastels on paper, the exhibition will open a new window into the richness of Mitchell's practice and present a model of art history that accommodates multiple chapters and evolving styles. *Joan Mitchell* is accompanied by a catalogue that will provide further essential insight into Mitchell's artistic achievements and the inspirations that drove them.



Co-organized by the BMA and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), the exhibition is grounded in more than two years of archival research and an extensive firsthand review of Mitchell's works conducted by co-curators Katy Siegel, BMA Senior Programming & Research Curator and Thaw Chair of Modern Art at Stony Brook University, and Sarah Roberts, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA. *Joan Mitchell* will be on view at SFMOMA September 4, 2021 through August 14, 2022 with additional works. A version of the exhibition will open at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris in fall 2022.

In conjunction with the BMA presentation of the retrospective, the museum will also open an exhibition of new works by four contemporary Baltimore-based artists that have previously been recognized with grants from the Joan Mitchell Foundation. Mitchell established the Foundation in her will to support the careers and lives of working artists. The exhibition, titled *All Due Respect*, provides a singular opportunity to highlight the role that Mitchell's generosity has played for generations of artists.

*Joan Mitchell* will explore the artist's evolution as she sought to unify physical experience with the psychological and emotional. Her works are connected by their incredible evocations of feeling, and her canvases capture the electricity of her physical process as well as the sensations aroused by music and poetry, personal relationships, and views of Chicago, New York, and Paris and the countryside of the Mediterranean and Vétueil (northwest of Paris). The power of her approach can be seen in her vibrant evocations articulations of the urban environments of New York City in paintings like *The Bridge* (1956) and *To The Harbormaster* (1957) and the lush French landscapes, as experienced firsthand and also in the works of historical artists like Vincent van Gogh, in such paintings as *No Rain* (1976) and *Sunflowers* (1990-91).

The exhibition will highlight the way Mitchell experimented with color, light, and gesture, resulting in a singular visual vocabulary that was decidedly personal and abstract, but also grounded in external reality. Photographs of views and other paintings that inspired Mitchell will be shown alongside her painterly responses, capturing the way she maintained a connection to the natural world and to everyday life, moving beyond the conventional definitions of Abstract Expressionism and Impressionism.

“Across her life, Mitchell experimented with how painting could embody physical experience and also the complexity of the inner self, and ultimately how that self could get beyond its limits to connect with a poem, passage of music, a dog—even a tree. Her fearlessness in making both grand and small gestures resulted in works that challenge our ideas about our own connections to the world, to our feelings and bodies, and to other beings,” said Siegel. “And they challenge our ideas about great art. To study her work is to understand that Mitchell was not simply ‘making it’ in an environment created and occupied by men, she was actively remaking painting and its possibilities. This exhibition is an opportunity to ask what it means to live a life with art at its center and to reconsider the art of the postwar era and the extended impact of feminism’s burgeoning possibilities in the 1970s and ‘80s.”

*Joan Mitchell* will also examine the essential role of music and poetry in the development of Mitchell’s practice. Immersed in culture from childhood, Mitchell determined early on to pursue the visual arts, though her love of poetry and music remained and her personal and collaborative relationships with writers and musicians in both the U.S. and France are key to her story. As her artistic style developed, the open-ended, sometimes ambiguous, and often personal nature of lyrics, lines of poetry, and musical compositions dovetailed with painting’s capacity to express what cannot be named or explained. Two multi-panel paintings, *Ode to Joy (A Poem by Frank O’Hara)* (1970-71) and *La Vie en Rose* (1979), demonstrate the relationships between Mitchell’s passion for the arts across its many disciplines and the way it propelled her practice.

“Mitchell possessed an unsurpassed ability to orchestrate a vast range of colors across the surface of a painting, masterfully controlling the density, placement, and proportion of every hue and the tempo of every mark. She created brilliantly complex compositions that range from tough and muscular to rich and symphonic, equaling the beauty and power of work by the artists she most admired, from Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh to her friends Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning. Mitchell’s sensuous paintings pulse with the energy, atmosphere, and color we usually experience only in the natural world,” said Roberts.

Additionally, the exhibition will contextualize the ways in which social dynamics shaped perceptions of and possibilities for her work. Throughout her life, Mitchell grappled with conflict between the social roles prescribed by her gender and social status and her desire for true creative freedom. Over the years, vividly different perceptions of her work in the U.S. and France developed, and the upcoming exhibition both examines these diverging views and reconciles them into a cohesive portrait of a complex individual and the art she produced.

### **Tickets**

Tickets will be available through [artbma.org](http://artbma.org). Prices are \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors, \$10 for groups of 7 or more, \$10 for students with ID, and \$5 for youth ages 7-18. BMA Members and children age 6 and under are admitted free. For more information, call 443-573-1701.

### **Catalogue**

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by SFMOMA in association with Yale University Press that offers a sweeping scholarly account of the artist’s transnational career and the cyclical nature of her painting in

relation to historical contexts in the U.S. and France. Ten chronological chapters provide new research on Mitchell's methods by focusing on moments where her ideas and techniques coalesced into significant bodies of work, while also delving into her biography with close studies of her relationships with peers and friends, especially artists, poets, and musicians. In addition to chapters authored by co-curators Siegel and Roberts, in-depth essays by scholars Éric de Chassey, Jenni Quilter, and Richard Schiff present new historical models for understanding Mitchell's work in relationship to mid-century painting in Paris, poetry, and 19th-century French Romanticism. Artistic and literary responses to Mitchell's work were contributed by writer Paul Auster, composer Gisèle Barreau, poet and essayist Eileen Myles, artist Joyce Pensato, and painter David Reed in dialogue with conservator Jennifer Hickey. This volume will be the first major scholarly publication on Mitchell in decades.

### **Joan Mitchell**

Joan Mitchell (1925–1992) was an American artist whose career spanned more than four decades in the U.S. and France. Best known for her large, abstract oils on canvas, Mitchell also created smaller paintings, as well as an extensive body of works on paper and prints. Born in Chicago and educated at the Art Institute of Chicago, Mitchell moved to New York in 1949. In 1955, she began splitting her time between Paris and New York, before moving permanently to France in 1959. In 1968, Mitchell moved from Paris to Vétheuil, a small village northwest of the city, while continuing to exhibit her work in Paris, New York, and around the world. In Vétheuil, Mitchell began regularly hosting artists at various stages of their careers, providing space and support to develop their art. When Mitchell passed away in 1992, her will specified that a portion of her estate should be used to establish a foundation to directly support visual artists.

### **THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART**

Founded in 1914, The Baltimore Museum of Art is a major cultural destination recognized for engaging diverse audiences through dynamic exhibitions and innovative educational and community outreach programs. The BMA's internationally renowned collection of 95,000 objects encompasses more than 1,000 works by Henri Matisse anchored by the famed Cone Collection of modern art, as well as one of the nation's finest holdings of prints, drawings, and photographs. The galleries showcase an exceptional collection of art from Africa; important works by established and emerging contemporary artists; outstanding European and American paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts; significant artworks from China; ancient Antioch mosaics; and exquisite textiles from around the world. The 210,000-square-foot museum is also distinguished by a grand historic building designed in the 1920s by renowned American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of 20th-century sculpture. The BMA is located in Charles Village, three miles north of the Inner Harbor, and is adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University. General admission to the BMA is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

### **VISITOR INFORMATION**

The BMA will reopen January 6, 2021 with its regular hours: Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m.–5 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays, Tuesdays, New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit [artbma.org](http://artbma.org). Connect with us: [#ARTBMA](#) • [Stories](#) • [Facebook](#) • [Twitter](#) • [Instagram](#) • [YouTube](#)

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**Image:** Joan Mitchell. *Sunflowers*. 1990-91. Collection of John Cheim. © Estate of Joan Mitchell.