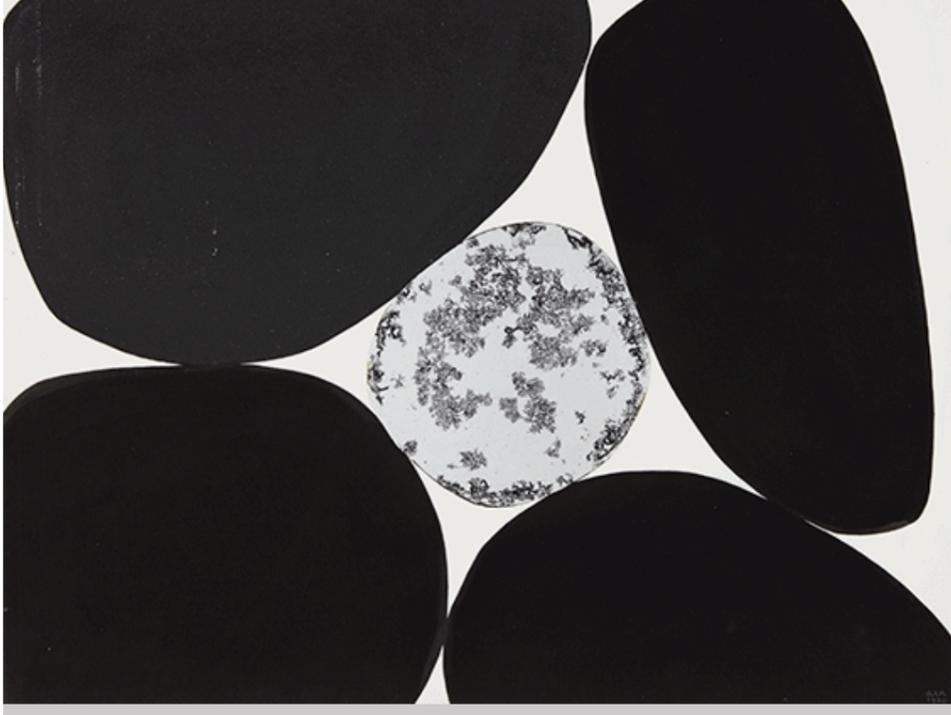


Exhibition October 22, 2020 – April 4, 2021

Parque del Retiro, Palacio de Velázquez

Anna-Eva Bergman

From North to South, Rhythms



Nº 76-1970 *Pierre de Castille 6*, 1970. Fondation Hartung-Bergman, Antibes

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“Abstract painting is describing the life of colors, their conformity with the laws of nature, their rhythm and their form.”

1950 Notebook, Anna-Eva Bergman

The work of Anna-Eva Bergman (1909-1987) is articulated on the basis of “rhythm”, an element she considered essential as a structural part of painting. Here, the rhythm results from the use of certain materials (metal sheets, silver, copper, or gold leaf), forms, lines and colors. After 1950, her attention focused on abstraction as a form of expression, and it was then that landscape became a formal referent in her work, with natural motifs, Scandinavian mythology (stones, planets, mountains, boats), and the Norwegian light.

Although her relationship with Spain began in 1933, when she went to live for a year in Minorca with her partner, Hans Hartung, the journey that had the greatest impact on her work was a visit in 1962 to the town of Carboneras in the Andalusian province of Almería. There, profoundly moved by the beauty of the landscapes, she started to produce her first horizons, a motif she resumed after her re-encounter with the landscapes of Norway. This link between Norway and Spain – north and south – manifests itself in a formal similarity between the two landscapes, but there are differences in the tonalities and the representation of the light.

Stones are another recurrent motif in the artist’s work. They first appeared after a stay in Norway in 1951, and were seen again in her “Stones of Castile” series after a tour of the interior of the Iberian Peninsula in the early 1970s.



Nº 36-1969, 1969. Fondation Hartung-Bergman, Antibes

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This exhibition is centered on a broad selection of work produced by Bergman between 1962 and 1971, a period coinciding with this series of journeys to Spain and Norway. During her travels, she also took a large number of photographs which she used as memory traces or mementoes, so that the landscapes are shown from the distance between the painting and the object of perception, which is transformed with the passage of time.

Her pictorial construction is based on a process of sedimentation that tends to transcend the surface through the immediacy of form, the use of large formats, or the addition of layers of various materials over thickly applied paint, sometimes varnished to modify their appearance and achieve greater density. The layers intermingle to alter the perception of color depending on the light. The alternation of these materials with forms, lines and colors is what Bergman considered the structural “rhythm” mentioned above. The technique yields a relief and a pattern that are only visible through the gleaming reflections of the metal, creating a physical experience that stamps the sentiment of the infinite on the finite. The intense relationship with landscape leads to a concentration on the elements that constitute and animate nature – air, fire, water, earth – in an attempt to trap the immaterial in the materiality of the artwork.

This tendency to open up the picture space inscribes the artist within the American abstract landscape tradition of artists like Mark Rothko, who Bergman knew very well, and ultimately within the history of Northern European Romanticism. Romantic painters like Caspar David Friedrich and J.M.W. Turner expressed experiences like infinity or the divine through landscape, seen as the chief expression of “the sublime”. And like Abstract Expressionism, the artist’s work allows the experience of the infinite in nature to be found in abstraction.

I must be totally free and alone, but mostly I need time: no more housekeeping nor other concerns. I must be occupied only with my work and have the opportunity to rest (Letter of separation to her husband Hans Hartung, April 14th, 1937).

There is a motif normally in my painting that I'm not able to repress, the horizon. For me, it contains the eternity, the infinite, what is beyond the well-known, what leads towards the unknown. When I contemplate my horizons, a nostalgic desire arises in me. A desire, yes, but for what? I can't reach it. It dwells in me, I feel it often, but I wouldn't know how to describe it.

The horizon is the limit of human experience which is common to us; a limit I try to overcome, an experience I try to expand. Beyond the boundary of the horizon lies a realm which, though physically unattainable to man, exists and we can experience it. Perhaps this experience must be apprehended as a “pure experience of Nature”, ...

Painting abstract is describing the life of colours, their conformity to the laws of nature, their rhythm and their form.

The essential backbone of the painting is the line however, why should the line be used to draw the contours? Is not indeed the rhythm of much more importance? There are no contours, there are only passages from one thing to another, from light to darkness, from one colour to another. Contours are limitations. There is a world without limitations, and a painting is a world without no other limit than the outside of the frame.

I dream of Finnmark and the North of Norway. I am captivated by the light which turns up by layers, giving the impression of places that are at the same time near and a long way far

Anna-Eva Bergman

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