



Culture

Pierre Soulages: Paint it Black

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On May 31st, French President François Hollande inaugurated the brand new Musée Soulages in Rodez, the hometown of the most celebrated artist in France today, 94-year-old French abstract master Pierre Soulages. The museum is expressly dedicated to the life and work of the artist.

For its major inaugural exhibition, Musée Soulages features more than 500 of Soulages' works, estimated at more than €40 million; most of the works were included in his 2005 and 2012 donations to the museum.

These comprise his oil paintings from the 1940s to the 70s, the more than 100 works on paper from 1946 to 2012, and the preparatory works (1987-1994) for the 104 stained glass windows he created for Conques Abbey church near Rodez, among others.

The painter of black

Pierre Soulages, considered one of the most prominent figures in the abstract art world, has exhibited in more than 90 museums and has a prolific output of around 1,500 works of art. He is better known for his distinctive style of being the "painter of black".

Black has always been a constant presence in his paintings because it has an "element contrast" with the other colors. But his interest in the color (which in some surreal way can be classified as both a "color and non-color") stems from something more basic and philosophical than anything else. As the artist explains: "Some people have cried [looking at] my paintings. [The color might have tapped in them] something basic, human and timeless. Black is the color of the origin of painting –and our own origin."

Outrenoir (Beyond black)

The inaugural exhibit at Musée Soulages also includes more than 30 large-scale paintings that belong to the series called "Outrenoir" ("beyond black" is a loose English translation), a series Soulages started in 1979. According to the artist, his discovery of "Outrenoir" came about after working furiously on a painting when "everything became black". He kept working on it thinking it might become stronger, and fell asleep.

When he looked at his work again when he awoke, he said he was "no longer working in black but working with the light reflected by the surface of the black...the light was dynamized by the strokes of paint. It was another world... When light is reflected on black, it transforms and transmutes it."

Fame and home for his works

Considered as the most successful living French artist today, the paintings of Pierre Soulages command an average of \$1 million to \$4 million each, especially those he did in the 50s and the 60s. His 2009 retrospective at the Pompidou Center had the largest number of visitors (over half a million people) who ever attended a show by a living artist.

With Musée Soulages, the works of Pierre Soulages have a home of their own, in addition to being exhibited in some of the world's biggest galleries and museums (Guggenheim, Tate, and Hermitage).