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PIERRE SOULAGES  
RODEZ, FRANCE 1919

*PEINTURE 162 X 130 CM, 21 OCT. 66*

1966

Oil on canvas  
162 x 130 cm

Painted on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1966

Signed lower right, signed and titled on the reverse.

Provenance:

M. Knoedler & Co., Inc., New York, 1967

Aluminium Company of America (acquired at the Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture), 1967

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Exhibited:

Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne, *Soulages*, 1967, no.76 (illustrated)

Pittsburgh, The Carnegie Museum, *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, 1967, no.65

New York, Knoedler & Co. *Soulages Painting since 1963*, 6 – 24 February 1968, no. 12, p. 11 (illustrated in colour); this exhibition then travelled to Pittsburgh, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, 7 March – 7 April 1968; Buffalo, Albright Knox Art Gallery, 6 May – 2 June 1968  
Montreal, Musée d'Art Contemporain, *Soulages*, 23 July – 1 September 1968, no. 31 (illustrated) ; this exhibition then travelled to Québec, Musée du Quebec, 26 September – 21 October 1968

Pittsburgh, University Art Gallery, *Pittsburgh Collects 2: Alcoa Collection of Contemporary Art*, 1971, p.19 (illustrated, catalogued incorrectly)

College Park, University of Maryland Art Gallery, *Pierre Soulages*, 10 February – 12 March 1972, no. 6, p. 7 (illustrated in colour)

Dublin, Municipal Gallery of Art; Swansea, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery; Sheffield, Graves Art Gallery; Glasgow Art Gallery, Kelvingrove; Worms, Städtische Kulturinstitut; Oslo, Henie Onstad Gallery; Birmingham, City Museum & Art Gallery; Edinburgh, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art; Manchester, Whitworth Gallery; London, Institute of Contemporary Art; Lausanne, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts; Vienna, Wiener Secession; Milan, Centro Culturale San Fedele; Tel Aviv, Municipal Museum of Art; Athens, Doxiades Design School, *Alcoa Collection of Contemporary Art*, 1972-1975, p.8, no.2 (illustrated in colour)

Wenatchee, Wenatchee Valley College, *Alcoa Collection of Contemporary Art*, 1976

Bibliography:

Pierre Encrevé, *Soulages, L'oeuvre complet, Peintures, vol. II, 1959-1978*, Paris, 1995, p. 168, no. 589 (illustrated in colour)

Intensely dramatic and completely engrossing, *Peinture 162 cm x 130 cm, 21 Oct. 66* captures Pierre Soulages' career long commitment to the primacy of form over illusion and dates from one of the artist's most sought after periods of creative production. By the end of the 1950s Soulages had forged his place within the contemporary art world. Gaining increasing international acclaim he exhibited his works at the XXVI Venice Biennale in 1952, as well as at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1953 and 1959, and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1957, as well as extensively at galleries in Europe and America. At his first showing in America at the beginning of the 1950s, Soulages' work attracted comparisons with that of the Abstract Expressionist artist Franz Kline (fig. 2) in its scope and pioneering approach to abstraction: "Both these painters with significant differences in method seem well along the royal road to a new absolute expression; both are making significant history in the drama of contemporary abstract painting..." (Pierre Encrevé, *Soulages, L'oeuvre complet, Peintures, I. 1946-1959*, Paris 1994, p. 158).

Black bars of glistening paint traverse the surface of Pierre Soulages' *Peinture 162 cm x 130 cm, 21 Oct. 66*, their viscosity creating an intense play of light. Bold and monumental, beneath the thick sweeping passages of black paint, a field of translucent crimson radiates. This impression is reinforced by the areas where the dark, viscous bands of paint are thinner,

allowing some sense of the background to glimmer through, like embers of a fire of smouldering luminosity. They seem liquid, vibrant, even, perfectly encapsulating the idiosyncratic character that lies at the heart of Soulages' greatest canvases. In works like these, Soulages strives to address the tensions between form, colour and light, revealing the artist's total mastery of an unadulterated expression.

While the contrast between light and dark, and indeed between colour and black, had long fascinated Soulages, it was only recently that he had developed what is now an almost iconic, though abstract, technique of expressing and exploiting the shades of colour. Thick rivers of dark, glistening paint course across the canvas. The heaviness of the black brushstrokes, and indeed the sheer mass of the impasto, contrast with the colourful embers of the background, creating a complex interplay that is accentuated by the careful, balanced composition of the picture as a whole. It is this subtle interplay among the black and the underlying reds in works such as this that capture the essence of Soulages' painting.

In the years 1963-1965, Soulages experimented with his painting process. The large format paintings from this time were the result of Soulages depositing fluid paint onto canvas laid on the floor. Renouncing scraping, he extended the media through large flat areas, using a brush, leaving significant antecedent layers. Changes in speed, direction and depth of the stroke gives pace to the canvas, which is built in successive stages. He would reveal the layers of vivid red, creating a sublime transparent surface from the most opaque black. The expanses of black offer up chromatic possibilities for other colours, in this case by adding contrast to the red, making it appear luminously vibrant. In this work, Soulages' majestic sweeps of black paint are softened into an imposing solid mass. By letting the opaque black paint bleed around the edges and drip by thinning it with turpentine, he fused these seemingly random marks into a powerful compositional unity that speaks of the action of painting. The commandingly linear passage of paint strokes exist in a world entirely unencumbered by allusions of objectivity.

Within *Peinture 162 cm x 130 cm, 21 Oct. 66*, the luminous hues of the central segment appear to glow as a result of the encroaching areas of deep black at either side, black signalling paramount importance for Soulages throughout his career. The artist recalled that his earliest works were influenced by his discovery of black tones in nature, making particular reference to the sight of tree branches silhouetted against the sky. In its play of light and dark and the striking combination of black with warm crimson tones *Peinture 162 cm x 130 cm, 21 Oct. 66* arguably recalls the appearance of a sunset sky glimpsed through trees, revealing the continuous influence of these early memories of the natural world on Soulages' painting of the time. Soulages was also strongly inspired by the rugged carved monoliths and menhirs that abound near Rodez in Southern France, the place of his birth: the powerful solidity of the paint surface, alongside the stalactite-like drips of paint across the centre of the canvas within *Peinture 162 cm x 130 cm, 21 Oct. 66* arguably pay homage to these primeval formations.

The work of Soulages resists being categorised alongside other postwar European artists as they struggled to handle the atrocities of the previous generation. Though he rejected the existential dialogue that was intrinsic to the theoretical discourse of his European contemporaries, his work nonetheless evokes the awe-inspiring canvases and emotional intensity of the most notable American Abstract Expressionists including Mark Rothko, Franz

Kline, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. However, refusing to be pigeon-holed in this way, Soulages attempts to situate his work outside of category, history or style, an approach which allows each of his paintings to convey an autonomous beauty regardless of time or place: "I don't depict. I don't narrate. I don't represent. I paint, I present."

Soulages' corpus is thus imbued with an air of timelessness, transcending conventional limitations of era or decade to project a singular beauty of form, colour and texture. *Peinture 162 cm x 130 cm, 21 Oct. 66* eloquently conveys this sensation of universality and immutability, and stands as a significant exposition of Soulages' ground-breaking painterly style and technique of the 1960s. "Soulages is certainly devoted to black, as is often repeated, such was the surprise of this revolutionary return to a colour which has rarely been made to sing so magnificently since the great era of the Dutch School. But which black? He has a hundred. Matte, glistening, unctuous, smooth or rugged, cold or warm, he borrows as much from bark as from soot or tar, peat as from humus or the charred wood of old beams." (Emmanuelle Stein, "Le Chant Profond de Soulages", *Tribune Socialiste*, 11 May 1967, quoted in Pierre Encrevé, *Soulages, l'Oeuvre Complet - Peintures*, Vol. II : 1959-1978, Paris, 1995, p. 124.)



Fig 1 Pierre Soulages, *Peintures*, 21 novembre 1959, 1959. Sold: Sotheby's London, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2013 for £ 4,338,500



Fig. 2 Franz Kline, *Horizontal Rust*, 1960 Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio



Fig. 3 Pierre Soulages, *Painting*  
1956, 1956 Musée National  
d'Art Moderne, Centre  
Pompidou, Paris

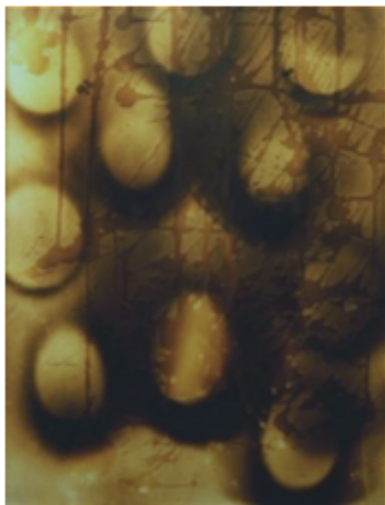


Fig. 4 Yves Klein, *Untitled*  
*Fire Painting F13*, 1961

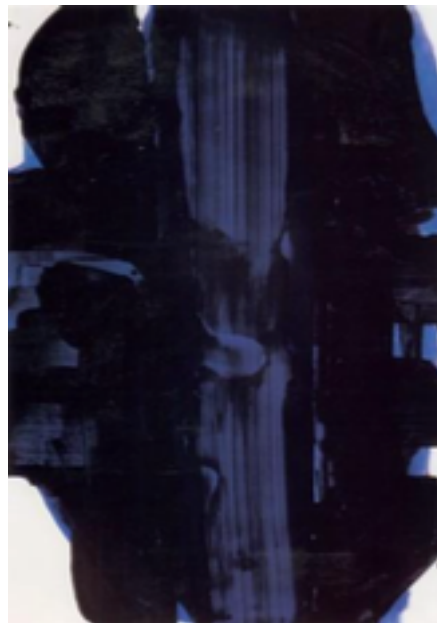


Fig. 5 Pierre Soulages,  
*Peinture 202 x 143 cm, 30*  
*novembre 1967*, 1967 Musée  
Soulages. Rodez



Fig 6 Pierre Soulages  
Peinture 130 x 89 cm. 8  
septembre 1965, 1965 Sold:  
Christie's Paris, 4<sup>th</sup> June 2013  
for € 2,001,500