

MARIAN DALE SCOTT

A Fascination with Structure

A Peek at the MAJ Collection
Exhibition begins June 17

After nearly forty years spent exploring the possibilities of figuration up to its most abstract expression, Montréal artist Marian Dale Scott (1906-1993) addressed, over the last thirty years of her life, the potential of non-objective art.

The underlying structures of urban, botanical, or cellular worlds formed the basis of Scott's approach in which she sought to formally translate their essential meaning through geometric organization, both angular and curved. This interest in underlying structures also guided her reflections on non-objective art. While her purely abstract paintings initially focused on the expressive potential of matter, this soon gave way to a more systematic structure that served to organize her thick, coloured textures.

Around 1965, Scott began a new phase in her work, many fine examples of which are part of the Musée d'art de Joliette's collection. In these, Scott uses a more formalist approach whereby an underlying grid acts as the surface's main organizing element. The impastos that previously had been formed out of oil-based pigments were now abandoned in favour of flat areas of acrylic paint applied in geometrically defined shapes to create various optical effects.

This new stage no doubt speaks to the growing influence of the Plasticiens movement on the Montréal art scene, which had been present since the mid-1950s. Their importance grew even more evident after the exhibition *The Responsive Eye*, held in New York in 1965, which Scott may have seen or had at least purchased the catalogue.

This rigorously geometric period ended in the early 1970s, after which fluidity, curves, and transparencies would gradually temper the strict linearity of her work.

It should be noted that at the time, in Québec, rigorous geometric abstraction and strictly pictorial optical effects were primarily the domain of male artists. Women artists were rarely concerned by these issues. The most well-known exception, of course, is Rita Letendre (1928-2021), and to a lesser degree, Marian Dale Scott. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that more than twenty years separate these two women. Scott, an anglophone artist, was a generation older than these younger, mainly francophone, women, who were making their mark on the abstract art scene in Québec. Hence the rather uncommon nature of these non-objective geometric explorations, which Marian Dale Scott untiringly pursued, even at an age when others were resting on their laurels.

Esther Trépanier, Guest Curator

MARIAN DALE SCOTT

Montréal, Québec, 1906 – Westmount, Québec, 1993

1. *Untitled*, 1966

Acrylic on canvas, 162.3 x 152.2 cm

Donation Maurice Forget

1995.258

Marian Dale Scott readily asserts this painting's flatness by basing its surface organization on a grid, the rigidity of which yields to the suppleness of the uneven bands. Inside each horizontal and vertical section, Scott uses the underlying white areas to create a series of undulating, oblique lines that form the interstices between the flat, coloured areas and delineate the dynamic triangular spaces. In 1966, a painting from this series received an honourable mention in the painting category of the province's *Concours artistiques* award.

2. *Untitled*, 1968

Silkscreen, 51 x 66.2 cm

Gift of Esther Trépanier

2022.567

In 1967-1968, Scott explored a compositional method that created a new optical dynamic whereby triangular forms whose tips converge toward a single point are positioned along a diagonal axis. She used this model to create a series of screen prints for an artists' album project launched by Guido Molinari, who had been a student of Scott's at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' school of art and design. The album was to have included works by Molinari, Jacques Hurtubise, Roy Kiyooka, Claude Tousignant, Jean McEwen, and Marian Scott. Although the project never materialized, Scott still produced her screen prints at Molinari's studio.

3. *Untitled*, 1969

Acrylic on canvas, 61.5 x 91.5 cm

Gift of Mark and Esperanza Schwartz

1992.064

Starting in 1968, Scott pursued her exploration of optical effects. A first series of paintings was made in more muted tones that gradually become more brilliant. Here, clear lines still separate the angular forms, which have now become more rigid. These unfold in a way that infers an abstract perception of volume. While working on this series, Scott gradually abandoned the white separating lines from her previous works in favour of juxtaposing the coloured forms directly against each other, thus adopting a more hard-edge technique.

4. *Untitled*, 1970 c

Acrylic on canvas, 91.5 x 86.6 cm

Gift of Esther Trépanier

2022.568

In 1969, one of Scott's hard-edge paintings won the Baxter Purchase Award from the Ontario Society of Artists. In the October 6 edition of the *Globe and Mail*, Kay Kritzwiser wrote an article in which she presented Scott as "a Montreal housewife who works at home in a small, crowded studio." The *Montreal Star* picked up the story and ran it on October 8 under the headline, "Montreal Housewife Wins Award." The article provoked outrage from the artist Ghitta Caiserman who, in a letter to the *Star* published on October 22, wrote: "The 'housewife' referred to is Marian Scott, an artist of longstanding stature and reputation, and this should be her designation. In this case the 'housewife' tag is an obsolete generalization."

3rd floor in the hallway

Espace 3^e étage

