

L'Inquiétude ca 1956-1965, MacDonald-Wright

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Title of Artwork: *L'Inquiétude*

Artist: Stanton MacDonal-Wright (July 8, 1890 – August 22, 1973)

Nationality: American

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Alan Leslie, © Stanton MacDonal-Wright Estate

Oil on Canvas, dated between 1956 and 1965, completed in Southern California

Stanton MacDonal-Wright was born in Charlottesville, Virginia to Archibald Davenport Wright and Annie VanVranken who was related through marriage to Transcontinental Railway tycoon Collis P. Huntington. Annie came from a long line of conservative Dutch ancestors and along with her husband accepted the Victorian conservative ideals of their time. However, when it came to their children their conservative ways rejected all social conventions of discipline and authoritarian rule in their home. At age five Wright began private tutoring along with his older brother Willard in literature, language, and art. They were spoiled children with servants who prepared their meals and attended to their needs. These kinds of indulgences led to Wright believing he was a prince. (1) In 1891 the family moved to Santa Monica, California, a more ethnically diverse environment, where Wright passed his youth having adventures that out shined Herman Melville's Captain Ahab. Wright's first oil was painted in 1903 titled Landscape, a view of Santa Monica's corner at Third and Olive Street. (1) When he was sixteen his father sent him to study art in Paris at the Sorbonne and there he befriended Gertrude Stein and artists such as Matisse, Picasso, Gauguin, Rodin, and made a new friend in fellow artist Morgan Russell. (1)

According to Wright one of his earliest artistic influences was poet Oscar Wilde who believed that art existed for art's sake and did not need to imitate nature but rather be

inspiration for a path to transcendence and a higher spiritual reality. Another was Cézanne who Wright believed was the Father of all Modern Painting and the first man ever to utilize color as a function; (5) Wright said, “color spectrum is a thing which extends itself into an imaginary space...into a third-dimensional imaginative space.” (6) Wright’s other influences included Michelangelo’s use of composition; Matisse’s exquisite eye for color; Wright’s study and practice of Taoism and Zen Buddhism that led him into a more contemplative and meditative life; and Chinese, Japanese, and Persian art that changed the way he viewed his own pictures. (6) Some experts discuss Wright’s later works as leaning more and more toward an oriental style. (1) Wright agreed with this interpretation because he viewed his work in color to be balanced in the same way that Chinese art balanced large empty masses of lights and darks. One can see the contrary and complementary balancing of Ying and Yang forces of interrelated forms clearly reflected in his work currently on display in the *Montgomery to Modernism* exhibit, titled *L'Inquiétude* (1956-1965). This was completed less than ten years before his death in 1973. The dance of colors and forms seem to pull one way and then another and at the same time perfectly relate to each other in a kind of color symmetry that Wright is famous for and that also exemplifies the first American modern art movement, Synchronism, meaning “with color” that was cofounded by Wright and Morgan Russell in Paris fifty years earlier (1913). Synchronism described in 1965 by William C. Agee for an exhibition catalog at the M. Knoedler Gallery in New York City titled, *Synchronism and Color Principles in American Painting 1910-1930*. Agee notes, “Color as generator of form, movement, and rhythm, orchestrated and moving in time demands and abstract painting composed like music, of an intangible, non literal subject matter”. (2)

L'Inquiétude employs the use of varying depths of color in orchestration with form and space. It evokes a feeling of suspended time and movement while forming a kaleidoscope of color that draws a spectator’s eye in and accomplishes Wright’s goal of “intensifying the expressive power of painting” (3). Here he is using pure color to elevate emotion in the same way that a conductor uses music to transport its listeners to a higher ethereal experience. According to Wright, he and Russell used to sit on the floor with a score of Beethoven and work out certain color harmonies to the Beethovenian format. (5)

Stanton MacDonald-Wright’s *L'Inquiétude* color and beautiful flowing forms attracted my attention immediately. The depth of color, the movement of angles and swirling forms inspired me and led me to think about how I could transform color in my own work. *L'Inquiétude* evokes an alternate reality where color and form perfectly blend into a multidimensional abstract landscape.

After researching Wright's modernist American movement, Synchronism, I believe Stanton MacDonald-Wright accomplished his lifetime artistic goal by harmoniously transcending and abstracting form into color.

REFERENCES

- (1) South, Will. *Color Myth, and Music: Stanton McDonald Wright and Synchronism*. Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 2001. (Pages 15-21).
- (2) Agee, William, C., *Synchronism and Color Principles in American painting 1910-1930*. M. Knoedler Gallery, New York, NY. (Pages 19,20) (Plates VII, IX)
- (3) Same as (2)
- (4) Karlstrom, Paul J. *Turning the Tide: Early Los Angeles Modernists 1920-1956*. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1990. (pages 89-92).
- (5) Walker, John Alan. *An Interview with Stanton MacDonal-Wright, 1956*. *Southwest Art Gallery Magazine*, May 1973. Dr. Alan Leslie Collection. (pages 49-53.)
- (6) Wright, Federick. *Stanton MacDonal-Wright Interviewed*. A Retrospective Exhibition 1911-1970. The UCLA Art Galleries/The Grunwald Graphic Arts Foundation/Nov.16 through Dec. 20, 1970.
- (7) Karlstrom, Paul J. (Editor) *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London in association with the archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution and the fine arts museums of San Francisco. (pages 8,10,167,274-286).
- (8) Levin, Gail. *Synchronism and American Color Abstraction 1910-1925*. George Braziller. New York, in Association with The Whitney Museum of American Art. 1978. (Pages 31-36). (color Plates 1,6-11,14,19-22).