

## Pierre Soulages, “Eauforte”

Pierre Soulages represents the rare artist who is noted for their longevity, not only in their career but also in their creativity. After earning his first notable gallery show in 1947, Soulages continued to introduce new work throughout his life, culminating in a 2014 solo exhibition of his long developed “beyond black” paintings in New York. One of France’s greatest artists, Michaan’s Auctions is proud to offer an excellent edition of an early etching by the artist in the Winter Fine Sale, **Pierre Soulages, “Eauforte,” 1957, relief etching** (\$10/15,000).

The abstract print features an amalgamation of black and deep ochre marks at the center of the page on a pristine white background. The marks



evoke elements of a structural mass, with strong vertical lines in black interspersed with perpendicular horizontal lines in from the middle of the frame to the top. On closer examination, the black marks are not solidly constructed as when seen from a distance, but rather are composed of numerous fine lines of deep black

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against a lighter gradient wash. These black marks are foregrounded by a number of areas filled in with ochre, which forms an irregular backdrop to the clearly executed black, reminiscent of rust forming at the edge of a painted metal beam, or conversely, raw brick emerging from a burnt or soot-covered wall.

Soulages is an artist interested in using his artistic practice as a means of creating signs, evident here in “Eauforte” which exudes an aura which emanates from its references to ancient objects of devotion, especially monoliths and similar structures such as Stonehenge. The forms of the print are deliberately constructed, in contrast to artists working in the styles of Abstract Expressionism or *Tachisme*, and is therefore well balanced, highlighting the artist's interests in monumental form. Particular interest is paid in “Eauforte”

and other early works to the way black affects the relative luminosity or saturation of boarding colors. In this work, this is particularly evident in the whiteness of the raw paper, which is enhanced in intensity due to its proximity to black, but also in the ochre, which appears to glow behind the thick, black marks.

This piece represents an important milestone in Soulages's early work, and as such a notable piece, is held in the permanent collection of museums around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The work highlights the artist's early interest in mark making, evident in the varied impressions that construct the larger forms, and materiality which is visible in the visible scratches of the etching process. Also present is an interest in black as both color and non-

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color, a theme which he would explore further beginning in the 1980s.

Pierre Soulages was born in the small town of Rodez in southern France on Christmas Eve, 1919. He developed an early interest in art through a school visit to the local abbey at Saint-Foy, the discovery of ancient cave paintings at Lascaux, and the numerous Bronze Age monolith stones that are found throughout Southern France. This interest in early art let him uncover a number of Celtic carvings and pottery fragments in an archeological dig, some of which remain in museums to this day. Soulages briefly attended L'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris but found it too formal and quickly dropped out before being conscripted into the French army at the start of the second world war.

After the war, he returned to Paris and continued painting, quickly

achieving national success, which reached international acclaim by the 1950s. Soulages is often compared to American Abstract Expressionist and French *Tachisme* artists, but he continued to reject this connection throughout his life, although he visited the studios of many of these artists, becoming friends with several of them. His reputation only grew through the end of the 20th century and his turn towards *outrénoir* or “beyond black” paintings in the latter years of his life, leading to him being described as “the world's greatest living artist” by French President François Hollande in 2014. Soulages continued to paint throughout his life, until his recent death at the age of 102 in 2022, earning awards from national academies in Japan, Austria, the United States of America, and France.

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**Pierre Soulages, “Eauforte,”**  
**1957, relief etching** (\$10/15,000) will  
be offered at Michaan’s Auctions Winter  
Fine Sale on Thursday, December 14th,  
which features notable names leading  
the fine art, decorative, and jewelry  
departments. BANKSY’s 2004 screen  
print “Barcode” headlines a sale  
featuring Tiffany Studios Bronze Lamp  
and Wisteria Table Screen, wristwatches

by Rolex and Hublot, and a Chalcedony,  
Yellow Gold Brooch attributed to  
Suzanne Belperron.

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