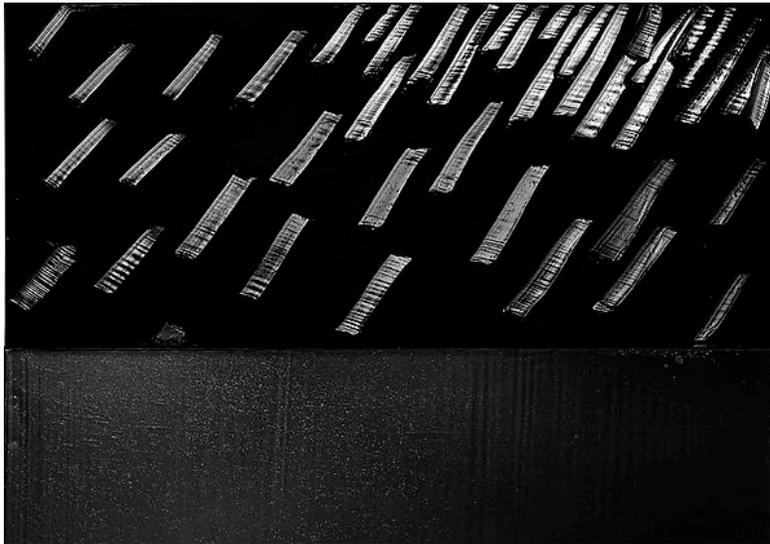


DAPHNE NASH

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Dominique Lévy + Galerie Perrotin | Pierre Soulages

POSTED ON **MAY 14, 2014** BY **DAPHNENASH**



Pierre Soulages, Peinture 128 x 181 cm, 14 Février 2012. Photo: © Vincent Cunillère

What is there to see in a canvas of black paint? More than you might initially think if the current [Pierre Soulages exhibition](#) on view at the [Dominique Lévy](#) and [Galerie Perrotin](#) galleries is any indication. The show, presented jointly in the building the two galleries share, places fourteen new works by the French artist in the context of his older works that are on loan to the show from major U.S. museums and private collections.



Soulages is best known in the United States for these museum pieces, works created and sold in New York during the city's heyday as the art world epicenter after World War II. Soulages, scouted in Paris by MoMA (then Guggenheim) curator James Johnson Sweeney, soon gained gallery representation in New York with the Kootz Gallery. This move put him into orbit with Abstract Expressionist artists such as Mark Rothko, William de Kooning and Helen Frankenthaler. He thrived in this environment, inspired by a locale and artist community that was able to look to the future without carrying the heavy weight of the past. After the travails of wartime Europe, the vigor of New York City must have been a welcome change. Despite his success, Soulages chose to return to France when the Kootz Gallery closed in 1966 and his reputation in America faded.



Pierre Soulages, First Floor Installation View at Dominique Lévy NYC, Soulages Archives, 2014.

Photo: © Vincent Cunillère

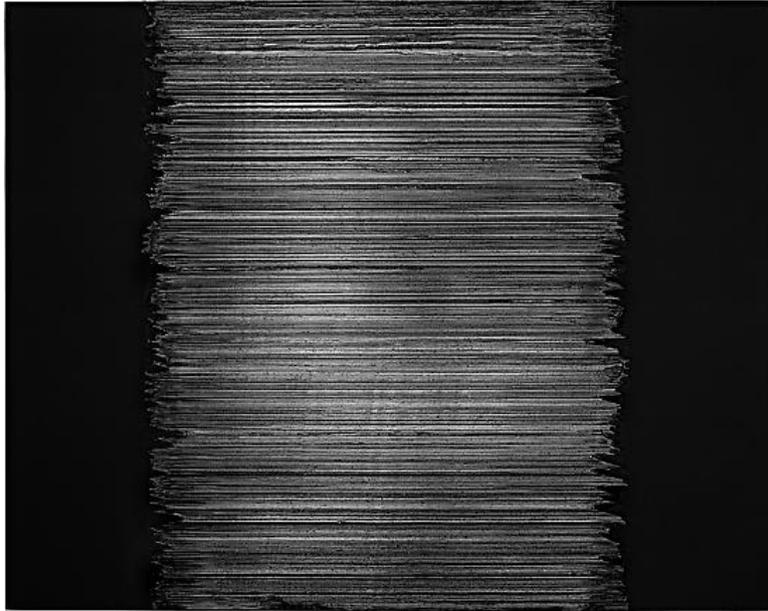
This exhibition reintroduces the now 94-year-old Soulages to the American market. He hasn't been idle. In fact, he was too busy preparing for the impending opening of the new **Musée Soulages** in Rodez, France to attend the exhibition preview and opening in person, but he made the time to join by Skype. The show in New York includes fourteen new "Outrenoir" paintings, which mark a clear evolution from his early works. These are part of a 35 year exploration into monochrome paintings, all of them black, or as he would put it *Outrenoir*, beyond black.



Pierre Soulages, Peinture 102 65 cm, 17 Juillet 2013. Soulages Archives, 2014. Photo: ©

Vincent Cunillère

So again, what is there to see in a canvas painted in black? Well, you quickly stop seeing the color black. Instead, you look for what else is present: the texture, the reflected light, and the volume of the work. You see beyond black. Monochromes usually reward closer exploration, and that is the case here.



Pierre Soulages, Peinture 175 x 222 cm, 23 Mai 2013. Soulages Archives, 2014. Photo: © Vincent Cunillère

The linear patterns in these large paintings are achieved through alternating surface finishes –matte and gloss – and textural painting effects that create a three-dimensional effect. That adds up to a painting that is constantly capturing and reflecting light. As the light shifts, the surface of the painting changes in response. The participatory quality of a monochrome is often surprising and it is always interesting. (A work with similar effect is Yang Jiechang's *100 Layers of No. 2*)

During the preview references were made to the landscape influence in Soulages's work. On learning of his childhood in the Aveyron region of France, this connection becomes clearer, but such specialized knowledge is not necessary to appreciate these paintings. They stand on their own merit and are well worth visiting in person to both investigate and enjoy.

Pierre Soulages is on view through June 27, 2014.