

Untitled

oil on canvas

1956

60 x 50 cm

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Asger Jorn

The Danish artist Asger Jorn started out as a painter of portraits and landscapes, becoming influenced by Cubism and abstract art in 1934. The following year he moved to Paris, where he studied with Fernand Léger and worked with Le Corbusier. His encounter with the spontaneous work of Egill Jacobsen in 1937 was to prove a watershed, marking the start of his struggle to arrive at a totally free manner of self-expression.

The encounter prompted Jorn to switch to abstract and surrealist painting, experimenting with the automatic way of working of Arp, Miro, Ernst and Chinese calligraphy. After the war Jorn, who had founded the Helhesten (Hell Horse) magazine in 1941, wanted to join the Belgian and French surrealists. In 1942 he became a member of Høst (Harvest). In 1946 he got to know Constant and Atlan in Paris.

Jorn was a co-founder of CoBrA and one of its prime movers. Within CoBrA Jorn brought together the starting-points of surrealist "automatism" with the world of Norse myths and sagas. It was not until the early Fifties that he found the style that was to bring him international acclaim. The forceful lines of his previous work gave way to dramatic swathes of colour from which vague beings, spirits and hazy visions emerge. Jorn experimented with all kinds of techniques.

Like Constant, Jorn developed revolutionary ideas about the role of the artist in western society. In 1956 he teamed up with Enrico Baj to found the Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste as a reaction to Max Bill, who wanted to realise a second Bauhaus in Ulm. The MIBI-congress of 1956, at which Constant was also present, was a precursor to the Situationist International (1957 –1969), the revolutionary alliance of European avant-garde artists of which Jorn was one of the founders. The situationists wanted to break down the barriers between artists and consumers in order to change society and make art of society itself.

Jorn died in Aarhus in 1973. The Museum of Modern Art in Silkeborg houses a large number of his works and those of his artist friends donated by him.

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