

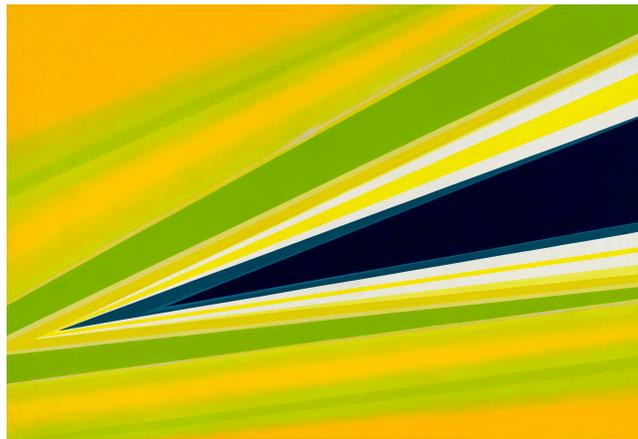
G A L E R I E  
S I M O N  
B L A I S

**NEWS RELEASE** — For immediate publication

Montréal, January 28, 2022 — Galerie Simon Blais is proud to pay tribute to the painter Rita Letendre, who died in November 2021, with a major exhibition of her work to be held between February 19 and March 26, 2022. Ms. Letendre was a true friend of the gallery, which has represented her since 1996. This overview of the artist's career will provide a look at 50 years of rich and diverse art making.

The body of work to be presented first includes large canvases that will be on view in galleries 1 and 2. Here will be featured her gestural paintings from the 1960s, her Montréal period, and those of her beginnings as a Plasticien artist in 1966, an impulse that continued throughout the 1970s. Also to be seen are the famous “arrows” that made her North American reputation, diagonal swaths of the spectral colours so typical of Rita Letendre's work precisely delineated in a hard-edge manner or blending into one another through spray painting.

Her return to using oils applied with a brush in the late 1980s, which continued up until her very last works in 2010–2012, will be illustrated through a group of canvases selected for their compositional qualities—a reminder of the attraction that going back to gestural painting held for the public as well as the museum world during the artist's final period of production.



*Soren*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 122 x 177.75 cm

*“For me, life is not a small thing. I want it to be big and strong.”*

It should be noted that the exhibition will provide an opportunity to see models on wood that have never been on public display. The artist painted a series of small models in her New York apartment in preparation for the works that would be shown in her first exhibition on American soil a year later, in 1973, at California's Palm Springs Desert Museum. Veritable jewels for their meticulous execution and visual effect on viewers, this group of works reconfirms Rita Letendre's ranking as a major Canadian Post-Plasticien artist. The models will be on view in Gallery 3.

Wrapping up the exhibition will be a series of works on paper the artist executed in the 1960s. At that time Rita Letendre had a preference for working in casein, a type of gouache, mainly limiting herself to the use of black, which she would occasionally combine with a few bright colours. Such a minimalist approach enabled her to display a rich graphic vocabulary in a deftly spontaneous manner.

A previously unseen video shot in the 1970s showing the artist at work will also be screened.



### **Brief Biography**

Rita Letendre is a major figure in modern Québec and Canadian art. This exceptional woman, born in Drummondville in 1928, had a remarkable career that took her from Montréal to Paris, as well as to Tel Aviv, New York, Los Angeles and Toronto. As a young girl she studied at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal in the late 1940s, and it was under the tutelage of Paul-Émile Borduas and the group of Automatiste artists that she began to blossom as an artist in the early 1950s.

A determined person who defied the problematic conditions facing her at the time, she had no hesitation in building a place for herself within the avant-garde movements of Québec. Never accepting limits to her ambitions or artistic dreams, Rita Letendre always vehemently asserted her individuality as a woman and a painter.

Whether through the group exhibitions in which she took part or the solo shows she was given as a recognized artist from the mid-1950s on, her work won the hearts of collectors and attracted the attention of museums. The latter would assemble important collections of the works she painted in the 1960s and, most notably, the huge canvases with shafts of colour that would become her artistic trademark and mark her career from the early 1970s on. The murals she created during that time for public spaces in many North American cities—from Toronto to Long Beach—shone out like powerful beams of light, their vibrant energy expressing the prevailing optimism proper to the progressive spirit of a generation responsible for major social advances.

In the late 1980s, in a kind of return to the art that had previously made her name, once again taking up easel painting in oil applied with a brush would see her create a highly

singular group of canvases and drawings in pastel, that time with the maturity of an artist with an international career.

Rita Letendre died in November 2021 in Toronto, the city she had made her home close to five decades ago, a few years after a brief return to Québec. Driven by a boundless creative passion, despite failing eyesight she had continued to paint until the 2010s. As she said, “Nothing was more wonderful than painting all day, trying to understand the beauty of life.”<sup>2</sup>

Among the honours she received were the Ordre national du Québec, Order of Canada and Paul-Émile-Borduas Prize. She was also a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.

### **About Galerie Simon Blais**

Since 1989, Galerie Simon Blais has showcased the talents of emerging and established artists working in such varied media as painting, drawing, sculpture, prints and photography. The painting and sculpture that have marked the history of Canadian art since 1945 are other areas of its special interest. A dynamic exhibition space, the gallery is known both within Canada and abroad through its participation in various contemporary art fairs.

[www.galeriesimonblais.com](http://www.galeriesimonblais.com)

### References

1. Murray White, “Rita Letendre: Against the Dying of the Light,” *Toronto Star*, July 8, 2017. <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visualarts/2017/07/08/rita-letendre-against-the-dying-of-the-light.html>
2. Ibid.