



## **Julius Tobias** Capturing Space

Paintings from the 50s and 60s    May 10 – June 2, 2018



*Cold Light (La Lumiere Froide)*, 1959. Oil on canvas, 50 x 60 inches. Signed and dated lower right: "Tobias 59." Signed, titled, dated, and inscribed verso: "J Tobias / 'COLD LIGHT' / 1959 / 50 1/4 x 60"



*Untitled*, circa 1960. Oil on canvas, 96 x 84 inches. Signed verso: "Tobias [Indistinct]"



Reflections, 1960. Oil on canvas, 59½ x 71¾ inches. Signed, titled, inscribed, and dated verso: "J. Tobias / 'REFLECTIONS' / SIZE 60 x 72 / YEAR 1960"



*Pécaire!*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 61 x 49<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches. Signed and dated lower right: "Tobias 60." Signed, titled, inscribed, and dated verso: "J Tobias / 'PÉCAÏRE!' / SIZE 61 x 49<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> / YEAR 1960"

# Julius Tobias

(1915–1999)



## EDUCATION

Atelier Fernand Léger, Paris 1949–52

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1959, 60 Esther Stuttmann Gallery, New York, NY
- 1961 Bleecker Gallery, New York, NY
- 1962 East Hampton Gallery, New York, NY
- 1968 "10 Downtown," New York, NY
- 1969 Lamont Gallery, Exeter Academy, NH
- 1969, 70, 71, 72 Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York, NY
- 1976, 77, 78 55 Mercer Street, New York, NY
- 1979 Zriny-Hayes Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1980 55 Mercer Street, New York, NY
- 1980 Myers Fine Arts Gallery, SUNY, Plattsburgh, NY
- 1992–93 University Art Gallery, Staller Center for the Arts, SUNY, Stony Brook, NY (Traveling)
- 1994, 96 Galerie Art In, Nürnberg, Germany
- 1999 Verein Galerie Sebastianskapelle, Ulm, Germany
- 1999 Prado Sheehan Gallery, New York, NY

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1946 Provincetown Art Association, MA
- 1957 Camino Gallery, New York, NY
- 1957, 58, 59 Brata Gallery, New York, NY
- 1959 National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
- 1959 Knoedler Galleries, New York, NY
- 1962 Staten Island Museum, NY
- 1962 Allan Stone Gallery, New York, NY
- 1967 Park Place Gallery, New York, NY
- 1968–69 Whitney Museum, New York, NY
- 1968 Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, NY
- 1970 Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN
- 1971 Bard College, Annandale, NY
- 1974 Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, NY
- 1977 Bronx County Museum, New York, NY
- 1981 Art Park, Lewiston, NY
- 1985 Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, NY
- 1992 Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY
- 1995 Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, NY
- 1996 Städtische Museen Heilbronn, Germany

## SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY  
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, NY  
Norton Simon Museum (Formerly the Pasadena Art Museum), CA  
The Plattsburgh State Art Museum, NY  
Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC

**There is no such thing as abstraction as differentiated from reality—all abstraction is based on reality and is reality. You can see abstraction wherever you go—clouds, sidewalks, sides of wall. It is not necessary to see things as objects only.**

—Julius Tobias, "Several thoughts to consider in reference to art."

Julius Tobias explored the fluid border between abstraction and reality in both painting and sculpture, pushing the boundaries of the two media in size and form. Though he spent a significant portion of his career creating groundbreaking Minimalist sculptural environments, he always considered himself a painter first and foremost. His canvases integrate expressionist brushwork with broad areas of color or, in his most subtle works, vast fields of white. These works insist on the materiality of paint, creating an emphasis on surface that speaks to Tobias' interest in probing the "reality" of abstraction.

Always in tune with the art movements of his time but never stylistically dogmatic, Tobias consistently remained somewhat of an enigma within the art world. His paintings from the 1950s and 1960s have a poetic, minimalist tone similar to that of his contemporary Mark Rothko, although Tobias' paintings have a strong sense of action as well as a feeling of spare landscape. Tobias, a humanist at heart, saw the realities of urban existence and of the world at large as abstract pictorial elements to be manipulated at will and integrated into his work. Gradually, over the course of the decade, he moved from pure expressionist abstractions to incorporate the more hard-edge aspects of Neo-plasticism.

Tobias' series of wall-sized white paintings, executed around 1960, laid the formal foundations for his sculptural work of the mid-1960s, in which concrete, steel, or wood created contained and often stubborn environments that blocked or corralled the viewer. Like his contemporary Richard Serra, Tobias filled and sometimes even barricaded galleries with vast sculptural materials, and eventually moved into outdoor spaces in order to work on a more monumental scale. His focus on space extends beyond his sculptural practice: "Space is primary—objects are secondary—objects can be destroyed—space cannot be destroyed. It is for this reason that space is primary—think about it! Paint space!"<sup>1</sup> This emphasis on the immaterial notion of space rather than the material nature of his work can be traced to the destruction he witnessed—and, as a bomber pilot, caused—during WWII.

Born in 1915 in Harlem, Tobias began his studies as a young man in evening classes at the American Art School. As with many of his peers, his career was interrupted by international conflict. He was stationed in England with the Army Air Corps throughout WWII, flying B16 bombers in raids over Germany until he was shot down over Switzerland. Tobias spent some time in Switzerland before he could arrange to rejoin his unit in England, and during that period he met and befriended the widow of German expressionist painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. She introduced him to her vast collection of early 20th-century expressionist paintings, works that he found greatly impressive.

After the war Tobias married and moved with his wife to Paris, taking advantage of the GI Bill to enroll at the Atelier Fernand Léger. His studies there from 1949 to 1952 instilled in him a deep sense of both art history and of Léger's particular politically charged humanism. Tobias recalled that the most important lesson he learned from Léger was contained in the older artist's mantra "*ça doit être monumentale!* (It should be monumental)." Tobias continued: "not just in size—a work should be overwhelming in its greatness, in its bigness. It should be big in quality. It has got to stay with you. The feeling of the work has got to make a lasting impression."<sup>2</sup> This feeling would drive much of his work throughout his career, from his early paintings to his later sculptural environments.

A traveling retrospective of Tobias' work was organized by the State University of New York, Stony Brook in 1992. Examples of his work can be found in the collections of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, Ithaca. Over the course of his career he was the recipient of two Guggenheim Fellowships, two Pollock-Krasner awards, and multiple National Endowment for the Arts grants. He passed away in Manhattan in 1999.

1. Julius Tobias, "Several thoughts to consider in reference to art."

2. Julius Tobias, quoted in Elizabeth Newman, "Julius Tobias: View Gallery." *Review Magazine*. January 15, 1997, p. 2.

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