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| Heron, Patrick (1920 – 1999) |
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| Patrick Heron is recognised by many as a key figure in the history of post war British art, both as a practising artist and as a prolific writer and critic. Influenced in his own work by artists such as Matisse, Bonnard and Braque, he acted as key conduit between British art and the continent; particularly French painting, typified by the École de Paris. Like his fellow British painters Roger Hilton and William Gear, he was predisposed toward the bold use of colour and a free play with oscillating perspectival cues in the more figurative of his works. An example of Heron's earlier linear lyrical abstract work, *Christmas Eve*, was included in the 1951 Festival of Britain exhibition, *60 Paintings for '51.* Heron also organised several key exhibitions during the 1950s, which marked key touchstones in the development of abstract British art, including *Space in Colour* at the Hanover Gallery, London, in 1953 and *Metavisual, Taschiste, Abstract* at the Redfern Gallery, London, in April 1956. Influenced by the Russian-French artist Nicholas de Staël, and perhaps somewhat by American Abstract Expressionism, after 1955 his works were primarily non representational, but preserved subtle and equivocal references to the landscape surrounding his home.  Patrick Heron was born in Headingley, Leeds in Yorkshire in 1920, the first of four children born to Eulalie 'Jack' Heron (née Davies) and Thomas Milner Heron. His father was the founder of the Cresta Silks Company, established in Welwyn Garden City, where Heron met his future wife Delia (nee Reiss). Prior to this, the family had lived for several years in Cornwall in the 1920s. As a conscientious objector during the war, Heron worked as a farm labourer between 1940 – 43 before returning to Cornwall to work at Bernard Leach's pottery studio between 1944 – 1945. During this time he first befriended members of the local artistic community including Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth.  Heron later identified Matisse's *Red Studio* as 'the most influential single painting in my entire career' (Heron, 1978). Whilst his enduring penchant for marriages of vibrant colour owed much to Matisse, the interwoven, linear denotation of his early forms was greatly indebted to Braque, whose works Heron viewed first at the Tate Gallery in 1946 and at the artist's studio whilst exhibiting at the 1949 Salon de Mai in Paris. Heron enjoyed numerous trips to Italy and France, both in the capacity of critic for the *New English Weekly* and, later, the *New Statesman and Nation* (between 1947 -50) and as an exhibiting artist, with each visit gathering information and furthering his interest in the work of French contemporary painters.  In the summer of 1952, influenced by Nicholas de Staël, Heron dispensed with the networks of linear markings and began to experiment in paint with simpler blocks of colour. He moved to Cornwall permanently in 1955 and, as welcoming hosts at their house - the Eagle's Nest at Zennor - he and Delia introduced other artists (including Roger Hilton and Sandra Blow) to the Cornish artistic community. Heron rented Ben Nicholson's old studio at Porthmeor beach, St Ives, and, in the period following his permanent move to Cornwall, his works became increasingly abstract. Two series of his works from this period - the Stripe paintings and Garden paintings, such as *Azalea Garden, May 1956* - demonstrate Heron's deft deployment of luminous tasches and bands of colour. In the remainder of the work he would produce, Heron had arrived at the realisation that, for him, colour was the 'utterly indispensable means' of realising pictorial space. Though, even in these seemingly non-representational works, there remained the trace of his visual perception, particularly of Cornwall: its landscape, its light and his home.  Heron was awarded the Grand Prize at the second annual John Moores Exhibition in 1959, was made CBE in 1977 and sat as a trustee of the Tate Gallery between 1980 – 87. Three retrospective exhibitions of his work were staged during his lifetime: at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1972, Barbican Art Gallery in 1985 and the Tate Gallery in 1998.  1. Christmas Eve, 1951  2. *Azalea Garden, May 1956*, Tate Gallery London |
| Further reading:  (Gooding and Heron)  (Heam)  (Heron, Painter As Critic: Patrick Heron, Selected Writings)  (Heron, Sylvester and Byatt, Patrick Heron)  (Knight and Hoole)  (McNay and Heron) |