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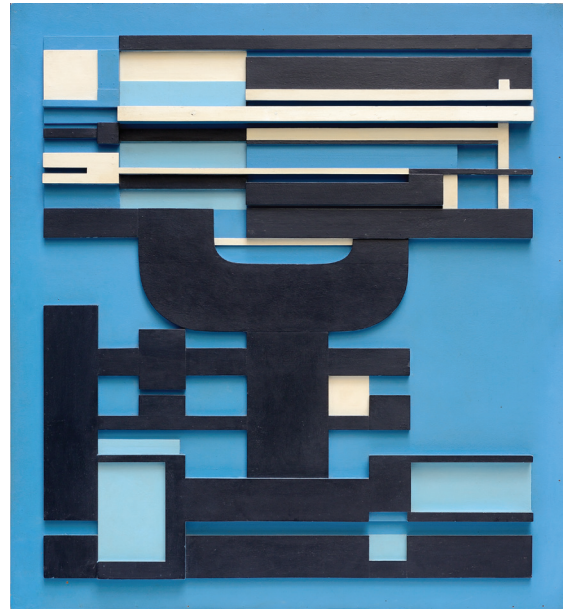
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PRESS RELEASE

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WIFREDO ARCAÏ CUBAN STRUCTURES

13TH OCT - 20TH NOV 2015



ETNAIRAV, 1959, Paint on wooden relief, 90 x 82 x 8 cm

Acclaimed by Jean Arp as “the perfection of Cuba’s Cubists,” Wifredo Arcaï (b.1925 Havana, Cuba - d.1997 Paris, France) emerged among the postwar generation of the Ecole de Paris as a painter, muralist and, perhaps most familiarly, as a printmaker. Born in Cuba and trained at Havana’s Academia de San Alejandro, Arcaï arrived in Paris on a grant in 1949. He assimilated quickly within the milieu of post-Cubist abstraction, studying at the Grande Chaumière and with Edgard Pillet and Jean Dewasne at their Atelier d’Art Abstrait. In 1951, at the invitation of André Bloc, the influential editor of the journal *Art d’Aujourd’hui*, Arcaï set up a studio at Bloc’s villa in Meudon, mingling there amongst such luminaries of the historical avant-garde as Arp, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, and Fernand Léger. Their work appeared in his album *Maîtres d’Aujourd’hui* (1953), an edition of twelve silkscreen prints that paid tribute to the prewar aesthetics of abstraction; a second volume, *Jeunes Peintres d’Aujourd’hui* (1954), positioned a younger generation (among them, Dewasne, Pillet, Serge Poliakoff, and Victor Vasarely) in their wake. While celebrated as a printmaker, Arcaï continued to paint through the 1950s and 1960s, sending work to the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles (1951-54) and regularly to Cuba. He exhibited as part of the Cuban delegation to the São Paulo Biennale (1955) and frequently at Havana’s Galería Color-Luz, a pioneering outpost of geometric abstraction directed by Loló Soldevilla and Pedro de Oraá. A member of both the Constructivist Groupe Espace, founded by Bloc and Félix Del Marle in 1951, and the short-lived Cuban group Los Diez Pintores Concretos (1959-61), Arcaï personified the rich diversity and internationalism of postwar abstraction.

The Mayor Gallery’s show marks the first ever exhibition of Arcaï’s paintings and structures in London and the first solo showing of his work since 1986. Accompanied by archival materials from the still active Atelier Arcaï, the exhibition includes twelve works that document his progression from easel painting, which he abandoned in 1956, to the wood reliefs that facilitated the expansion of his practice into architectural space. Amidst calls for a renewed public art able to embody “the soul of the multitude...to be the visual signification of human community,” as Vasarely wrote, Arcaï ultimately brought his participatory model of screen-printing to bear on mural paintings, integrated into a number of buildings designed by the architect Jean Ginsberg. Associated with the kinetic and optical artists shown at the Galerie Denise René, for whom he often printed, Arcaï struck a distinctive path of his own within abstraction, allowing the process of silkscreening--collaborative, reproductive, multiple--to inform the creative evolution of his painting. In presenting this work anew, The Mayor Gallery’s exhibition illuminates the artist’s multifaceted legacy within the postwar history of geometric abstraction, suggesting new synchronicities between painting and printmaking and, no less, between Paris and Havana.