

Basic Detail Report



Title: Child's Supper

Date: 1945

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@27e9c

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: Milton Avery was an individualist. In 1945, the year that Avery painted "Child's Supper", the Abstract Expressionists dominated the New York art scene. Instead of conforming to their doctrine of the complete absence of figuration, Avery remained faithful to his own artistic vision as he had during the 1920s and 1930s, when the realist painters considered him too abstract. There were disadvantages to defying the popular art movement of the day: Avery was never financially successful as an artist and lived just above the poverty level for most of his life. Today, however, his work is recognized as a major achievement in American art. Avery took his subject matter from the familiar everyday world around him--landscapes, domestic interiors, and figures. In "Child's Supper", three figures are seated at a table, but they are completely disproportionate. The monumental figures on either side dwarf the small childish figure at the far end, yet the child's face comes to the fore with its shocking melon color and curly blond hair, all the bolder for the closely

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valued hues around it. There is no perspective except the lines of the table receding into the background. It is the simple colored shapes and their interaction that create the pictorial construction. In the mid-1940s Avery began to leave the faces of many of his sitters blank. (1) He did not want facial features to become the focal point of a work, distracting the viewer from the importance of the interacting colors on the canvas. His masks may derive from Matisse's art, for this was an artistic device frequently employed by the French artist. Avery has often been called the American Matisse, for his broad shapes of color and his use of simple outlines around his figures. Avery's undetailed forms and flattened color masses inspired subsequent generations of American colorists, among them mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, who gathered at the Avery home almost daily in the 1930s and 1940s to sketch and socialize. Sally Michel Avery recalled: "In our home on Columbus Avenue and later on West Eleventh Street someone was always dropping in--a continual array of artists, relatives, models and friends of friends. Everyone was welcome." (2) Avery drew every day. He re-created the world around him on canvas, and simple scenes of domestic activity gained universal significance through the broad use of color and the abstraction of forms. "I like to seize the one sharp instant in Nature," Avery once said, "to imprison it by means of ordered shapes and space relationships. To this end I eliminate and simplify, leaving apparently nothing but color and pattern. I am not seeking pure abstraction; rather, the purity and essence of the idea--expressed in its simplest form." (3) Hilton Kramer, "Milton Avery: Paintings, 1930-1960"(New York: Thomas Yoseloff,1962); Barbara Haskell, "Milton Avery", exhib.cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1982); Hilton Kramer, "Milton Avery: Homage to an American Master," "New York Times Magazine" (August 29, 1982): 28-44; Milton Avery, "Milton Avery: Works from the 1950s in the Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth" (Fort Worth: Modern Art Museum, 1990); Robert Hobbs, "Milton Avery" (New York:Hudson Hills Press, 1990). Notes: (1) Hobbs, "Milton Avery", p. 129 (2) Sally Michel Avery, "Milton Avery Portraits, 1928-1963: Family and Friends," exhib.cat.(New York: Grace Borgenicht Gallery, 1986) n.p. (3) Avery, quoted in "Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting", exhib. cat. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1951), p. 158.
Dimensions: 36 x 48 in. (43 3/4 x 55 3/4 x 2 in. framed)