



# Coloured lines

Jean Fautrier

---

**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Coloured lines

**Artist/Maker:** Jean Fautrier

**Born:** 1958

**Object Type:** Painting

**Materials:** Canvas, Mixed Media, Oil paint

**Technique:** haute pâte

**Measurements:** h 456 x w 554mm (frame: h 566 x w 663 x d 46mm)

**Accession Number:** SAC 10

**Production Place:** Europe, France

**School/Style:** Tachisme, Art Informel

**Credit Line:** Bequeathed by Lady Sainsbury, 2014

---

Painted in the final decade of Jean Fautrier's (1898-1964) life, *Coloured Lines* (1959) is an excellent example of the artist's *haute pâte* (high paste) technique, characterised by an almost alchemistic use of colour and material. The work is composed of a highly centralised, square mass of tar-like paint, realised through a series of vigorous, unidirectional strokes, that is set against an empty background of thick paper glued onto a canvas support. While the entire composition is coated in an atmospheric dusting of deep purple pigment, it is evident from the still visible whiteness of the thick paste below that Fautrier has applied the colour separately from this textured matter. The central form is further adorned with four sets of carefully painted double lines, in a range of candy-like colours.

The origins of Fautrier's distinctive technique can be seen in his famous *Otages* (Hostages) series (1942-46) which, through their depiction of faces both mutilated and abstracted, respond to atrocities committed by the Nazis in France during World War II. In a manner typical of Fautrier's late work however, *Coloured Lines* has a markedly non-objective quality, with the title offering little information as to its subject matter. As explained in the catalogue for the artist's 1959 exhibition at the Hanover Gallery, where the work was first shown: '[Fautrier] now paints qualities or substances rather than objects, achieving a new kind of sensual abstraction which is far more appropriate, in the art of painting, than the puritanical denial of sensual delights that one can detect in the merely geometrical abstractions of Mondrian' [1]. This aligns with the artist's desire to express reality through the materiality of paint, striving to achieve what he termed a 'liberated figuration' [2].

Fautrier has signed *Coloured Lines* in each of its four corners, refusing to submit the work to a singular orientation. Yve-Alain Bois contends that this motif, which began to appear in select works from 1957 onwards, exemplifies Fautrier's interest in the writings of the subversive French theorist, Georges Bataille, specifically in his notion of 'formlessness' which works to undermine rational modes of understanding [3]. The disruptive force of the formless is felt in *Coloured Lines* as the geometric concerns of orientation are brought into conflict with Fautrier's 'muddy texture' and shimmering, somewhat kitschy, colour palette [4]. To draw a connection between the two figures is well founded as Fautrier had previously illustrated Bataille's erotic novel, *Madame Edwarda* (1942).

*Coloured Lines* was purchased by Lord and Lady Sainsbury from the aforementioned exhibition of Fautrier's work at the Hanover Gallery, London. In 1989, the couple loaned the work to the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris for their retrospective exhibition, *Fautrier 1898-1964*, before Lady Sainsbury bequeathed the painting to the Sainsbury Centre in 2014. The work was produced at a time of heightened international recognition for Fautrier, who was awarded the International Grand Prize at the 30th Venice Biennale in 1960, just two years after its creation.

Freddie Warshaw, August 2021

[1] Edouard Roditi, 'Foreword,' in *Jean Fautrier: Paintings, Gouaches, Drawings* ed. Hanover Gallery (London: Graphis Press Ltd, 1959), pp.5-8 (p.8).

[2] Jean Fautrier, 'Fautrier Had Granted An Interview to Planète,' in *Jean Fautrier: 1898-1964* ed. Curtis L. Carter and Karen K. Butler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p.220.

[3] Georges Bataille, 'Formless,' in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939* ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p.31.

[4] Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Falling Trapeze,' in *Jean Fautrier: 1898-1964* ed. Curtis L. Carter and Karen K. Butler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 57-61 (p.60).

---

---

## Further Reading

Palma Bucarelli, *Jean Fautrier: pittura e materia* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1960)

Curtis L. Carter and Karen K. Butler, *Jean Fautrier: 1898-1964* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002)

Timothy Mathews, *Literature, Art and the Pursuit of Decay in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Suzanne Pagé, ed., *Fautrier 1898-1964* (Paris: Paris-Musées, 1989)

Sarah Wilson, 'Fêting the Wound' Georges Bataille and Jean Fautrier in the 1940s', in *Georges Bataille: Writing the Sacred* ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1995), 172-192

Sarah Wilson, 'Jean Fautrier. Orthodoxy and the Outsider', *Art International*, 4 (1988), 33-40

---

---