



27 Jack Hamilton Bush

ARCA CGP CSGA CSPWC OSA P11 1909 – 1977

Cello Solo #1

acrylic polymer on canvas, on verso signed, titled, dated November 1975, inscribed *TOP / Toronto / Carlaw / BV* and variously and numbered C-48 on the Jack Bush Estate label 39 ¾ x 32 ¾ in, 101 x 83.2 cm

PROVENANCE

Estate of the Artist
André Emmerich Gallery, New York, 1981
Elinor Woron Associates, Boston, 1981
Phyllis and Jerome Lyle Rappaport, June 1981
Contemporary Day Auction, Sotheby’s New York, November 16, 2023, lot 340
Private Collection, Toronto

LITERATURE

Jack Bush, Paintings 1973 to 1976, André Emmerich Gallery, 1981, reproduced, unpaginated
Sarah Stanners, *Jack Bush Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 4, 1972–1977, 2024*, listed page 384 and reproduced page 385, catalogue #3.32.1975.34

EXHIBITED

André Emmerich Gallery, New York, *Jack Bush, Paintings 1973 to 1976*, February 5–28, 1981, catalogue #5

CELLO SOLO #1 is a relatively late painting by Jack Bush, painted less than 15 months before the artist suddenly passed away on January 24, 1977. It was among the paintings found in the artist’s studio at the time of his death and did not come to public attention until it was shown in a solo exhibition mounted at the André Emmerich Gallery in New York in 1981. The exhibition, titled *Jack Bush, Paintings 1973 to 1976*, included other lyrical paintings such as *Pianissimo* (1974), *Flute Passage* (1975) and *La Danse* (1976) as well as Bush’s later *Handkerchief*-type painting *Dandy Day* (1976), which was installed near *Cello Solo #1* in the exhibition.

The artist’s lyrical paintings are joyful and full of movement. As their titles indicate, music was the muse for these paintings and was often what Bush pointed to when trying to explain how he understood abstract art. In a September 1976 CBC Radio interview with Art Cuthbert, Bush explained how he painted the feeling of things and likened it to music:

What happens when you abstract the feeling of the landscape, but the landscape doesn’t appear? Then you are into a music sort of thing, if you follow me, and that’s a hard step for the art-loving public to take, not to have the red look like a barn but to let it be the red for its own sake and how it exists in the environment of the canvas.¹

In *Cello Solo #1*, the feeling of strings music is described by the climbing notes (or strokes) of colour in orange, tan and yellow, royal blue, kelly green and deep red. Some of these notes are more closely paired than others, suggesting rich reverberations or rising octaves.

While it is possible that Bush was listening to an actual cello solo when he painted this canvas, his titles were more of a reflection of the composition than his personal circumstances. Beginning in 1974, he referenced a glossary of musical terms to



Cello Solo #1 (left) and *Dandy Day* installed at the André Emmerich Gallery, New York, in the 1981 exhibition *Jack Bush, Paintings 1973 to 1976*
Courtesy of Archives of American Art, André Emmerich Gallery papers, box 213, file 46

prompt his titles; his arrangement of shapes across the canvas usually reflects the meaning or feeling of the term found in the glossary.

For example, the horizontally oriented paintings titled *Salmon Concerto* (1975) and *Two Part Sonata* (1975) both depict two or more separate groups of colour strokes, suggesting distinct movements in a piece of music or sections of a symphony orchestra, while *Cello Solo #1* focuses on a single group of strokes, as if to acknowledge the singular sound of a solo piece. The feeling of a deep, intentional draw of the bow across the strings of a cello and the warmly haunting sound it pulls from the body of the wooden instrument are evoked in both the shape of the swooping notes and in the walnut-brown ground colour.

Terry Fenton, who curated the first Jack Bush retrospective, held in 1976 at the Art Gallery of Ontario, used musical terms when describing the significance of the backgrounds in these late works by the artist, noting: “The paintings seem literally drawn with colour. Colour rhythms, rhythmic drawing and swirling, dancing grounds combine to produce some of the most lyrical art since Matisse.”² Bush greatly admired Matisse and especially his colourful cut-outs, which he encountered in an exhibition during his first-ever trip to France in 1962. The impression was lasting, and *Cello Solo #1* is a testament to the influence of Matisse’s prowess with colour paired with joyous free-floating shapes in space.

We thank Dr. Sarah Stanners, director of the Jack Bush Catalogue Raisonné, contributor to the Bush retrospective originating at the National Gallery of Canada in 2014, and adjunct professor at the University of Toronto, Department of Art History, for contributing the above essay.

This work is included in Stanners’s recently published *Jack Bush Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné*, as #3.32.1975.34.

1. Interview transcribed in “Some Thoughts on His Painting by Jack Bush,” in *Jack Bush: Paintings and Drawings, 1955–1976* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980), exhibition catalogue, 20.

2. Terry Fenton, “Jack Bush,” in *Jack Bush: A Retrospective* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1976), exhibition catalogue, sec. 8, unpaginated.

ESTIMATE: \$70,000 – 90,000