

*Hana Pietri & the Alliance Française de Chicago present:*

---

# Maurice Sullins and the Eiffel Tower: A Timeless Muse

In partnership with:

Villa Albertine  
The French Consulate in Chicago  
The Chicago Architectural Biennial  
Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and  
Outsider Art

---

*27 September - 15 December, 2023*



As we celebrate the centennial anniversary of Gustave Eiffel's death and as part of the 5th Chicago Architectural Biennial, the Alliance Française de Chicago is proud to present an exhibition of paintings by Maurice Sullins that pays tribute to Eiffel's world-famous tower in an originally distinctive way. Eiffel's masterpiece of architecture and engineering not only laid the foundations for the high-rise buildings so emblematic to Chicago's landscape, but its influence on painters permeates the realms of imagination and extends far beyond its physical form.

Maurice Sullins, an Illinois self-taught master of visual storytelling, possessed a remarkable ability to envision this iconic monument in his paintings with unparalleled finesse. Although he never went to France nor did he ever see the monument in person, he seamlessly integrated the Eiffel Tower into brilliantly imagined narratives. This exhibition invites the viewer not only to consider the impact of Eiffel's extraordinary work in Chicago and beyond, but also to visualize how architecture transcends the physical form to shape artistic expression, forever leaving its mark on the canvas of art history.

Legend has it a dream about a water fountain in France first compelled Maurice Sullins (1910 - 1995) to paint at the age of sixty. The year was 1970, and Sullins was an airplane waxer at the municipal airport in Joliet, Illinois. Armed with an insatiable appetite for reading and a vivid imagination, he began to paint obsessively and produced a large body of work, including many paintings inspired by France, its culture, and icons. Entirely self-taught, he became a true master of his craft and developed a total command of color, composition, and technique.

Over the course of his short career spanning fifteen years (1970 - 1985), Sullins worked in near isolation and did not show his work. Moreover, it is important to note that he never left Illinois, but rather traveled the world through the publications he collected and the paintings and characters he created. His alter-ego, whom he referred to as "The Dapper Frenchman," can be seen gallivanting throughout his pictures in the form of a gentleman with a top hat, frequently in black silhouette or as a stick figure.

Most of the works presented in this exhibition depict enchanted scenes in France, with the Eiffel Tower as a backdrop to narratives with witty titles and elements that often reference European masters. While he never copied other artists, Sullins transformed and construed famous recognizable motifs into his own fresh and unique painterly language, believing his purpose was to continue their great work. Most notably, "Madame Etienne de Silhouette", a recurring figure throughout Sullins' oeuvre, was inspired by one of the women in Georges Seurat's *Un dimanche après-midi à la Grande Jatte*.



Capturing the essence of an environment without ever having set foot there is quite an incredible feat. An intuitive, almost subliminal connection to the universe would explain one's ability to conceive of and record the mystical sceneries that exist in other parts of the world. Maurice Sullins had such capacity and graced us with his dreamlike visions of the universe, filled with poetry and color. For Sullins, "art was total living (...) and everything in the world, everything in the Universe everywhere, everything ties together."

Maurice Sullins employed many original techniques in his paintings. He manipulated his pigment with combs or brush handles and worked with masking tape to form elements of his composition in what he referred to as "X-outs." He would often hold a paint tube close to the canvas, squeeze a drop of paint out and then pull it up, an approach he called the "eye stop." His methods of applying paint had many terms including the "Naughty Line," a horizon line representative of Mother Earth that forms the lower back and buttocks of a female figure; a wavy line squeezed directly from the tube was a "Master Stroke"; a "Grand Stroke" was a horizontal line made in one sweep and a "Grand Sweep" was a horizontal line that went off the canvas and "into eternity."

Sullins stopped painting in 1986, at which time he was introduced to Mary T. Schmich, a columnist at the *Chicago Tribune* who wrote an enthusiastic article about his paintings and persona titled *Is this Grandpa Moses?*. This attracted collectors from around the country and resulted in a retrospective at the Illinois State Museum in 1988. The exhibition received critical acclaim and the following year, the SEITA Museum in Paris held a solo show for him during the centennial celebration of the Eiffel Tower.

Hailed by critics as "an artistic genius" and "one of the most important outsider artists of the 20th century", Maurice Sullins died on March 21, 1995 at 84 years old. Upon his death, he left behind an exceptional body of work that was placed in storage, where it remained out of sight for twenty-two years. After decades away from the public eye, the Sullins collection is being unveiled by Hana Pietri Gallery through a series of exhibitions, offering an unprecedented opportunity to witness the extent of his strikingly original talent.













































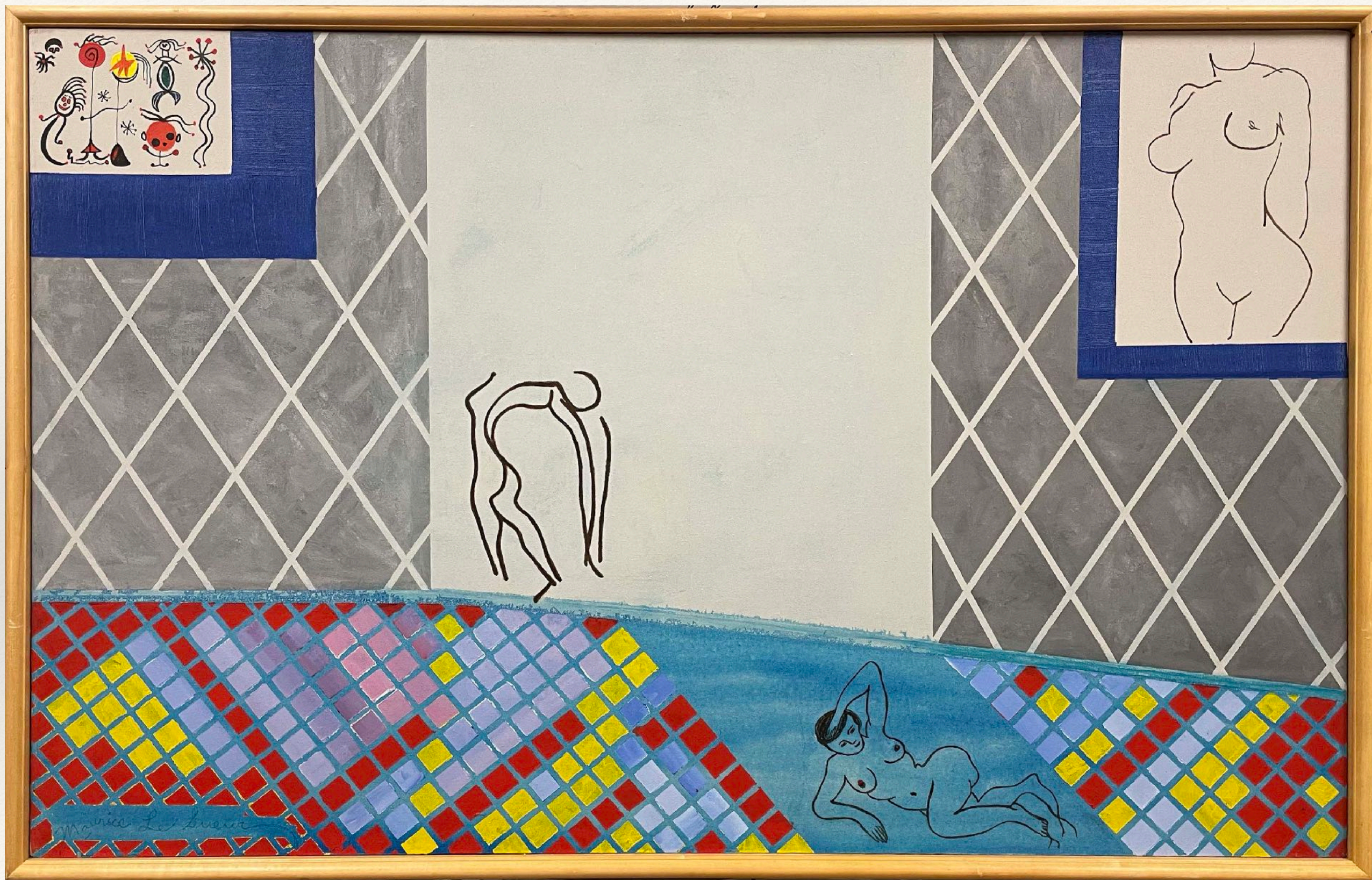






















# List of Paintings



1. Maurice Le Grand Le Sueur Sullins  
French Flair  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x48 inches / \$4,600 / Framed



2. Maurice Le Grand Sullins  
Madame Etienne de Silhouette Strolls Under Parisian Sunset  
Acrylic on Canvas  
24x36 inches / \$3,500 / Framed



3. Maurice Sullins  
Nymphs of Trees Cavort in Bois de Boulogne  
Acrylic on Canvas  
24x36 inches / \$2,500 / Framed



4. Maurice Le Grand Le Sueur Sullins  
French Girls with a Red Rose  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x40 inches / \$4,200 / Framed



5. Maurice Le Grand Le Sueur Sullins  
L'Hotel de Ville, à Paris  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x40 inches / \$3,900 / Framed



# List of Paintings



6. Maurice Sullins  
Noon Sun over Gay Paree  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x24 inches / \$2,300 / Framed



7. Maurice Sullins  
Very Blue Sky Over Paris  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x40 inches / \$3,900 / Framed



8. Maurice Le Grand Le Sueur Sullins  
Elegant Moment in Paris  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x40 inches / \$4,200 / Framed



9. Maurice Le Grand Le Sueur Sullins  
Arlette Promenades Along Rue Le Sueur  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x48 inches / \$4,900 / Framed



10. Maurice Le Grand Sullins  
Arlette Loves Sullins and Gauguin Skies  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x40 inches / \$4,500 / Framed



# List of Paintings



11. Maurice Sullins  
Madame de Silhouette Strolls in Rain  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x24 inches / \$2,500 / Framed



12. Maurice Sullins  
Canal de Bourgogne, October 18, 1970  
Acrylic on Canvas Panel  
24x30 inches / \$2,500 / Framed



13. Maurice Le Grand Le Sueur Sullins  
Raoul Dufy's Les Trois Ombrelles 1906 A Variation  
Acrylic on Canvas  
36x48 inches / \$5,500 / Framed



14. Le Grand Maurice Le Grand le Sueur  
Matisse's Heavenly Blue Nude  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x48 inches / \$5,500 / Framed



15. Le Grand Maurice Le Grand  
Baitinger's Braque Birds  
Acrylic on Canvas  
30x40 inches / \$3,800 / Framed



16. Grand Maurice Le Grand Le Sueur Sullins  
Chagall's Rougey Moon  
Acrylic on Canvas  
36x48 inches / \$5,500 / Framed



Inquire:

[info@hanapietri.com](mailto:info@hanapietri.com)