

## Discussion Questions for *Joan Mitchell, Lady Painter: A Life*

by Sylvia Martin, Docent

1. Does the title of this biography seem appropriate? Explain your answer.
2. Joan had rigorous Beaux Arts training at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. What does it mean to have Beaux Arts training? (p.108)
3. What other training and experiences were important to her at the Art Institute? (p. 109)
4. Joan's father Jimmie made drawings even though art was not his career. How did her father influence her art? What was the troubling nature of their relationship which would be with Joan her whole life until Jimmie's death? (p. 145, p. 223)
5. How was Joan's maternal grandfather, Charles Louis Strobel important to her art? (p. 24, 26, 27).
6. Joan used her memory of landscapes, poetry and classical music to find subjects for her paintings and to even get started painting. Discuss one example of each of these three elements.
7. Patricia Albers, Joan's biographer, states that Joan had unique perception ability. Albers feels Joan was a "synesthete." Define this term (p.5). In chapter 9, Albers says Joan had "an edetic's" insight (last par. P. 216 & all p. 217). Define "edetic" and connect it to Joan's art. How did Joan feel about her unique perception ability? (p.161, par. 2)
8. Joan had a great fear of death and dying, and she was always trying to keep that feeling at bay (p.107). How would French companion, Gisele Barreau's childhood story of the grand valley help Joan with her fear and influence her painting? (pp.372-top 373)
9. Describe the social environment for women in the late 40's and 50's (and even later) that became a handicap of gender for Joan as she worked to become a recognized artist. (pp. 120-121, 144, b. 171-172, 175, 177)
10. Joan was a representational artist until she was age 26 in 1950-51 when she turned to abstraction in her painting. Why did she make this change? (pp.142-143 & p. 147)
11. Joan Mitchell has been labeled as a Second-Generation Abstract Expressionist. Why did Albers and Mitchell find this a problem? (Intro. & pp.283-384)
12. Do Joan's depression, seasonal affective disorder, (see p. 30) alcoholism and psychological affliction, "symbiotic fusion" (see p. 161) help explain her outrageous behavior and sexual promiscuity? Would she have created less art and fewer original masterpieces of art if she had not had these conditions?
13. What are some of the honors and wonderful reviews which Joan received for her art?
14. Joan would say you cannot understand painting unless you feel (p.224) Choose one of the painting plates in the biography and describe how it makes you feel.
15. The University of Iowa's modern art collection shown in the Figge's Avenue has Joan Mitchell's abstract expressionist painting, "Red Painting, No 2" 1954. What may have been the inspiration for this painting? (p. 213, 232) Mitchell's paintings were said to be informed by imagined (more likely remembered according to Albers) landscapes or feelings about places. Do you see anything in the painting that supports this?