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Landmark Exhibition at Denver Art Museum Highlights Women's Contributions to Abstract Expressionism

Women of Abstract Expressionism expands understanding of innovative art movement with survey of more than 50 major works

DENVER – Sept. 1, 2015 –The Denver Art Museum (DAM) is proud to present the first full-scale museum presentation celebrating the female artists of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Organized by the DAM and curated by Gwen Chanzit, *Women of Abstract Expressionism* brings together 51 paintings to examine the distinct contributions of 12 artists who played an integral role in what has been recognized as the first fully-American modern art movement. On view June 12, 2016 through Sept. 25, 2016, the exhibition presents a nuanced profile of women working on the East and West Coasts during the 1940s and '50s, providing scholars and audiences with a new perspective on this important chapter in art history. Following its debut at the DAM, *Women of Abstract Expressionism* will travel to the Mint Museum in October 2016 and to the Palm Springs Art Museum in February 2017.



Lee Krasner, *The Seasons*, 1957. Oil and house paint on canvas, 92-3/4 × 203-7/8 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from Frances and Sydney Lewis by exchange, the Mrs. Percy Uris Purchase Fund and the Painting and Sculpture Committee 87.7. Photograph by Sheldon C. Collins. © 2015 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The DAM's exhibition focuses on the expressive freedom of direct gesture and process at the core of abstract expressionism, while revealing inward reverie and painterly expression in these works by individuals responding to particular places, memories and life experiences. *Women of Abstract Expressionism* also sheds light on the unique experiences of artists based in the Bay Area on the West Coast where they were on a more equal footing with their male counterparts than those working in New York. The featured artists include Mary Abbott, Jay DeFeo, Perle Fine, Helen Frankenthaler, Sonia

Gechtoff, Judith Godwin, Grace Hartigan, Elaine de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Joan Mitchell, Deborah Remington and Ethel Schwabacher.

“For millennia women have been creators and innovators of artistic expression,” said Christoph Heinrich, Frederick and Jan Mayer Director of the DAM. “Few women have found their way into the accounts of art history, and not until the 20th century have they received some of the credit that is long overdue. We are delighted to be the first U.S. museum to tell these stories of the most prolific female Abstract Expressionists.”

Lee Krasner, who often lived in husband Jackson Pollock's shadow, is one notable Abstract Expressionist painter featured in the exhibition. Seven of Krasner's works will be on view, showing the breadth of her artistic development and her responses to the natural world around her. This is visible in prominent works such as *The Seasons* (1957) and *Charred Landscape* (1960).

Elaine de Kooning is another artist whose work will be placed in a context independent from her husband, and well-known contemporary, Willem de Kooning. Elaine de Kooning was a skilled draughtswoman and abstract painter as shown in her monumental canvas *Bullfight* (1959). The artwork depicts the impact of energy and excitement brought on by her experience of witnessing bullfights in Mexico.



Elaine de Kooning, *Bullfight*, 1959. Oil on canvas; 77-5/8 x 131-1/4 x 1-1/8 in. Denver Art Museum: Vance H. Kirkland Acquisition Fund. Courtesy Mark Borghi Fine Art, New York, NY. © Elaine de Kooning Trust

A lesser-known artist featured in *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, Sonia Gechtoff, experienced a career that spanned both coasts. Her artistic contributions are pivotal in understanding the situation for women during the Abstract Expressionist movement. Gechtoff had much success in the Bay Area, but was surprised to experience gender bias in New York.

"*Women of Abstract Expressionism*, for the first time, positions this expanded group of painters within the context of abstract expressionism and its cultural milieu," said Gwen Chanzit, curator of modern art at the DAM. "The exhibition will contribute to a more complete understanding of this important mid-20th century movement by presenting artists beyond the handful of painters who have previously defined the whole in textbook accounts. It also will present these female artists together for the first time. While visitors discover the significant role of women in the formation of abstract expressionism, they will be treated to a powerful presentation of remarkable paintings."

An original video made for the exhibition will include some of the few living artists from the Abstract Expressionist movement—including Mary Abbott, Sonia Gechtoff and Judith Godwin—and a few children of the painters, sharing memories of their mothers. This account will highlight exciting journeys, as well as trials and tribulations, women experienced during the 1950s. *Women of Abstract Expressionism* will span the entire level 4 of the Hamilton Building, with the video being shown inside the gallery's Fuse Box.

Exhibition Catalog

A fully illustrated catalog, edited by Joan Marter and published by Yale University Press in association with the DAM, will serve as a permanent record of *Women of Abstract Expressionism*. Essays by leading scholars of abstract expressionism will be included in the catalog, as well as an extensive compilation of artist biographies of women featured in the exhibition and some additional 30 artists whose work paralleled the movement.

Exhibition Organizers and Sponsors

Women of Abstract Expressionism is organized by the Denver Art Museum. It is generously funded by Merle Chambers; the Ponzio Family; Barbara Bridges; DAM Contemporaries, a support group of the Denver Art Museum; the Dedalus Foundation; the donors to the Annual Fund Leadership Campaign; and the citizens who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District. Promotional support is provided by *5280 Magazine*, Comcast Spotlight, CBS4 and *The Denver Post*.

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The Denver Art Museum

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