



Artist Biographies

Mary Abbott

Mary Lee Abbott was born in New York in 1921 to a prominent American family (John Adams was one of her ancestors). At a young age, Abbott took Saturday classes at the Art Students League and later studied under George Grosz, Anne Goldthwaite and Morris Kantor, as well as Eugene Weiss at the Corcoran Museum School in Washington, D.C. In 1946, Abbott rented a studio at 88 Tenth Street in Manhattan, and a couple of years later, the sculptor and painter David Hare introduced her to the experimental Subjects of the Artist School. There she studied under Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, an experience that heavily influenced her turn toward abstraction.

Philip Pavia invited Abbott to join The Club, a social and intellectual gathering place for artists, as one of its few women members, and she frequented the Cedar Street Tavern to discuss art and philosophy. A friendship with Willem de Kooning, which began after meeting him around 1948-49, was a central influence in her artistic development. Abbott's annual trips to Haiti and the Virgin Islands were popular subjects for her work from the late 1940s to the early 1950s. In 1950, Abbott moved to Southampton but maintained a studio in Manhattan. She began teaching at the University of Minnesota in 1974 but returned to New York in 1980.

Jay DeFeo

Born in 1929 in Hanover, New Hampshire, Mary Joan ("Jay") DeFeo moved with her family to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1932. She graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a B.A. (1950) and M.A. (1951) in studio art. After graduating, she was awarded a fellowship for travel, which she used to travel through Europe and North Africa; during a stopover in New York in January 1953, DeFeo saw Philip Guston's work and was inspired to make paintings, collages and sculptures when she returned to the Bay Area the following month. In 1954, DeFeo and artist Wally Hedrick married and moved to Fillmore Street in San Francisco, which was home to many artists, including Joan Brown, Sonia Gechtoff, Dave Getz and Michael McClure. She worked frequently at the Six Gallery, and in 1959, DeFeo was one of two female artists included in Dorothy Miller's *Sixteen Americans* (1959-60) at the Museum of Modern Art.

DeFeo's work was associated with Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism and spirituality, and her large-scale paintings and drawings were often created by building up many layers of mixed media. DeFeo became preoccupied with one such painting, *The Rose*, working on it for eight years from 1958 to 1966. The result was an eleven-foot high work weighing approximately two thousand pounds. DeFeo stopped working after completing *The Rose* until the end of the decade, but she later returned to painting, drawing and collage, and began experimenting with new materials and photography. From the late 1960s through the 1980s, DeFeo taught art in the Bay Area. She died in 1989 in Oakland, California, at age 60.

Elaine de Kooning

Elaine Fried was born in 1918 in Brooklyn, New York. In 1936, she enrolled in Hunter College but quickly left to study art at the Leonardo da Vinci Art School. There, she met Milton Resnick and Willem de Kooning, for whom she became an occasional model. In 1943, Elaine and Willem married and began

summering in East Hampton, New York, in 1951, where they eventually set up studios. The couple unofficially separated in the mid-1950s but reconciled in 1975.

During the early 1940s, de Kooning worked on portraits as a means to insert herself into the debate between abstraction and representational painting. Postwar gesturalism was common in her portraits and many of her sitters were authorities on postwar painting: Harold Rosenberg, Thomas Hess, Frank O'Hara, John Bernard Myers and Leo Catelli among them. A series de Kooning started in 1947, later referred to as *Faceless Men* (1947-56), became part of her first solo exhibition, held at the Stable Gallery in 1954. In 1948, de Kooning began publishing art criticism as an editorial associate for *ARTnews*, and in the summer of that year, she and Willem joined the staff at Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina. During this period, de Kooning created a series of enamel paintings on wrapping paper, later referred to as her *Black Mountain* series. Bullfights, landscapes, Bacchus themes and cave paintings became the subjects of additional series during de Kooning's career. Elaine de Kooning died in 1989 in Southampton, New York.

Perle Fine

The daughter of Russian emigrants, Perle Fine was born in Boston in 1905. In 1929, she moved to New York where she met Maurice Berezov, a fellow student and emerging photographer and art director, at the Grand Central School of Art. The couple married in 1930. Fine studied drawing with Kimon Nicolaides at the Art Students League, and from the mid- to late 1930s, she attended classes at Hans Hofmann's Greenwich Village school and his summer art school in Provincetown, Massachusetts. In 1944, after enrolling in printmaking classes at Atelier 17 with Stanley William Hayter, Fine officially joined the American Abstract Artists group. She also became one of a few female members of The Club at the invitation of Willem de Kooning.

Fine worked in various styles, but non-objectivity was essential to her art. She explored relationships between color and lines, working with the language between geometric abstraction and Neo-Plasticism advanced by Piet Mondrian, whom she met in New York. Fine was commissioned in 1947 by collector Emily Hall Tremain to create two interpretations of Mondrian's *Victory Boogie-Woogie*. In 1954, Fine moved full-time to Springs, in East Hampton, New York. The move influenced a change in the scale and brushwork of her art, which sometimes incorporated collage elements and wide swatches of black. Bas-relief paintings and grids marked her later career. From 1962 to 1973, Fine worked as associate professor of fine art at Hofstra University, in Hempstead, New York. She died in Southampton, New York, in 1988.

Helen Frankenthaler

Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) is widely credited for her pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting. Born and raised in New York City, she attended the Dalton School, receiving her earliest art instruction from Mexican artist Rufino Tamayo. In 1949 she graduated from Bennington College, where she was a student of the artist Paul Feeley, and in 1950 she studied with Hans Hofmann. Her exhibition career began in 1950, when Adolph Gottlieb selected her painting *Beach* (1950) for *Fifteen Unknowns: Selected by Artists of the Kootz Gallery*. Her first solo exhibition was in 1951, at New York's Tibor de Nagy Gallery, and she was also included in that year's landmark *9th St. Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture*. Renowned art critic Clement Greenberg recognized her originality, and her work soon garnered international attention.

Jackson Pollock was an important early influence on Frankenthaler's work, inspiring her own revolutionary technique of stain painting: pouring thinned paint onto unstretched, unsized cotton canvas. In 1952 she created her breakthrough work, *Mountains and Sea*, immediately influential for the artists who would form the Color Field school of painting. Throughout her long career, she experimented ceaselessly, working in a wide range of media. In 1966, along with Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jules Olitski, she represented the U.S. at the 33rd Venice Biennale. Her work has been the subject of numerous museum exhibitions and gallery shows and three major monographs.

Sonia Gechtoff

Sonia Gechtoff was born in 1926 in Philadelphia, where she grew up learning art from her father, a moderately successful landscape and still-life painter. She received a scholarship to the Philadelphia Museum School of Art, from which she earned her B.F.A. in painting in 1950. She moved to San Francisco the following year and studied lithography with James Budd Dixon at the California School of Fine Arts. She later taught at CSFA, from 1957 to 1958, at the invitation of Elmer Bischoff. While studying at CSFA, Gechtoff met painter James Kelly. After marrying in 1953, Gechtoff and Kelly moved to the Fillmore Street studio building, becoming neighbors with other artists including Joan Brown, Bruce Conner and Jay DeFeo. Gechtoff's mother, Ethel, opened the East and West Gallery on Fillmore Street, across from the Six Gallery, in 1954.

Gechtoff began her career as a Social Realist painter, but by the early 1950s, her oil paintings developed large-scale painterly gestures, and she also began creating large graphite drawings. Nature and poetry often served as inspiration for her works. An exhibition that included the work of Clyfford Still led Gechtoff to approach abstraction. In 1958, Gechtoff and her husband moved to New York, which Gechtoff found to be an unsupportive atmosphere for Abstract Expressionism due to the rise of Pop Art. She credited her early success to San Francisco's support of female artists. In addition to showing at galleries in New York and San Francisco (including Six Gallery), Gechtoff's work was also shown internationally, such as at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair and the 1961 São Paulo Bienal in Brazil.

Judith Godwin

Judith Godwin was born in 1930 in Suffolk, Virginia. At Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia, Godwin studied art with Elizabeth Nottingham Day and Horace Day, but after two years, she transferred in 1951 to Richmond Professional Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University) and graduated in 1952. With encouragement from professors Theresa Pollak and Jewett Campbell, a former Hans Hofmann student, Godwin moved to New York in 1953. She studied with Will Barnet and Vaclav Vytlacil at the Art Students League in spring 1953, before enrolling in classes with Hofmann, first at his summer school in Massachusetts and then at his New York school in fall 1954.

Hofmann's influence was evident in Godwin's artistic development during the mid-1950s. Modern dance also inspired her broad corporeal gestures, arcs and angles, and Godwin's association with Japanese painter Kenzo Okada encouraged her interest in Zen Buddhism and the teachings of D.T. Suzuki. At the invitation of James Brooks, Godwin exhibited at the Stable Gallery in 1958 and in the inaugural exhibition the same year at Betty Parsons Gallery's Section Eleven, an annex for younger artists. In her later works, Godwin began incorporating collage elements, introducing pattern and texture to her sweeping gestures.

Grace Hartigan

Born in 1922 in Newark, New Jersey, Grace Hartigan worked as a draftsman in an airplane factory during World War II and briefly studied painting with Isaac Lane Muse in New York. She married in 1941, then moved to California and began taking drawing classes in Los Angeles. For a period of time, she exhibited under the name "George Hartigan." After meeting Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb and viewing Jackson Pollock's 1948 exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, Hartigan began a series of gestural abstractions. Through Pollock, Hartigan also met Willem de Kooning, who became a strong artistic influence and close friend.

Hartigan's colorful canvases often challenged Abstract Expressionism's non-objective tenets because they included references to contemporary life. Her early 1950s *Matador* series examined sexual identity, and a series on bridal imagery addressed social dimensions of American womanhood, marriage and consumerism. In a collaboration with poet Frank O'Hara, she incorporated words from his poems to create the *Oranges* series. Hartigan was the only woman included in *Twelve Americans* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1956. Four years later, Hartigan and her last husband, Dr. Winston Price, left New York for Baltimore. She taught art at the Hoffberger School of Painting at the Maryland Institute College of Art and continued to make new paintings, which she showed at the C. Grimaldis Gallery in Baltimore. Hartigan died in 2008 in Timonium, Maryland.

Lee Krasner

Lee Krasner was born in 1908 in Brooklyn, New York, as Lena Krasner. In 1926, she enrolled at the Women's Art School of Cooper Union and briefly studied drawing at the Art Students League before attending the National Academy of Design from 1928 to 1932. Krasner also worked with the Public Works of Art Project and in the mural division of the Federal Art Project/Works Progress Administration during the mid-1930s. In 1937, under Hans Hofmann's direction, she further integrated principles of European abstraction and Cubism into her painting, and she became a member of the American Abstract Artists group in 1939. Krasner participated, along with Jackson Pollock, in *American and French Paintings* at McMillen Gallery, New York, in 1942. She also showed in *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* at Sidney Janis Gallery (1944) and *A Problem for Critics* at 67 Gallery (1945). Her first solo exhibition was held at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951, but it was, in fact, a two-person show with Anne Ryan.

Krasner and Pollock married in 1945, settling in Springs, East Hampton, New York. Pollock's emerging success led Krasner to struggle before beginning her *Little Image* series in 1946. In 1949, Krasner and Pollock exhibited together again in *Artists: Man and Wife* at Sidney Janis Gallery. Continuing to work in series, Krasner made large collages that were created from torn and reused drawings and incorporated organic forms and allusions to figures; this collage series was shown at the Stable Gallery in 1955. After Pollock's death in 1956, Krasner began her *Earth Green* series, works with high-toned palettes suggestive of sexual and anthropomorphic components. Her early 1960s *Umber* paintings were larger and monochromatic by contrast and culminated in a series of collage paintings from the mid- to late 1970s. The first Lee Krasner retrospective was organized in 1956 by the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London. Krasner was the only woman shown in *Abstract Expressionism: The Formative Years* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1978, and she received a traveling retrospective organized by the Museum of Modern Art in 1983. Krasner died in New York in 1984.

Joan Mitchell

Born in Chicago in 1925, Joan Mitchell was introduced to visual arts, literature and poetry by her mother, Marion Strobel Mitchell, who was co-editor of *Poetry* magazine. Mitchell attended weekend classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, and she met her future husband, Barney Rosset, while at the Francis W. Parker School. Mitchell and Rosset married in 1949 and divorced in 1952 but remained close friends. Mitchell graduated with a B.F.A (1947) and M.F.A. (1950) from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. After a brief stay in New York, she traveled to France in spring 1948 and spent a year painting in Paris and Provence.

Back in New York in late 1949, Mitchell was invited to participate in the *Ninth Street Show* (1951). As part of a younger generation of women artists, she positioned herself with the senior Abstract Expressionists while forming associations with a group of poets, such as Frank O'Hara, and painters, such as Grace Hartigan. In summer 1955, Mitchell returned to Paris and began a complicated long-term relationship with painter Jean-Paul Riopelle. During the late 1950s, Mitchell's critical success grew with the 1956 purchase of *Hemlock* by the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art's acquisition of *Ladybug* (1957). Mitchell was the first recipient of the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement from the College Art Association in 1988. She died in Paris in 1992.

Deborah Remington

A distant cousin of American artist Frederic Remington, Deborah Remington was born in 1930 in Haddonfield, New Jersey. As a teenager, she took painting and drawing classes at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art (now University of the Arts, Philadelphia). After briefly attending the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles (now Otis College of Art and Design), she enrolled at the California School of Fine Arts in 1947. While there she studied with Elmer Bischoff, Edward Corbett, David Park, Hassel Smith, Clay Spohn and Clyfford Still. She graduated with a B.F.A in 1955. Remington also frequented teacher James Budd Dixon's studio in North Beach, San Francisco, and she became affiliated with a younger set of Bay Area Abstract Expressionists, including Joan Brown, Jay DeFeo, Madeline Dimond, Lilly Fenichel and Sonia Gechtoff.

In 1953, Remington was featured in an exhibition, *Deborah Remington/Jorge Goya*, at the King Ubu Gallery on Fillmore Street. One year later, in 1954, the gallery space reopened as the Six Gallery; Remington co-founded the gallery, the only female among the six founders. From 1956 to 1958, she traveled to Asia, visiting numerous countries and studying Chinese and Japanese calligraphy and *sumi-e* painting in Japan. These experiences influenced the work she created upon her return to the U.S. Remington experimented with gestural abstraction based on observations from nature and imagery that some critics called kimono-like or heraldic. By the mid-1960s, her work took a notable shift toward a polished and optically reflective surface. Remington taught at San Francisco Art Institute (1960-65), University of California, Davis (1962) and San Francisco State College (1965) before relocating to New York and teaching at Cooper Union (1973-97) and New York University (1994-99). Remington died in Moorestown, New Jersey, in 2010.

Ethel Schwabacher

Ethel Kramer was born in 1903 in New York. She took classes between 1918 and 1927 at the Art Students League from various instructors, including Robert Laurent and Max Weber. She also studied at the National Academy of Design in 1920 and 1921, apprenticed with sculptor Anna Hyatt Huntington in 1923 and painted in France between 1928 and 1934. Her first solo exhibition was mounted at the Georgette Passedoit Gallery in New York in 1935, the same year she married lawyer Wolfgang Schwabacher. From 1934 to 1936, Schwabacher was a private student of Arshile Gorky, and although she worked independently after her study with him, Gorky remained an important source of critical commentary and a close friend. After Gorky's death in 1948, Schwabacher helped organize his memorial exhibition at the Whitney Museum, curated exhibitions at the Princeton University Art Museum and the Venice Biennale and authored the first authoritative monograph on Gorky.

Schwabacher's paintings from the mid-1940s reveal the influence of Gorky and Surrealism, while exploring gardens as sites for fantasies and childhood visions. Deeply influenced by psychoanalysis and Freudian theory, her works from the 1950s explore psychological aspects of landscape, creativity and maternity. They represent the multiple roles she held in her personal life but also the broader psychological experiences of womanhood and feminine identity. Her interest in tragic and mythic Greek themes was also an important influence in the work she created during the late 1950s. Schwabacher died in 1984 in New York.

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