

CARTER RATCLIFF

Lee Krasner

The Unacknowledged Equal



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POLLOCK-KRASNER FOUNDATION

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Lee Krasner: The Unacknowledged Equal

Carter Ratcliff

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To Phyllis Diefner, as always.

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since I can remember, the myth of the heroic artist working alone in his studio has hovered over the art world, like a vindictive tyrant or an angry, pent-up child waiting to be provoked. Always a white male, our valiant idol is uniformly described as making his breakthrough in isolation, misunderstood by all but a few. Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Piet Mondrian, and Jackson Pollock—each of them an acclaimed trailblazer marking out a road where there was none before.

Reflecting on the beginnings of Cubism, the quiet Georges Braque described his daily rapport with the flamboyant Picasso as “two mountaineers roped together,” while Picasso put their search for the new in sexist terms; Braque was merely his “wife.” For Picasso, there was no equality. Of course, he was only following protocol: the heroic artist club did not admit women, and there could only be one male genius at a time.

It is one thing to know that this view is wrong; it is quite another to dig into the historical record to prove the extent to which it has distorted our understanding of highly significant figures. In his beautifully and thoughtfully written book, *Lee Krasner: The Unacknowledged Equal*, Carter Ratcliff does more than give Krasner her proper and rightful due.

Critical opinion during much of Krasner’s lifetime cast her in the role of Mrs. Jackson Pollock, the long-suffering helpmeet and, at best, a minor artist following in her husband’s footsteps. The distance between this narrative and Krasner’s actual achievement is vast, of course, and none of her story’s complexity or nuance escapes Ratcliff’s attention. He has written a non-polemical, fact-driven book in precise, sparkling prose that pulls the reader forward into a new understanding.

Krasner's life can be viewed as an act of incorporating, at the very least, two distinct—if not competing—individuals and personalities. During their decade-long marriage, she was the wife who promoted Pollock's career, often at her own expense, and later, as his widow, worked tirelessly and strenuously on his behalf, ensuring the placement of his work in the best museum collections around the world. The individual who coexisted with this public figure (Mrs. Jackson Pollock) was Lee Krasner, the hard-nosed, supremely intelligent, and highly ambitious artist. It is this figure that Ratcliff brings fully into the light for the first time.

While the art world has finally recognized Krasner's accomplishments after Pollock died and Abstract Expressionism was superseded by Pop Art and Minimalism, Ratcliff goes back to the time they first met “in 1936, at a loft party in downtown Manhattan,” and Pollock was “mumbly obnoxious.”

From that initial meeting, Ratcliff conscientiously traces, as well as gently untangles, their complicated, nearly unfathomable relationship, patiently sifting through all the available evidence—even when it doesn't align, such as the two different stories that Krasner tells about searching out Pollock five years later, after seeing his work near hers in the landmark exhibition, *French and American Paintings*, curated by the émigré artist John Graham, which also included Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Stuart Davis, and Willem de Kooning.

Ratcliff's reading of the extent that Krasner and Pollock influenced each other as they approached the breakthrough of what we know as “allover” painting is eye-opening, thrilling, and indispensable: he has shown us something we have not seen before, even though it has literally been in front of our eyes for more than 70 years.

Writing about the paintings that Krasner made in the late 1940s, Ratcliff states:

There is no focal point, no principle of containment, and no recognition of the edge as anything but a physical fact. These are not compositions but allover images, and so different from Pollock's that only a few writers have ever applied the word to them. Krasner called them “hieroglyphic,” as good a name as any for grids inflected by flourishes of paint that come to rest at the border where writing—or calligraphy—meets painting.

And with that, we are compelled to see Krasner's work and life in a new light—as an innovator on an equal footing with Pollock.

Ratcliff also scrutinizes Krasner and Pollock's achievements during the late '40s and early '50s within the larger context of the New York art world, including the influence of the little-known Ukrainian-American abstractionist Janet Sobel on Pollock's drip paintings, which led the influential critic Clement Greenberg “for a time [to have felt] the need to hedge his account of Pollock's originality.”

No matter whom or what he discusses—artists and critics, champions and detractors—Ratcliff is that truly rare writer, judicious and understanding, scrupulous and passionate. In keeping with his insight that Krasner and Pollock made the breakthrough into all-over painting together, even as each artist took a different route, Ratcliff acknowledges other critics and art historians, such as Barbara Rose, Ellen Landau, and Greenberg, who helped pave the way for him. Finally, Ratcliff understands the implications of Krasner and Pollock's leap into the unknown—that the aesthetic and the political are engaged in a deep and illuminating conversation.

JOHN YAU

2020

John Yau is a poet and art critic. He has a book of poems, *Genghis Chan on Drums*, and a book of essays, *Foreign Sounds or Sounds Foreign*, forthcoming. His monographs include *Thomas Nozkowski*, *Catherine Murphy*, *Richard Artschwager: Into the Desert* and *Joan Mitchell: Works on Paper 1956–1992*. He was the 2017 recipient of the Jackson Prize in Poetry. An editor of the online magazine, *Hyperallergic Weekend*, he lives in New York.





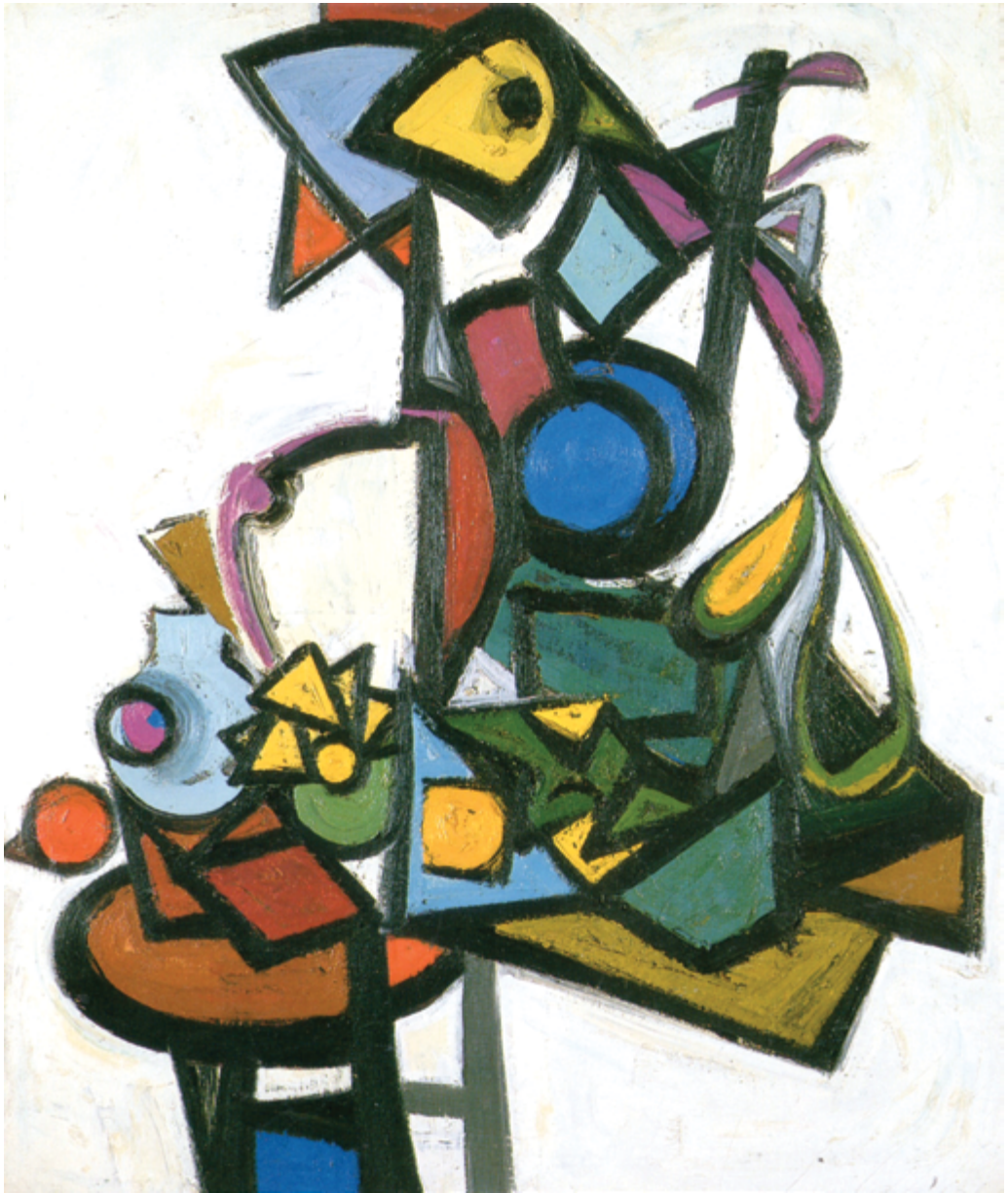
Lee Krasner, *Self-Portrait*, ca.1931-1933

PRECEDING PAGE: Lee Krasner at the Hofmann School, c. 1940, Photographer unknown.
Photo courtesy Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner Papers, ca. 1905-1984, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

LEE KRASNER: THE UNACKNOWLEDGED EQUAL

The ranks of first-generation Abstract Expressionist painters include just one woman: Lee Krasner. If Krasner had not been so furiously stubborn, there might have been none.¹ A member of this pioneer band once told her, “We don’t need dames.”² Refusing, out of tact, to say who he was, she left no significant gap in the historical record. Any of Krasner’s male counterparts could have made this remark, for they all felt, in her words, that “something about a woman is ‘in the way.’”³ At the very least, women are distractions; at worst, they undermine a man’s heroic conception of himself. One of Willem de Kooning’s many lovers compared him and his fellow painters to “outlaws or soldiers who’ve been through a lot together.”⁴ Women, they believed, could never understand their struggles; and so none of these men—Krasner’s husband Jackson Pollock, least of all—could acknowledge that her struggle was more desperate, even, than theirs, and her scars deeper.

Krasner and Pollock met in 1936, at a loft party in downtown Manhattan. He was drunk, his default condition in social situations, and mumblingly obnoxious. She brushed him off and forgot about the encounter. Five years later, John Graham, an émigré artist with connections to the Parisian avant-garde, invited her to participate in “French and American Painting,” an exhibition he was organizing for McMillen Incorporated, on East Fifty-Sixth Street. Told that her canvas—an untitled work thought to be from around 1940—would hang side by side with canvases by Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, and other School of Paris luminaries, Krasner was thrilled. Graham had vindicated her ambition. Among the Americans chosen for the show were Stuart Davis and de Kooning, both respectable, and Jackson Pollock, whose name Krasner didn’t recognize. Certain until then that she knew every modern painter on the downtown scene, this blank spot annoyed her. Asking around, Krasner learned from a painter named Lou Bunce that Pollock’s studio was on East Eighth Street, a block away from her Ninth Street apartment. After a few days, she knocked



Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1940

on his door. Pollock let her in and showed her his work in progress. The story of Krasner's response comes in two versions.

According to the more dramatic one, she instantaneously saw the brilliance of Pollock's art. "To say that I flipped my lid would be an understatement," she told the chronicler John Gruen. "I was totally bowled over."⁵ In the more nuanced telling of the tale, Krasner was entranced less by the art than by the artist. As her friend John Bernard Myers later said, "She found him the most beautiful thing that ever walked on two feet."⁶ His paintings she found baffling. Then Mercedes Matter, a painter and close friend, seconded the approval of John Graham, who was the first to see promise in the always dogged, sometimes inspired strivings of Pollock's brush. Partially swayed, Krasner let herself be won over when Mercedes' husband Herbert, a graphic designer, visited Pollock's studio and declared his approval. Eventually, the two versions of this story merged.

"I was terribly drawn to Jackson," Krasner said in the 1960s. "I fell in love with him—physically, mentally—in every sense of the word." Krasner's devotion was unreserved. When she and Pollock "began going together," she recalled, "my own work became irrelevant. *He* was the important thing. I couldn't do enough for him."⁷ Modulating their misogyny a bit, Krasner's male colleagues had seen her as a competitor during the 1930s. Now they demoted her to Mrs. Jackson Pollock, as she came to be known even before marrying Jackson, in 1945. Protecting Pollock's time in the studio, supervising his friendships, she worked hard to bring him and his work to the attention of the New York art world's prominent figures.

John Graham billed himself as a seer, a magus possessed of supra-human vision. This grandiosity seems almost justified by his discovery of Pollock in the entourage of Thomas Hart Benton, the leading purveyor of regionalism, a movement spouting an America-First ideology and buoyed up by contempt for the audacity of European avant-gardists. Benton and the Bentonites formed a band of provincials in New York, and so it was daring of Graham to include Pollock in "French and American Painting." The moment the show closed, Krasner assigned herself a new mission: the reinvention of this obscure figure. Pollock was now to be a member of the New York avant-garde. She introduced him first to Willem de Kooning and next to Alexander Calder, one of the very few American artists taken seriously in Paris. In a sudden burst of courage, Krasner invited her teacher, Hans Hofmann, to see Pollock's work. Hofmann was

appalled by the disorder of the younger painter's studio and unmoved by the canvases he saw there. Moreover, he took offense when Pollock said he wasn't interested in the older painter's theories. He wanted to see his work. "Put up or shut up! Let's see your work," barked Pollock, knowing that Hofmann rarely showed his paintings to anyone.⁸ To serve as Pollock's champion could be a frustrating task. But Krasner kept at it and in the spring of 1943 Pollock received an invitation to exhibit *Painting* (now known as *Stenographic Figure*), a canvas from the previous year, in a group show at Art of This Century, a gallery recently opened on West Fifty-Seventh Street by Peggy Guggenheim.

An expatriate heiress driven back to New York by the German invasion of Paris, Guggenheim learned of Pollock from James Johnson Sweeney, a curator in the department of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art; Sweeney's introduction to his work had come from Herbert Matter—a short and decisive sequence of connections set in motion by Krasner's proselytizing. Guggenheim gave Pollock his first solo show in November 1943. Though most critics responded with bafflement tinged by hostility, a few showed cautious interest. In a review for *The Nation*, Clement Greenberg allowed that despite their muddiness Pollock's larger canvases were "original and ambitious."⁹ *The New Yorker's* Robert M. Coates went half a step further, calling Pollock "an authentic discovery."¹⁰ The show's strongest work was *The She-Wolf*, 1943. With some effort, Sweeney talked Alfred Barr into buying it for the Modern.

By 1947 Pollock's progress had persuaded Greenberg to proclaim him "the most powerful painter in contemporary America."¹¹ Two years later, editors at *Life* magazine turned the critic's judgment into a question: "Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?"¹² Above this headline is a photograph of Pollock, clad in denim with a cigarette at the corner of his mouth. Arms crossed, he looks broodingly Brando-esque—or just surly. On the wall behind him hangs *Summertime, Number 9A, 1948*, 1948. Over thirty feet wide, this is one of his largest dripped and spattered canvases. Suddenly spot-lit in a magazine read nationwide, Pollock now stood on the verge of the stardom Krasner had done so much to promote. As she vanished into his shadow, her friends declared their dismay. Self-possessed to the point of arrogance, she had been unapologetically ambitious. How could she let herself be overshadowed, even partially? Krasner never gave a satisfactory answer to this question. We know only that her



ABOVE: Jackson Pollock, *Stenographic Figure*, 1942

BELOW: Jackson Pollock, *The She-Wolf*, 1943

devotion to Pollock was unqualified—and that she never saw herself as anything less than an artist of uncompromising seriousness.

A YOUNG PAINTER: HER LIFE AND HARD TIMES

“Even at school as a kid,” said Krasner in 1977, “I knew I was an artist.”¹³ Nothing in her background encouraged this conviction. Krasner’s parents were devoutly Orthodox Jews with no interest in art. In 1905, her father Joseph Krassner emigrated to Brooklyn from Shpikoy, a village near Odessa. Three years later, his wife Anna and their three children joined him; in October 1908, Lee arrived, the first of her siblings to be born in America. Lena, as her parents named her, grew up listening to Joseph’s “marvelous tales! About forests. Beautiful, beautiful stories. Always like Grimm. Scary things. The sleighs in winter going out with the dog, and there would always be someone standing in the road to stop them. The forest, and always the snow, and sleighs. A foreign world to me.”¹⁴ During Lena’s earliest years, the Krassners lived in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. (Lena renamed herself Lenore after graduating from junior high school and in her early twenties shortened Lenore to Lee, dropping the second “s” in Krassner along the way.) When she was six, the family moved to East New York, a corner of Brooklyn that remained, in those days, more rural than urban. “I loved it,” Krasner said. “A backyard with irises. My fleurs-de-lis—my favorite flower. And wild daisies. Bridal veil. And lilac. And roses on the fences, and in all the back yards.”¹⁵ Here was nature, resplendent and palpable, a complement, not a contrast, to the otherworldly landscapes of her father’s stories.

The Torah proscribes graven images; nonetheless, Krasner’s parents didn’t object when she copied figures from the newspapers’ fashion pages, and her younger sister, Ruth, reluctantly admired this “marvelous” talent.¹⁶ Lena sought visual images in newspapers, in magazines, in the public library’s illustrated books. At thirteen, she applied for the arts program at Washington Irving High School. Rejected, she attended Girls’ High School, in Brooklyn, and reapplied to Washington Irving a year later. This time she was accepted and did well in all her subjects but art. Yet her belief in her calling never wavered. She worked hard at drawing, and her portfolio was sufficiently accomplished to win her admission to the Women’s Art School of the Cooper Union,

in downtown Manhattan.

Krasner struck her first teacher, the academically trained Charles Louis Hinton, as undisciplined. Tolerant or possibly indifferent, he permitted her to advance from Elementary Drawing to Costume Design and Illustration. The first year of this course was devoted to the figure and the second to the production of drawings suitable for publication in magazines and catalogs—Cooper Union was a vocational school. As the semesters went by, Krasner realized that her training was putting her on the wrong side of the line that divides commercial art from fine art. She had an eye for fashion but no interest in working as an illustrator for *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*. Much less did she want to be a designer of any kind—fashion, graphic, or industrial. She had defined her life's purpose: to be a painter; more precisely, she wanted to be a *modern* painter, an inhabitant of the aesthetic territory opened by Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and other avant-gardists whose works were on view in the Manhattan galleries and museums she had begun to visit with friends. For the future to deliver its best promise, she would have to leave Cooper Union for a school that fostered a less practical, more elevated idea of art.

In the fall of 1928, Krasner enrolled at the National Academy of Design. A venerable, somewhat sleepy institution on Amsterdam Avenue in uptown Manhattan, the academy offered a full panoply of courses, none of them suggesting anything so mundane as vocational training. Krasner studied there for four years. The introductory course was taught by Charles Louis Hinton, the hidebound painter who had found Krasner's work at Cooper Union so unsatisfactory. By unspoken agreement, they tolerated one another.

To progress from preliminary to advanced courses at this and every other academy was to follow a path laid out in the Italian Renaissance and little changed in the twentieth century. If painting represents visible things, drawing is so obviously indispensable that it hardly seems necessary to say why. With long hours of practice and the guidance of an instructor, a student learns to trace on a two-dimensional surface the external shapes and internal divisions of three-dimensional objects. Next comes the use of light and dark tones to give bodies and objects a look of volume, rounded or rectangular. This is called modeling. Last is perspective, the device that situates a form in the imaginary space of the drawing. Listed in an art-school catalog, these basics sound dull. To Krasner, possessed of an innate knack for drawing, they

were exciting—her means of endowing the world with order and significance. She sailed through the Academy’s program, though instructors would object on the rare occasions when a touch of modernist innovation slipped into her classwork.

Trouble was more likely to be the upshot of Krasner’s refusal to follow the Academy’s rules; no still lifes with fish, for example, were to be painted in the upstairs studios—that subject had been relegated to the basement, where it was cool and fish were not so quick to rot. But there was a hitch: the basement was off-limits to female students. Annoyed, Krasner and her friend Eda Mirsky snuck downstairs, set up a still life arrangement with fish, and dashed off paintings of this forbidden subject—or rather, this subject forbidden to women. For their defiance, Krasner and Mirsky received a short suspension. Disinclined to mend her ways, Krasner continued to exhibit the obstinance that kept instructors at a cautious remove.

When she left the National Academy, in 1932, the Great Depression was dragging America downward, toward a nadir until then unimaginable. Rattled by the sight of breadlines and picketers, she matriculated at the City College of New York and in 1935 earned a teaching certificate—an achievement that brought with it the realization that “the last thing in the world that I wanted to do was to teach art.”¹⁷ Krasner had been earning her living by modeling for artists and waiting on tables at a Greenwich Village restaurant called Sam Johnson’s. There she met the poet and art critic Harold Rosenberg, Lionel Abel, a literary critic and playwright, and other denizens of bohemian New York. Some of the patrons at Sam Johnson’s tipped very little or not at all, professing to believe that tipping was bourgeois and therefore decadent; and of course the establishment paid its waitresses very low wages. Krasner and her lover, a young painter named Igor Pantuhoff, could barely survive from month to month. Then, not long after she balked at the unbearable thought of teaching art, Krasner was accepted into the Public Works of Art Project. Launched late in 1933, this was the first in a succession of agencies designed by the Roosevelt Administration to provide artists with gainful employment.

THE WPA TO THE RESCUE

Given the job of drawing fossils for a professor whose name she later forgot, Krasner was reminded, happily, of drawing butterflies and other insects in her illustration

classes at Washington Irving High School. In mid-1934, the Public Works of Art Project became the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Glad to have been kept on the rolls, Krasner was irked by her new assignment: teacher. Soon, however, the agency gave her a more congenial designation: artist; and when FERA came to an end, after little more than a year, she and other painters were transferred to the Federal Arts Project, a section of the Works Progress Administration. Under the WPA, bridges were built, eroded landscapes were reforested, and artists across the land were rescued from destitution. In a radio address, Franklin D. Roosevelt spelled out the rationale for supporting artists, marginal figures suspected in some quarters of subversive intent. “The Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration,” said the president,

is a practical relief project which also emphasizes the best traditions of the democratic spirit. The WPA artist, in rendering his own impression of things, speaks also for the spirit of his fellow countrymen everywhere. I think the WPA artist exemplifies with great force the essential place which the arts have in a democratic society such as ours.¹⁸

The Federal Art Project’s guidelines were truly democratic. To present oneself as an artist was nearly always to be accepted. “It didn’t matter,” said Harold Rosenberg, “if you were a portrait painter or painted bears in a shooting gallery on Coney Island.”¹⁹ When Krasner joined the Project, in 1935, artists received \$23.65 per week; varying slightly over the years, this stipend kept their incomes close to the national median. No longer scrambling to pay rent and buy groceries, Krasner reconnoitered her options and applied to Hans Hofmann’s School of Fine Arts, at 52 West Ninth Street.

Hofmann was a rarity in the New York art world of the 1930s: a veteran of the Parisian avant-garde. Born in Munich, in 1880, he moved to Paris when he was twenty-four years old and entered with ease into a life lived in pleasant cafés and down-at-heel studios. A patron funded the young painter’s studies, first at the Académie Colarossi and next at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, where a fellow student, Henri Matisse, liked to explain, to anyone who would listen, how color functions in the paintings of Cézanne. Hofmann returned to Munich in 1914, bringing with him the distinction of having consorted with Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, the inventors of Cubism. Kept in Germany by the outbreak of the First World War, Hofmann

launched an art school in Munich. Two of his American students, now professors, arranged for him to teach at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1930. This appointment led to another, at the Chouinard School of Art in Los Angeles. These stints completed, Hofmann chose to stay in America. He was wary of the Nazis coming to power in his native country, and it may be that he saw the New World as not merely ready for but urgently in need of his passionately avant-garde doctrines. Hofmann opened his New York school in 1933.

Krasner brought a portfolio of figure drawings to the school four years later. Stunned by their precocious flair, the registrar, Lillian Olinsey, convinced the maestro to grant the young woman a scholarship. Though he believed in her promise, his methods of encouraging it were not gentle. A day or two after Krasner entered his class, Hofmann approached her easel to assess a drawing in progress; he then tore it into pieces and rearranged them to improve the relationship between the drawn image and the virtual surface known as the picture plane.²⁰ The goal was a unity at once stable and dynamic. Hofmann propounded it in terms derived from Cubism: lines and flat shapes positioned in shallow space and modulated by colors close on the tonal scale that reaches from black to white. If the painting's tones are too disparate, the darker ones recede, disrupting the picture plane. The painting now has "a hole" in it.²¹ Unity is lost, taking with it the power of the image to fuse the artist's "inner self—his spiritual world" with the outer world, the fullness of nature felt as a "spiritual being."²²

Directed at a student's drawing, Hofmann's comments had dictatorial precision. Addressed to an audience or billowing through his essays, his language swelled to a vague and exalted generality. Borrowing grand words from German metaphysics and the Romantic poets, he mixed invocations of "intuition" and "empathy" with talk about "spiritual reality," "the essence of things,"²³ and "cosmic feeling."²⁴ A star student, Krasner put Hofmann's theory into practice with such skill that he once said of a drawing of hers, "This is so good you would not know it was done by a woman."²⁵ That his praise rested on a rage-inducing assumption would not have occurred to him. Gender equality concerned Hofmann as little as parking regulations on Ninth Street.

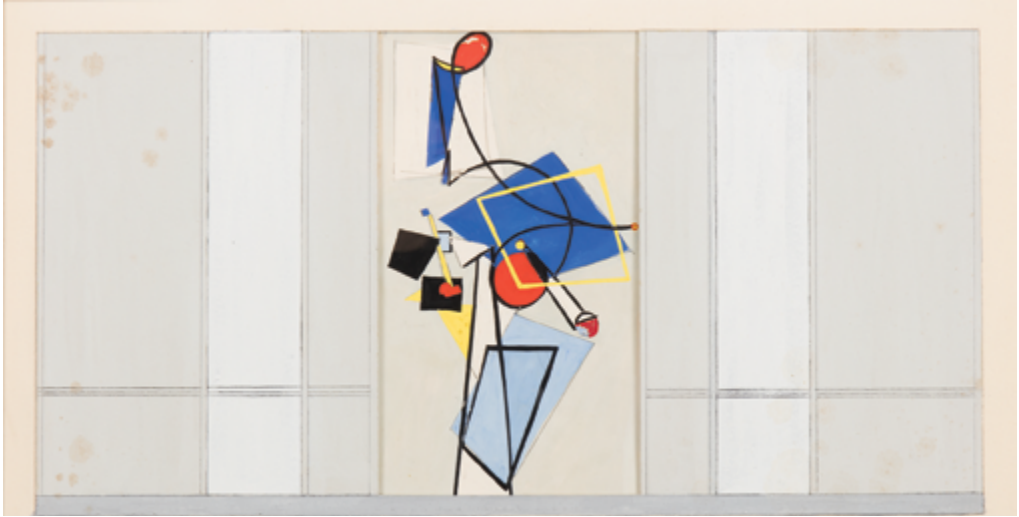
Behind Hofmann's day-to-day instruction in fundamentals lay a larger purpose: to instill in students his belief that "man is at the center of the creative universe and his task as an artist is to find inspiration in the creative activity of relationships and forces."²⁶ Painting, as he taught it, was a redemptive vocation, a way of life leading

to ultimate things. Records of Krasner's conversation show few signs that she took on the airy baggage of Hofmann's quasi-religious convictions. In 1973, she summed up his lessons in two sentences: he "clarified negative and positive space and the flattening of the picture plane. Spatially, the negative was as positive as the positive space of an object."²⁷ Three years at the Hofmann School gave Krasner an iron command of these edicts. She left in 1940, fully able to make a modernist painting and elucidate its formal virtues—and, like every other artist in her circle, unable to find a gallery or museum that would show her work. Institutional acknowledgment that she was an artist came only from Hans Hofmann and the WPA.



Lee Krasner, *Nude Study from Life*, 1938

On the Project, Krasner helped other artists with their murals. Her ambition was to be assigned a mural of her own; in 1940, after four years, it happened—and that is all we know. The name and location of the building scheduled to receive a Krasner mural have been lost, and of course her design was never installed. Yet her studies survive and testify to her firm grasp of avant-garde idioms. For over two years she had been turning out charcoal-on-paper studies of the nude figure in the fashion prescribed by Hofmann. Flattening and schematizing forms, Krasner approached the border between the figurative and the abstract and crossed it, tentatively, a time or two. In her mural studies, she expunged all traces of recognizable objects and with that step moved beyond student work toward a style recognizably her own. It was, however, just a step.

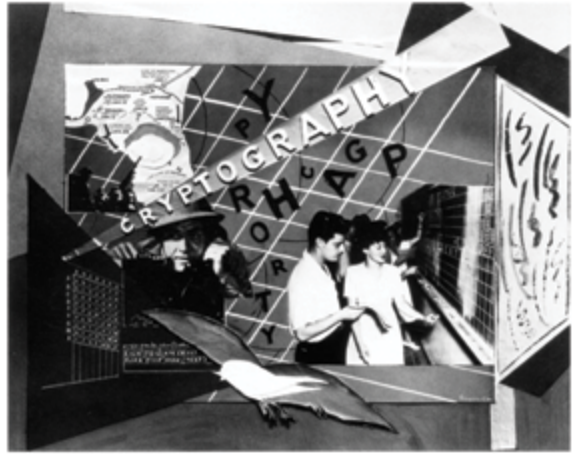


Lee Krasner, *Mural Study for Studio A, Radio Station WNYC*, 1941

Alert to the need for visibility across large interior spaces, Krasner took her colors from Piet Mondrian: bright reds, yellows, and blues. Borrowing from Joan Miró and Jean Arp, she charged her shapes with signs of organic life and set them afloat in spaces roomier than any to be seen in her work from the Hofmann years. These studies have a panoramic feel. Before the end of 1940, she returned to that more familiar scale in a sequence of paintings legible as flowers and vases, cups and bottles, and other themes of Hofmannesque—originally Cubist—still life, but only if we insist. Krasner's images from this period are more comfortably seen as abstract: for every thrusting angle there is a curving counterthrust; every patch of red offsets a judiciously positioned patch of blue. Thoroughly worked out, these paintings are not calm; the artist's insistent brushwork loads them with bursts of jittery texture. She had arrived at the first stage of her mature work, as John Graham was quick to see.

Fortified by her inclusion in Graham's *French and American Painting*, she submitted a sketch for another Federal Art Project mural, this one planned for Studio A of radio station WNYC, on the twenty-fifth floor of the Municipal Office Building, in downtown Manhattan. Krasner's studies for this project have a new fluidity. The play of forms is nimble; connective lines are supple. Her proposal was accepted but never executed.

In May 1942, half a year after the United States entered the Second World War, the Federal Art Project morphed into the Graphic Section of the War Services Program. Krasner stayed on, not to paint murals but to lead a team in the design of nineteen department store window displays. The purpose was to promote war-training courses on cryptography, the chemistry of explosives, and other bellicose subjects. Suspending her disdain for commercial art, Krasner



Lee Krasner, *War Service Window Cryptography*, 1942

turned with ease from painting to graphic design. Interspersing photographs with text, abstract patterns, and expanses of flat color, she and her eight coworkers made well-informed use of Bauhaus design and Futurist typography. They took hints, as well, from Surrealist dream imagery and the visual polemics of Berlin Dada.

Krasner's team included Jean Xceron, Ben Benn, and several other accomplished abstractionists. Individual contributions went unrecorded, so we don't know who to credit for the embellishments that supply these window dressings with their mid-century zip; it is a fair guess, however, that none are the work of Jackson Pollock, the sole member of the group who received a personal invitation to join. Wrestling ever more anxiously with questions of how to paint, he could never have mustered the detachment needed for the solution of anything as impersonal as a design problem.

That fall, Krasner moved into Pollock's Eighth Street apartment. Reassigned to a mechanical drafting course, she spent her free time keeping house, fixing Pollock's meals, restraining his drinking, and trying, as ever, to improve his prospects. Manifestly talented in the studio, Krasner had also been a pugnacious participant in the conversations that shaped the downtown avant-gardists into a ramshackle community. In that small world, she had a high profile, and so friends were baffled when she dedicated herself not to her own but to Pollock's future. She, of all people, had not showed a penchant for self-erasure.

An old acquaintance of Pollock's, Wally Strautin, said that after the two painters began living together Krasner "never missed an occasion to talk about Jack's work, but she never mentioned her own." No one expected art talk from Pollock. Unless drunk, he was usually silent, a trait some inhabitants of this garrulous environment saw as a sign of intellectual deficiency. Krasner "was much brighter than he was and she ran his career," said Lionel Abel. "She thought the whole thing out from the beginning: how to put him over and make him a big success." "Lee was completely devoted to Jackson and his work," said Strautin. "Completely. That's why she gave up everything she had and everything she was."²⁸

KRASNER ECLIPSED: HER "BLACKOUT" PERIOD

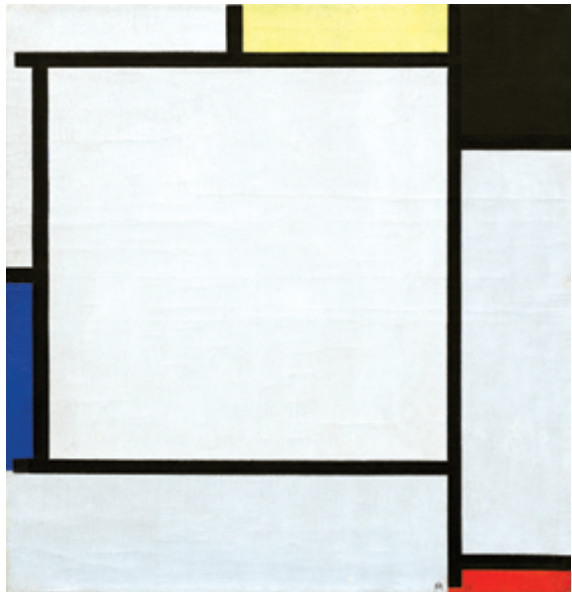
As her friends watched her vanishing into the character of Mrs. Jackson Pollock, Krasner remained, in her own eyes, a modernist painter. She had mastered the latest, most sophisticated varieties of pictorial space; her work had impressed John Graham and Mondrian, who praised a canvas of hers for its "strong inner rhythm"—an especially gratifying compliment to have received from an avant-garde hero with a connoisseur's taste for boogie-woogie.²⁹ Krasner had been on the high road to the modernist future. Then she met Pollock and her sudden certainty about his importance corroded all her prior certainties. How, she wondered, could Pollock—a follower of Thomas Hart Benton—be any good at all?

Sneering in a scattershot manner at everything from the Old World, Benton left some targets unscathed—most notably El Greco and Michelangelo, whose art supplied him with the elements of his quirky variation on traditional composition. Striving mightily to mimic his teacher's quirks, Pollock failed; nor did he find his own way to compose an image. If a Pollock painting from the 1930s hangs together, it is invariably derivative—a homage to Benton or, in the next decade, Picasso or Wassily Kandinsky. Beneath the stylistic approximations of Pollock's paintings churned intuitions his brush could not articulate. Nonetheless, Krasner saw him as a great artist in the making and so did Mondrian, who owed his first encounter with Pollock's painting to Peggy Guggenheim.

Sure that she liked art but not always sure of her taste, Guggenheim called upon advisors to buttress her judgments. For a Spring Salon, scheduled to open early in 1943, she recruited a jury featuring Marcel Duchamp, James Johnson Sweeney, and James Thrall Soby, who would later that year become the director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art. One morning, as she leaned pictures against the gallery wall, another member of the jury arrived. It was Mondrian, who paused before a small batch of Pollocks. Guggenheim rushed over and said, "Pretty awful, isn't it? That's not painting, is it?" Mondrian said nothing and she went away. When Guggenheim noticed that he was still absorbed, she returned and said, "There is absolutely no discipline at all. This young man has serious problems, and painting is one of them." To Guggenheim's surprise, he said, "I have a feeling that this may be the most exciting painting I have seen in a long time, here or in Europe." Mondrian acknowledged that Pollock's art "points in the opposite direction of my painting, my writing." Still, he saw "no reason to declare it invalid . . . Where you see 'lack of discipline,' I see tremendous energy."³⁰

Pollock did have a problem. His tremendous energy flailed, unguided by a strong sense of what a painting ought to be. Wrestling with an image, he would fall back on the expedient of aligning vertical forms with the vertical edges of the canvas. Or he occupied the center of the canvas with a reiteration of the frame: a rectangle within a rectangle. *Guardians of the Secret*, 1943, combines the two tactics in an image that settles for symmetry before it can arrive at the give-and-take of a well-made painting.³¹ Pollock's work from these years feels provisional, yet its imagery transfixes us. *The She-Wolf* is a maternal beast from the dark places of myth; and we are tantalized by the Guardians' secret, lost in the painterly stresses and strains that wrack the frames of these skeletal figures and overload the painting with flurries of illegible graffiti.

Most viewers were captured by Pollock's subject matter or retreated from his battles with form. Looking more deeply, Krasner had a unique—and frantic—hunch that he was stumbling, blindly, into new territory: space that could not be entered by following the step-by-step logic of modernist progress. Powerless to make any useful sense of this intuition, she felt stymied whenever she faced a canvas. Working and reworking her images, she ended up with fields of impacted emptiness—the "gray slabs" that accumulated from early 1943 to late 1945, an anguished interval she later called her "blackout" period.³²

LEFT: Pablo Picasso, *Man with a Violin*, 1911-12RIGHT: Piet Mondrian, *Tableau 2*, 1922

In Krasner's time, young modernist painters felt free—even obligated—to try a variety of styles. Progress, they believed, required ruts to be avoided and risks to be taken. Before joining Hofmann's circle, Krasner made realist and Surrealist paintings; she experimented with Giorgio de Chirico's "metaphysical painting" and Matisse's version of Fauvism. Mondrian haunts her mural studies, and in 1939–40 she painted a few canvases enough like his to qualify her as one of his American disciples. This versatility evaporated during her "blackout," as modernist precedents lost their allure and she could see no opening to the future. In 1975, Krasner told the art historian Cindy Nemser, "I was fighting to find I knew not what, but I could no longer stay with what I had."³³ What she had was Cubism, the style pared down by Hofmann to a short list of principles. Now she felt the need to "lose" it, to unlearn everything she had learned at Hofmann's school.³⁴ This was inconceivable. It meant jettisoning the high modernist seriousness certified by her mastery of Cubism's magisterial ambiguities.

More than three decades after Picasso unveiled *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907,

Cubism was still the master style of modernism, the culmination of all that Cézanne's late work implied and the stimulus for a parade of avant-garde variations: Futurism, Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism, and the starkly geometric style of Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg, and other members of their avant-garde phalanx, de Stijl. None of these later movements revamped the elements of picture-making as drastically as Cubism did. The agent of change was a brand of irony until then unknown in the art of painting. Earlier painters might treat their subjects ironically but never their means of depiction—as Picasso does in *Man with a Violin*, 1911–12, where lines at right angles may represent the man's shoulder or a portion of his chair. We can't be sure. Right angles echo one another across the canvas, sabotaging all hope of certainty. As Picasso's linear intent turns increasingly elusive, drawing disengages itself from the thing drawn; and modeling—the flow of light and dark tones—flattens into quasi-abstract passages that do little to furnish the man and his violin with rounded volume. Portraying this sitter's head, the painter multiplies points of view until perspective splinters into incoherence.

Picasso, Braque, and Juan Gris, the third major Cubist, were pictorial wits, tricksters at play in the fields of Western painting. Their playfulness has the serious consequence of turning drawing, modeling, and perspective into subject matter, giving them more salience than anything a painting might ordinarily be about. The focus shifts from ends to means, as the Cubists teach the medium to hold a mirror up to itself—to become, one might say, self-aware. Krasner, who lived through painting, felt this metaphorical self-awareness as her own. If she were to “lose” it, she would be not just a different artist but a new person. For painting has the power to shape not only a view of the world but a style of being. Direct evidence of this shaping power is thin, deducible only from the weight of the commentary on painting begun by a few early voices and maintained, in our time, by a vast and quarrelsome chorus.

WHAT WAS AT STAKE: A PAINTER'S DEVICES AND THEIR HISTORY

Wearied by art talk, we sometimes yearn for silence and this yearning gives birth to a persistent fiction. In *The Elements of Drawing*, the art critic and social visionary John Ruskin argued that, ideally, a painter brings to the world—and a viewer brings to a

painting—an “innocence of the eye.”³⁵ Deaf to critics, historians, and aestheticians, the innocent eye simply looks and what it sees has an authenticity denied the eye misled by sophistication. But this is just another fiction of isolated, hence pure, individuality. We learn to see, to make visual sense of the world, in the talkative company of others, a process that begins in infancy. There is no seeing innocent of social interaction any more than there is thinking apart from language.³⁶ When the philosopher Nelson Goodman says, “The eye always comes ancient to its work,” he means that our ways of seeing are shaped by a long history of intricately evolved and continuously exchanged ideas.³⁷ By the late 1930s, according to Clement Greenberg, Krasner had developed “the best eye in the country for the art of painting.”³⁸ His praise implies that she had, as well, the best mind for the subject. If art viewing is alert and informed, it is akin to thinking or even a kind of thinking, and Krasner wasn’t just good at it. She was brilliant. Through conversation with other artists and her acquaintance with a plethora of artworks, she assimilated a vast body of thought about her medium—not, of course, as a theoretician but in the practical, intuitive manner of an ambitious painter. A survey of that thought shows us what Krasner knew, all that underpinned her exalted vision of herself.

The commentary on painting begins with inconsistent accounts of the medium’s origin. Pliny the Elder, writing in first-century Rome, says that “line drawing” was invented by Philocles the Egyptian or possibly Cleanthes of Corinth. Never one to leave a good story out of his massive *Natural History*, Pliny also told of Kora, daughter of Butades the sculptor, who fell in love with her father’s apprentice. His training complete, the young man prepared to depart, pausing only long enough for Kora to make the first drawing: an outline of his shadow on a wall.³⁹ The image of course lacked modeling, a device not invented until a century later, by the Athenian painter Apollodorus.⁴⁰ Perspective, the pictorial ploy that lends credible shapes to buildings and other large volumes, first appeared in the backdrops Agatharchus painted for performances of Aeschylean tragedy, or so says the Roman Vitruvius in his treatise *On Architecture*.⁴¹

Drawing, modeling, perspective—all three are at work in medieval art, but without benefit of much critical reflection. The early Greek and Roman discussion of painting came back to life in the writings of Leon Battista Alberti, the scholar, painter, and architect, who, with a few others, put the city of Florence on the road to the High

Renaissance. Alberti's treatise *On Painting*—written first in Latin (1435), then rewritten in Italian (1436)—acknowledges his predecessors only in passing as he compiles a guide for painters who want their work to comport with the era's rejection of medieval taste. In the first book of *On Painting*, he fuses Euclidean geometry with then current theories of vision in a system of one-point perspective. Turning in the second book to drawing—or “circumscription,” in his Latinate style—Alberti recommends that it be done with a precision that does not attract attention to itself. If the outline of a form is too heavy, it will create the unsightly look of a crack in the surface of the painting.⁴² Of modeling he says that the distribution of light and dark tones must be managed with “all skill and care” to ensure that forms are seen “in maximum relief.” The eye needs to feel the full weight of an object or a figure.⁴³

Early writers made just a scattering of remarks on color, and the topic has only secondary interest for Alberti. Willing to admit that a wide palette is pleasing, he nonetheless remains suspicious of color because its sensual appeal puts it beyond the reach of concept. By contrast, drawing, modeling, and perspective invite his patient theorizing. Expanded and refined, often to the point of aridity, analysis in the Albertian manner shaped curricula in the academies of painting that proliferated throughout Europe after the Italian Renaissance—and throughout the New World during the nineteenth century.

Ancient or modern, avant-garde or traditional, Western painters share a purpose: to extract from the world's unstable appearances a stable image, internally unified and decisively enclosed by the edges of the canvas. An agitated subject or raucous style may obscure a painting's unity, yet we can always detect it or at least find signs of the artist's attempt to achieve it. For unity is vital to composition, Alberti's name for “that rule of painting by which the parts of the things seen fit together.” Since, as he declared, “the things seen” are to display “copiousness and variety,” composition is the harmonious organization of disparate elements.⁴⁴ Lacking that harmony, a painting fails. First made in antiquity, such judgments were still being made in Krasner's time. In the studio talk of the 1940s: a painting is no good unless its elements mesh, it has made peace with the frame, and—if the talker is a Hofmannite—the picture plane has no “holes” in it.

The Renaissance added the principles of compositional harmony to every cultivated European's bundle of intellectual equipment. Those whose positions required them to learn the etiquette of social hierarchy were expected to be equally



ABOVE: Nicolas Poussin, *Parnassus*, 1630-31
 BELOW: Paul Cézanne, *Bibémus*, c. 1894-9

sensitive to the formal hierarchy that structures a properly composed painting. By the middle of the nineteenth century, pictorial composition was such a familiar piece of cultural furniture that Victor Cousin, a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne, could sum it up in a phrase: “the precept of unity and variety.” Precepts are easily taught, and Cousin feared that the academy’s “artificial rules” had reduced the painter’s procedure to a predictable “arrangement of parts.”⁴⁵ The poet Stéphane Mallarmé considered the knack of composing a picture so commonplace that he felt obliged to defend Claude Monet and the other Impressionists from the charge of having acquired it. They sought, said Mallarmé, the visible truth, not the propriety of traditional structure; indifferent to compositional order, they ignored perspective and deprived the frame of its power to enclose the painted image.⁴⁶ This is avant-garde hyperbole. Distributing unity and variety in familiar ratios, Impressionist paintings are undeniably composed. Still, they rejuvenate the available models of composition with a limber verve that feels fresh and improvisatory even now.

Like the Impressionists, Paul Cézanne found his subjects in nuances of light and weather. Their focus on these phenomena was calm; his was fraught. By the 1890s, Cézanne’s determination to record the flickering transience of visual sensation had thinned his pigments to a weave of faint lines and translucent colors. This shimmering imagery led critics to group Cézanne with the Impressionists—a policy that distressed him, for he saw the Impressionists’ loosened-up compositions not as liberated but as inexcusably casual. Unyielding on the need for rigorous structure, Cézanne told the art dealer Ambroise Vollard that a proper painting would be “a Poussin made over according to Nature.”⁴⁷

“Nature” is the dappled onslaught that captivated the Impressionists—and Cézanne, too, though immersion in a landscape could push him to the edge of exhaustion. Resuscitation came only if he could subordinate natural contingencies to the rock-solid certitudes of Nicolas Poussin, the seventeenth-century master whose work epitomized the ideal of stable compositional order for a long line of connoisseurs, beginning with André Félibien, a court historian and friend of Poussin who praised the painter’s pronouncement that “in Musick the ear is not delighted but by a just agreement of different Voices or Sounds: So in Painting the eye is not charmed but by a fine Harmony of Colors and a just Agreement of all the parts with one another.”⁴⁸

Cézanne’s direct heirs were the Cubists, who downplayed “Nature” in favor of a

small segment of high-art culture: the historically sanctioned cluster of pictorial devices they converted into subject matter, but only after absorbing them in the historically sanctioned manner. Madrid's Royal Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1744. Picasso studied there for a short time a century and a half later. Georges Braque, too, received academic training during his two years at the School of Fine Arts in Le Havre. The third major Cubist, Juan Gris, began his higher education in the Department of Engineering at the Madrid School of Arts and Sciences. Put off by the subject, he left to study with José Moreno Carbonero, a celebrated realist in the elevated style of nineteenth-century history painting and a professor of drawing at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, in Madrid.

Equipped with the essentials, Gris left in 1906 for Paris, where he found work as an illustrator and political cartoonist. Drifting onto the city's bohemian margins, he met Braque and Picasso; by 1911 he had joined them in subjecting the art of painting to a steady barrage of inventiveness. The art historian John Golding called Cubism "the most important and certainly the most complete and radical artistic revolution since the Renaissance."⁴⁹ One thing survived this revolution intact: composition. No matter how shocking they were when new, Cubist paintings employ compositions as familiar, structurally, as their structures are sturdy. The pictorial foundations of these pictures are unapologetically traditional—and indispensable. As Krasner labored to "lose Cubism," she was not trying to move on from a certain style. She was trying to extricate herself from the long centuries of picture-making that Cubism encapsulated. To "lose Cubism," she would have to lose not only the Cubists but also Cézanne and Poussin and the whole, masterpiece-laden history of Western painting. She would have to lose Alberti—not Alberti the Florentine theorist, whose writings she never read, but all that he symbolizes as he links us to the classical past—and how could she possibly do that? It would mean jettisoning her art and with it her hard-won idea of herself.

ESCAPE FROM MANHATTAN

In 1977, I asked Krasner how life had been for New York's modern painters during the 1930s. The city had "no atmosphere then, no ambience," she said. "There was little support and few rewards. As an artist I felt like I was climbing a porcelain mountain."⁵⁰

She was not the only one to feel that way. Cubists were plentiful in America during the 1930s; even so, not a single American was chosen for *Cubism and Abstract Art*, a 1936 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Exasperated, a group of New York's abstractionists founded American Abstract Artists. Large shows of their work followed, accompanied by publications. Krasner joined AAA in 1939 and picketed the Modern with other members who felt they owed it to themselves and to America to convey their outrage at a museum determined, chiefly, to serve as a European beachhead in New York. Nothing changed. Curatorial interest in the work of American avant-gardists fluctuated from sporadic to nonexistent, and dealers followed the museum's lead. During the war years, a few doors opened; and yet, whatever Krasner might have hoped, Alfred Barr's willingness to purchase *The She-Wolf* did not inaugurate a Pollock market.

To scrape up an income, he spent a few months in 1943 decorating neckties and lipstick cases, then got a job at the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. Later renamed the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, it is now housed in Frank Lloyd Wright's spiral colossus on upper Fifth Avenue. In those days it occupied a small building on East Fifty-Fourth Street. Pollock served as an odd-job man; when required, he would run the elevator or lend a hand in the frame shop. Peggy Guggenheim rescued him from this tedium with the offer of a contract. He would receive one hundred and fifty dollars a month against future sales; if, at the end of a year, not enough had been sold to match these advances plus the gallery's commission, Guggenheim would be compensated in paintings. Still poor, Pollock and Krasner would nevertheless be free to paint full time.

With Pollock's first exhibition at Art of This Century scheduled for November 1943, Guggenheim made a habit of trumpeting her faith in his genius; and, as proof of her sincerity, commissioned him to provide a mural for the vestibule of her Upper East Side townhouse. To meet its purpose, the painting would have to be large—roughly eight by twenty feet. "It looks pretty big," wrote Pollock to his brother Charles, "but as exciting as hell."⁵¹ Pollock stretched the canvas, dithered in its vicinity for months, and then covered it in several sessions with a frieze-like composition of tall, quasi-abstract figures. Named, simply, *Mural*, 1943, it turned out on installation day to be too long for its intended place. That, anyway, is the legend. A close look at the painting does not support it, nor is there solid proof that, flummoxed by this glitch,



Jackson Pollock, *Mural*, 1943

Pollock wandered off in search of his patron's liquor cabinet, got drunk, and urinated in Guggenheim's fireplace. Yet he was certainly drinking too much and behaving very badly under the influence, and that has kept the story in circulation. It was, Krasner saw, imperative to remove Pollock from Manhattan, with its familiar bars and ample provision of fellow alcoholics. He resisted, unable to bear the thought of life anywhere but in the New York art world. It was here, he believed, that his battle with painting mattered, and here that he would glimpse, in the turmoil of his imagery, the path to triumph.

Born in Wyoming, Pollock and his four brothers grew up as farm boys, not cowboys, on a dreary succession of homesteads in Arizona and Southern California. Little in their upbringing explains why three of the five Pollock boys became painters. Cues may lurk in photographs of living rooms their mother Stella decorated with a late-Victorian plenitude of textures, patterns, and overwrought shapes. Guided by ladies' magazines and department store catalogs, she did what she could, given her husband's shiftlessness, to realize a domestic ideal.⁵² Late in life, she told a daughter-in-law that during her Iowa girlhood she wanted to study art but never found the chance.⁵³ Aesthetic aspiration colored Pollock's childhood, however spottily.

In 1928, Stella moved to Los Angeles with four of her children. The eldest, Charles, had left two years earlier to take classes with Thomas Hart Benton, at the Art Students League, in New York. Jackson entered Manual Arts High School as a sophomore and

became friends with two artists in the making—Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish. In 1930, he followed his brother Charles to New York and into Benton's classes. Kadish, too, had come to the city, where he and Pollock met and resumed their teenage friendship. Bookish and articulate, Kadish had the patience to gather from Pollock's sparse conversation how tenaciously painting possessed him.

Kadish and his wife, Barbara, spent August 1945 in a borrowed house in Springs, a village on the South Fork of Long Island. When the couple invited Pollock and Krasner for a weekend, they accepted—she more willingly than he. At the end of their visit, Krasner presented him with a plan: they would sublet their New York apartment and rent a house in Springs for the coming winter. After three days of rumination, Pollock said, no, they should buy a house and live there year-round. Apprehensive about the cost, Krasner let herself be persuaded and they soon found a house for sale on the stretch of Fireplace Road that curves along the shore of Accabonac Bay. To meet the \$5,000 price, they took out a \$3,000 mortgage and covered the rest with a loan obtained from Peggy Guggenheim after many visits from Krasner. Insisting at first that she couldn't afford it, Guggenheim gave in only on the condition that Pollock's contract be renegotiated. For the next two years, he would receive three hundred dollars a month, minus fifty dollars for repayment of the interest-free loan; in return, Guggenheim would receive Pollock's entire output, except for one painting a year.⁵⁴ His works were so hard to sell that Guggenheim had no good reason to accept this deal. Yet she did, explaining that "it was the only way to get rid of Lee."⁵⁵

When Krasner and Pollock arrived at the house on Fireplace Road, in late November, a violent storm was soaking eastern Long Island. "What an entrance!" said Krasner, long after Pollock's death in 1956. "The house was stuffed with the belongings of the people who had lived there. It was a rough scene. The barn was packed solid with cast iron farm tools. So it was a matter of cleaning everything out before either of us could work. In the meantime, Jackson took one of the bedrooms to try to paint in."⁵⁶ A water pump stood in the sink; there was no bathroom and no central heating. In winter, reliable warmth came only from the kitchen range. Life in Springs was strenuous but became easier in the fall of 1948, when Pollock stopped drinking.

THE ALLOVER IMAGE: “IS THIS A PAINTING?”

Before moving out of town, Krasner had ended her “blackout period” with a painting aptly named *Image Surfacing*, c. 1945. The image that surfaced is manifold. In the center, a tall cluster of curved and triangular forms half-conjures up a heroic figure—or a monstrous one. The eyelike oval floating where the figure’s head would be looks out at us with wicked intensity. To the right, smaller forms recall still life setups from Krasner’s days in Hofmann’s classroom. *Image Surfacing* is a composition of a kind she had constructed many times under his tutelage. Yet she was not backtracking.

This painting’s textures look hurried, as if Krasner were trying to rush past uncertainty, and its rough, repetitive outlines betray a hand in a state of panic. Fully able to have calmed herself and corrected the awkwardness of *Image Surfacing*, she let it stand in defiance of the competence that still gripped her, even after the long torment of the “blackout” years. Her weapons in this fight were painterly tics she may have learned from Pollock: the skittering flecks of color, the scraped and smeary passages that aggravate the unease of his *Stenographic Figure*, *The She-Wolf*, and *Pasiphaë*, 1943. With *Image Surfacing*, Krasner rescued herself from the finesse that had earned her the part of Hofmann’s best female student. Feeling the courage of her deliberately cultivated ineptitude, she was more than ready to plunge ahead. It was galling to have to spend a winter working with Pollock to make their house habitable.

After the snow melted, the barn was moved twenty yards to the north, opening a view to Accabonac Creek. Pollock now painted there, and Krasner took over the bedroom he had vacated. The first canvas she completed in these new circumstances was *Blue Painting*, 1946. Like *Image Surfacing*, this is a well-handled composition. Its diagonals, some developing into zigzags, engage one another in a game of balance and counterbalance; settling their differences, they preserve their drive. *Blue Painting* quivers with linear drama played out against a backdrop of dark red and blue pigment even more vigorously scumbled than the light grayish blue of *Image Surfacing*. Next came an untitled canvas thought by Ellen G. Landau, the art historian who compiled the Krasner catalogue raisonné, to have been made not long after January 1946. This work took Krasner beyond her familiar self. She had at last lost Cubism.

Destroyed for some unremembered reason, the painting is known only from a photograph taken by Herbert Matter; another, similar canvas from 1946 survives in

the same ghostly way. Each is a field of eddying texture, skittish and opaque. Pictorial incident is local, responsive only to its immediate environment. Composition is absent, and the same absence distinguishes the paintings in Pollock's *Sounds in the Grass* series. The most sumptuous, *Shimmering Substance*, 1946, is a tangle of arcing brushstrokes, white and bright yellow, accented with scattered spots of hot-red pigment. *Earthworms*, 1946, and *Eyes in the Heat*, 1946, are more sober in hue but just as animated. Like Krasner's untitled canvases from the same year, these seethe with impatience.

Cued by its title, we see eyes in the hovering ovals of *Eyes in the Heat*; and all the *Sounds in the Grass* paintings evoke the croaking, rustling, squirming vitality of a landscape only spottily cultivated. Yet the larger point has to do not with the natural world but with the nature of painting. For Pollock's and Krasner's canvases from this long moment present something utterly new—allover images. A bit of jargon coined in 1948 by Clement Greenberg, *allover* has become standard usage because it so concisely names the kind of imagery that appears when a painter dismantles the architecture of traditional composition.⁵⁷

Against Krasner's and Pollock's first allover canvases, composition's explicators would have brought a complaint of monotony—of failing to provide enough variety for the artist to organize under the aegis of a firm hierarchy, with small forms subordinate to large and all tensions resolved. Achieve that stability and you have devised a composition willingly confined by the edges of the canvas. Not just a convention handed down from ancient times, this rectilinear enclosure is the compositional premise that entails all the others: a first principle that allover images neither accept nor reject.⁵⁸ When it reaches the edge of a canvas, an image of this kind must stop, but not out of respect for the frame or for any reason inherent in its play of color and texture. It stops when it has no more canvas to cover. On a boundless surface, the image could, by its own sprawling logic, go on forever in every direction. Alloverness implies the infinite.

Painters don't always date their paintings, and when they do they usually affix a year but not a month. This means, as Landau notes, that "it is difficult to determine definitively who came up with the idea to create canvases comprised of open-ended juxtapositions of heavy, energetically applied patches of pigment."⁵⁹ In fact, no one can say whether Krasner or Pollock was the author of the first allover painting. Neither foretold it and there was a second only because the creator of the first had the



Lee Krasner, *Image Surfacing*, 1945



Jackson Pollock, *Shimmering Substance*, 1946

benefit of a shared understanding that, yes, this is a painting, not a color exercise or a decorative pattern but a painting of a radically new kind. Yet we can't know precisely how they arrived at their agreement that it had promise.

After Pollock's death, writers would ask Krasner about influence. Did she and Pollock see one another's work in progress? Did they discuss it, and, if so, what effect did their discussions have? This line of inquiry sometimes struck her as a dismissible nuisance. "We didn't talk art," she told an interviewer in 1964.⁶⁰ A few years later, she was more forthcoming:

We had an agreement that neither of us would go into the other's studio without being asked. Occasionally, it was something like once a week, he would say, "I have something to show you." I would always be astonished by the amount of work he had accomplished. In discussing the paintings, he would ask, "Does it work?" Or in looking at mine, he would comment, "It works" or "It doesn't work." He may have been the first artist to have used "work" in that sense.⁶¹

By the mid-1940s, they had come to rely on each other as they figured out what did and didn't work. For theirs was "a relationship of equals," as Krasner said in 1981, and the allover image might have died of doubt if they had not believed in it fully and together.⁶² Their conviction kept this new and unnamed thing alive when there was nothing else to protect it from the fully justified incomprehension awaiting it in the world beyond their studios. But why was it necessary for the two of them to believe in it? Isn't it possible that either Krasner or Pollock painted an allover image some time in 1946, saw on his or her own that it had potential and proceeded from there? Art critics and historians have been telling this story for more than seven decades. Naturally, they cast Pollock as the star, the heroic innovator, with Krasner tagging after in the supporting role of his first follower. As plausible as it seems, this scenario ignores an inescapable truth: artists do not innovate in isolation. Far from it. The new is the upshot of an individual's collaboration with others, present and past.

It is sensible but not sufficient to say that *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, is the first Cubist painting, for it became the basis of this new style only after Picasso and Braque found ways, in tandem, to exploit its possibilities. And those who made sense of their collaboration could do so only because Cubism, as it was generally called by 1911,

played variations on Western painting's heritage of pictorial devices.⁶³ Exasperated by crowds of obtuse viewers and under pressure from right-wing defenders of officially approved tradition, Picasso said, in 1923, that he and the other Cubists "stay within the limits of painting, never pretending to go beyond it. Drawing, design"—that is, composition—"and color are understood and practiced in Cubism as they are understood and practiced in all other schools."⁶⁴ This is at once true and disingenuous. Like every other band of avant-gardists, the Cubists refashioned centuries of precedent into something new, and yet their paintings were intelligible precisely because they revised precedent rather than abandoning it. Of course, Picasso was being coy when he said that Cubists employed their pictorial inheritance just as earlier painters had done. Granted, his compositions are as stable, in their complexity, as those of a neoclassicist like Jacques-Louis David. It was his play with modeling and perspective that shocked expectations early in the twentieth century and still vexes our sense of the way these devices work. Picasso's best Cubist paintings stay fresh but not fresh enough to disconnect them from the past that, on the artist's own account, provided them with their origins. Like every revolution in art, Cubism brought incremental change.

In early-seventeenth-century Italy, everyone who paid attention to painting agreed, roughly, on the proper way to send light through pictorial space. When Caravaggio suddenly dramatized the conventions governing light's depiction, some were enthralled, others formulated objections. Both reactions show that he had made himself understandable to his audience. The lesson of this episode is that new meanings emerge from older ones and they register, they become part of art history, through social interactions amplified by cultural memory. For Caravaggio's and the Cubists' innovations to count, these artists had to have been in communication with the past and with initiated viewers in the present. The figure of the solitary creator, prompted only by an inward vision, is an empty fiction. Connection with a milieu is indispensable. Nothing would mean anything to a person in absolute isolation—a state difficult to imagine. Even Kaspar Hauser, alone for years in a dark basement in Nuremberg, Germany, had the concept of "horse," a sign that someone at some time in his life had taught him what the word means.

As much a legend as a historical figure, Kaspar Hauser has been the subject of poems, novels, plays, and films, including Werner Herzog's *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*, 1974. He tends to play the part of an alienated being who generates

his understanding of the world and even language in solitude—a complement to the image of the self-sufficient genius whose creativity owes nothing to others or his surroundings. The persistence of this image works against an understanding that meaning is social, created and sustained as we interact with one another. For we are all like Kaspar Hauser in one respect: we need others to guide us as we connect words to things in the world. We also need to know how to arrange words into sentences, and here too others are helpful, for we take their talking as exemplary and learn from it how to talk on our own. A parallel process makes paintings comprehensible. Others' reactions teach us how to react, though we are not bound by the guidance they provide. Nothing prevents us from having an original response. But we would have no response at all if our imaginations were not shaped by, grounded in, a shared understanding of what paintings are and how they make whatever sense they do.

Among artists, this understanding is fuller and more deeply shared. Living a hermetic life in the south of France, the elderly Cézanne was sustained by all that he had experienced during his former life, in the Parisian avant-garde, and by the tradition he had learned, early on, from the paintings of Poussin. He was isolated in fact but not in memory. Long before John Ashbery wrote, "The academy of the future is opening its doors," Cézanne could imagine that, indeed, those doors were opening for him or soon would be.⁶⁵ His vision of his past and present gave him reason to believe, in his solitude, that he had a place in an art world that would, in time, find his late paintings compelling. For as difficult as many found these works when they were new, they arose in a lucid manner from a long and widely understood history. The first all-over painting did nothing of the kind.

We naturally would like to know who painted this canvas: Krasner or Pollock? Finally, it doesn't matter. What matters is that the painting did not emerge from history. It broke with history. It had no past and therefore no place in the pattern of precedents that make every new painting at least partially comprehensible. The meanings of artworks develop from interchanges between members of a well-prepared audience, yet there was no such audience for the first all-over painting—only Krasner and Pollock, and they could have been certain of nothing about this unprecedented image.

Whoever painted it, either might have asked, as Pollock asked Krasner in 1950, "Is this a painting?"⁶⁶ If neither asked the question in 1946, or not in those words, both would have felt doubt. For the answer to the question was "No." By standards in

force for two and half millennia, this was not a painting. It lacked drawing, modeling, perspective, and—the most significant lack—composition. With its colors wet and art history not yet aware of it, this object with no past would have had no future, no potential to mean anything, if there had not been a person other than the painter who could see its potential—who could stand in for the large, disparate audience to whom the new is usually addressed. The one who played the role of the ratifying audience became, in the process, the equal of the one who made the painting.⁶⁷ Something unforeseen had swum into view, something in need of elaboration. That this first allover painting led both Pollock and Krasner to paint more shows that they saw with a shared clarity that it worked. Their unanimity was essential, and thus they were the cocreators of alloverness.

THE ALLOVER IMAGE UNFURLS

Pollock once said that his skeins of flung paint “do not have a center but depend on the same amount of interest throughout.”⁶⁸ Talking about these paintings in 1950, Krasner came up with a useful phrase: “unframed space.”⁶⁹ Their colleague Clyfford Still was more bombastic. “To be stopped by a frame’s edge was intolerable,” he declared.⁷⁰ Of course, he had no choice but to tolerate this stoppage; paintings do, after all, have edges. To take his revenge on the intolerable, he covered his canvases with thick slabs of pigment that, to a speculative gaze, expand across the surface with a belligerent disregard for the logic of enclosure that fits an image within the frame. At stake for Still was freedom, for he saw in the devices of pictorial composition a “Euclidean prison.” Its power to constrain the painter must be “annihilated” so that he and his audience could be liberated from “the sterile conclusions of Western European decadence.”⁷¹

Still was driven to alloverness by an indiscriminately anti-European rage. Focusing his hostility, Barnett Newman beamed it at a band of Old World moderns: the geometric abstractionists epitomized by Piet Mondrian. If he could defeat this avant-garde hero, so widely admired by New York’s more subservient sensibilities, Newman would defeat European culture in its entirety and the war for American independence would be won. In 1960 he declared victory. “I’ve licked Mondrian,” he said, adding that he had “killed the diagram.” In less violent terms: Newman deployed elements

LEFT: Clyfford Still, *1951-T No. 3*, 1951RIGHT: Barnett Newman, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950-51

of Mondrian's geometric compositions in images that disassemble composition itself and thereby open fields of color to a force that, as it spreads, sweeps vision past any enclosure, actual or imaginary.⁷² That Newman's paintings look nothing like Still's is an obvious point with an important corollary: alloverness is tied to no one style or method or medium. It appears whenever an artist gives an image a restless, centrifugal energy indifferent to limits and disinclined to settle into stability. Not so much anti-compositional as non-compositional, the allover image took painting into regions unknown, unimaginable, in the world charted by traditional picture-making.

With the first allover paintings, Krasner and Pollock pulverized composition or, better yet, liquefied it, liberating the equalizing impulses that swirl over these new surfaces and dissolve every trace of hierarchal structure. With nothing subordinate to anything else, every detail, large or small, has the same import as every other. At this first, embryonic stage, little distinguishes her paintings from his. Soon they would diverge. Speeding up, the brushwork in Pollock's *Sounds in the Grass* canvases drives itself to a repetitiousness that vanishes only when he begins to drip and pour his paints. In contact with the canvas, he is hampered; when he breaks that contact, he puts himself back in control. As Pollock slung paint, Krasner invented ways to give the touches of her brush more definition. Paint still skids and drifts in *Noon*, 1947, and yet a family of new forms is being hatched: jostling dabs of color set off by semicircular strokes of white. This is alloverness in a jumpy mood. In an untitled canvas from 1946, hurried

flecks of white, orangey-red, and sky-blue crowd one another, acquiring a glint from minute striations left by the edge of the artist's palette knife. Allover texture seconds allover color in a field half-veiled by overlays of scratchy black pigment.

The substratum of Krasner's *Abstract No. 2* has the liquefied look of the first allover canvases. Across this blue and white field, the artist spreads an irregular lattice of black brushstrokes, then accents each one with wiry lines of creamy white paint. The date on the back of this painting, 1946–1948, suggests that Krasner began with a canvas from 1946 and overlaid it two years later in a manner not available to her until then. Covering the surface of *Shattered Color*, 1947, with dashes and drips of aquamarine, reddish brown, and white, she gives it the look of a neural network sensitive to light; or we could see it as breeding light out of its own intricacies. Color may be shattered, as its title states, but its texture weaves a dense and glowing web.

During the winter, Pollock heated the barn with a kerosene stove. Impossible to keep warm at that time of year, the second floor of the house was shut off. Displaced from her bedroom studio to the kitchen, Krasner had a long, cold season to simmer with annoyance at the lack of a suitable workspace. In the winter of 1947, Pollock proposed that she make some furniture. The household had almost none, and this project would keep her occupied until spring came and she could again paint upstairs. Krasner might have fumed at the assumption that the husband must of course continue painting while the wife sets down her brushes and attends to a domestic matter. Yet she had sacrificed her art to Pollock's before, and now she built a table.

From the junk cleared out of the barn, Krasner retrieved a wagon wheel rim, hand-forged from iron and forty-six inches in diameter; she then covered a wooden disc of the same size with a tight, staccato pattern of coins, keys, pebbles, fragments of seashell, and bits of tesserae—ceramic tile. To fix the pattern in place, Pollock poured concrete into the narrow gaps between



Lee Krasner, *Table*, 1947

its assorted elements. Improvising, Krasner had fabricated the first allover tabletop. A local ironworker supplied it with legs. The next year, she built another mosaic table. These objects were not merely functional. From Krasner's mosaics Pollock may have gotten the idea of embedding small objects in his pigments. A close look reveals gravel embedded in the scintillations of *Sea Change*, 1947. There are a few nails in *Magic Lantern*, 1947, and the tacks, buttons, keys, cigarettes, matches, and paint-tube tops caught in the vortex of *Full Fathom Five*, 1947, conjure up a half-emptied drawer in a fully abandoned house.

The patterns of Krasner's tabletops swirl in sympathy with their curving, circular outlines. Returning to the canvas, with its squared-away edges, Krasner covered it with squared-away forms: painted counterparts to rectangular specks of color in her mosaics. Arranging them in rows, she produced gridded images—and unintentionally led commentators into a persistent confusion. Historians of avant-garde painting often talk of the Cubist grid, a catchall name for the patterns of horizontal and vertical lines that materialized as Cubism evolved, in 1911–12, toward abstraction. Braque and Picasso had no intention of reaching that goal. Far more doctrinaire, Mondrian, Van Doesburg, and their fellow utopians in de Stijl saw it as a historical imperative to be obeyed at once. It's not the only thing to be said about their paintings of the 1920s, but we could describe them as distillations of the Cubist grid and therefore compositions: balanced arrays of disparate parts.

Also gridded and compositional are the paintings made in the late 1940s by Adolph Gottlieb, a friend of Krasner's and Pollock's. Gottlieb gave every grid compartment unique proportions that blend harmoniously with the larger configuration. Thus his grids resemble Krasner's no more than do those of de Stijl. For she builds hers by placing nearly identical forms side by side, in row after slightly irregular row, until she exhausts the surface. There is no focal point, no principle of containment, and no recognition of the edge as anything but a physical fact. These are not compositions but allover images, and so different from Pollock's that only a few writers have ever applied the word to them. Krasner called them "hieroglyphic," as good a name as any for grids inflected by flourishes of paint that come to rest at the border where writing—or calligraphy—meets painting. These comprised the third series of Little Image paintings, a label the artist applied first to *Noon* and other "touch" paintings and next to such "drip" paintings as *Shattered Color*.

The hieroglyphs of Krasner's *White Squares*, 1948, interlock with the grid compartments that contain them: angled forms within angled forms in a pattern that draws us close, to follow the blips in her poured line, and then invites us to withdraw to a distance that reveals the allover sweep of this small painting. Only twenty-four inches high by thirty inches in width, it is an object lesson in the difference between size and scale. One is verifiable—all you need is a tape measure—whereas the other calls on the imagination. Left free to wander in the lively labyrinth of *White Squares*, vision invests it with the power to reach far beyond the edges of the canvas. Even if it is not always conscious, this inventive sort of seeing gives our experience of this painting a heady lightness. Nothing in it impedes or confines us. In 1949, Krasner reprised her tables with *Stop and Go*, 1949–50, the only tondo she ever painted. Mixed with its angled hieroglyphs are circles and spirals: miniaturizations of the circular frame. Always restless, never willing to relax into a signature style, Krasner used all three Little Image methods to bring *Continuum*, 1947–49, to completion. Its first layer is a field made of color touches. The second is dripped, and the top layer spreads hieroglyphs edge to edge. But these forms are minuscule now and the grid has been submerged in texture. *Continuum* is an allover evocation of darkly glittering light.

QUESTIONS OF PRECEDENCE: SOME STUBBORN CONFUSIONS

Shifting from one method to another, often mixing two or three in a single painting, Krasner typified the 1940s, a time of incessant experimentation. New means of making a painting would lead the medium into fresh territory, or so the Surrealists insisted, and sometimes a new technique was taken for genuine innovation. In 1944 Peggy Guggenheim exhibited paintings by Janet Sobel, an art-world outsider whose drip method prompted Clement Greenberg to state in 1961 that these were “the first really ‘all-over’” images he had ever seen. This was awkward because the critic had made his reputation, in large part, by glorifying Pollock as the sole progenitor of alloverness. The critic said that Pollock, too, had admired Sobel's drip paintings, if only “furtively,” and “later admitted that these pictures had made an impression on him.”⁷³

Greenberg's recollection may not be reliable. It appeared in a revised version of a 1955 essay that disappeared when the original essay was republished in his collected



Jackson Pollock, *Magic Lantern*, 1947



Jackson Pollock, *Sea Change*, 1947



Lee Krasner, *Abstract No. 2*, 1946



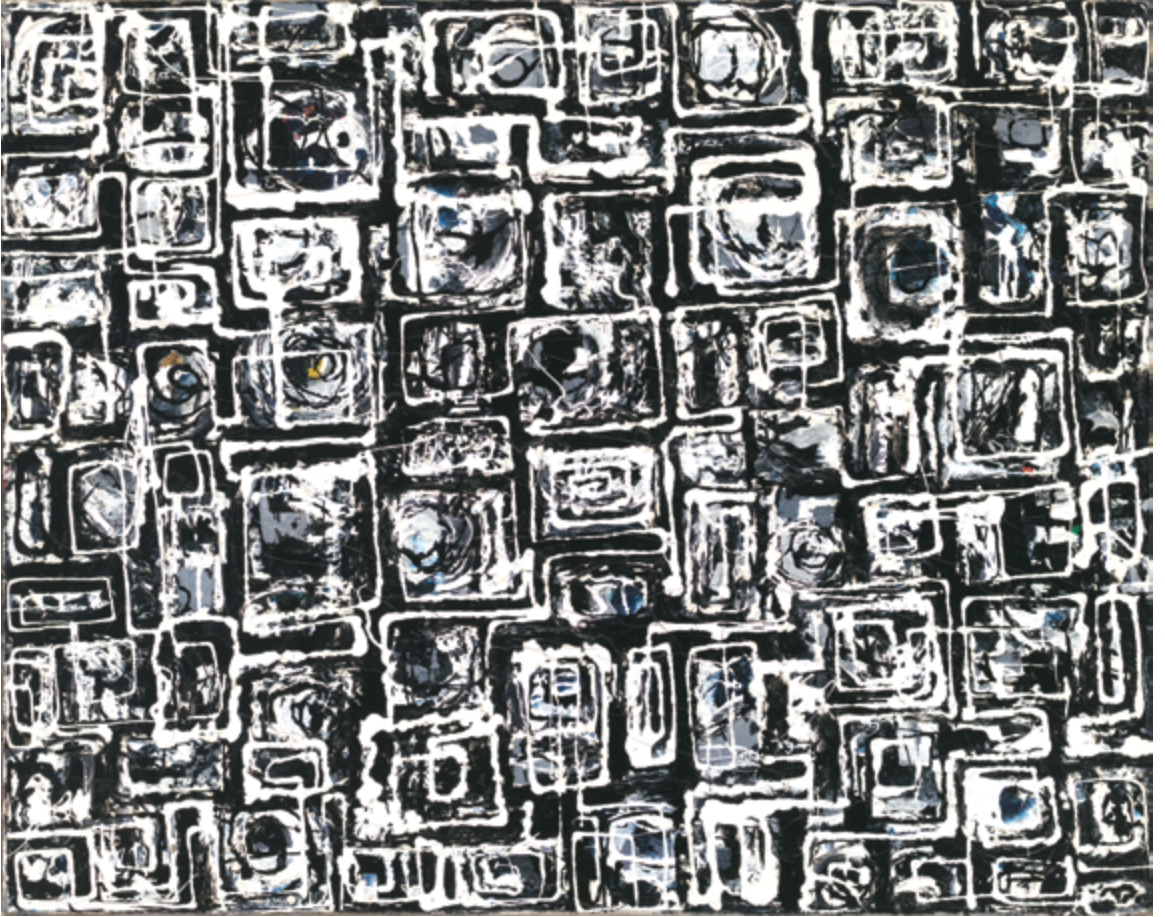
Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1946



Lee Krasner, *Shattered Color*, 1947



Lee Krasner, *Noon*, 1947



Lee Krasner, *White Squares*, 1948



Lee Krasner, *Stop and Go*, 1949-50



LEFT: Janet Sobel, *Untitled*, 1946
 RIGHT: André Masson, *Painting (Figure)*, 1926-27

works. His talk of Sobel lets us surmise, at most, that he felt—for a time—the need to hedge his account of Pollock’s originality. Greenberg could do this with a certain plausibility because, of all the new methods that popped up in the 1940s, paint dripping had the most practitioners—and the strongest theoretical credentials, rooted as it was in the doctrine of automatism promulgated by André Breton in his first *Surrealist Manifesto*, 1924. Uninhibited by conscious intention, said Breton, the hand would write poems or draw pictures at the bidding of the unconscious; bypassing tradition, style, and any concern for the audience’s expectations, the creator would tap primordial energies.⁷⁴

Among the New Yorkers who gave automatism a try were William Baziotes, Gerome Kamrowski, and Robert Motherwell, on whom the method had a career-long effect. And we feel automatist energies in the painterly webs spun by Pollock

and Sobel. That these two painters shared a method does not mean, however, that they both made allover images. Nor did the Surrealist André Masson become an allover painter when, prompted by Breton's *Manifesto*, he dripped lines and patches of glue on his canvases and sprinkled them with sand. The results have a flagrantly improvisatory feel and yet the proprieties of composition persist. In Masson's *Painting (Figure)*, 1926-27, for instance, quick indications of the human form acknowledge the frame with a casual willingness. That painting's four-sided enclosure might be challenged seems never to have occurred to Masson or any of the Surrealists. Leaving pictorial structure undisturbed, they jostled one another in the scramble for alternatives to traditional technique. Max Ernst followed his peculiarly Surrealist collages with experiments in decalcomania. Next, he pierced the bottom of a can, filled it with paint, and oscillated it above a canvas. This was the quasi-mechanical procedure that supplied an Ernst painting from 1942, *The Bewildered Planet*, with its images of orbits—loopingly linear patterns that fit nicely within the painting's well-proportioned compartments. For this is a proper composition, as are the Hans Hofmann paintings from 1942 and '43 that feature incidents of dripped pigment.

Hofmann was so reluctant to show his work that Pollock or Krasner probably did not see his early-'40s dripping in the years before they began to drip paint themselves. Yet they may well have known of Ernst's oscillatory method. He arrived in New York in 1941 and the following year demonstrated his new method at Betty Parsons's gallery. And it is certain that Pollock and Krasner saw calligraphic paintings by Mark Tobey at the Willard Gallery in 1944. Tobey's "white writing," as he called it, is often dubbed "allover," understandably so, for it fills the canvas with a dense cloud of bright lines. Nonetheless, these marks are always oriented to the edges of the canvas—not precisely, as in a Mondrian, but with slight variations from the horizontal and the vertical that set up a subtle and self-contained rhythm. Composition persists, however elusively.

In the various origin stories of the allover image, Tobey's place is sometimes taken by Joan Miró, who showed his *Constellations* at the Pierre Matisse Gallery, on Fifty-Seventh Street, in 1945. This was an exhibition Pollock, Krasner, and their friends would not have missed. Miró was among those European avant-gardists whose work was often reproduced in art magazines New Yorkers faithfully read, and now he had taken a sudden leap, from his usual clusters of quirkily biomorphic forms, to patterns of smaller, simpler shapes strung, like beads, on thin, wiry lines. William Rubin, a



ABOVE: Max Ernst, *The Bewildered Planet*, 1942
 BELOW: Mark Tobey, *Lines of the City*, 1945

curator at the Museum of Modern Art, called the *Constellations* allover paintings and, as with Tobey's "white writing," this interpretation has a superficial plausibility.⁷⁵ You can see why Rubin would find alloverness in these images, especially as a curator at an institution inclined to find continuities between European and American art—in this case, between Miró and Pollock. Still, Rubin is in error. *The Beautiful Bird Revealing the Unknown to a Pair of Lovers*, 1941, a *Constellation* in the Modern's collection, is rife, after all, with the shifts in size and, consequently, with the hierarchical arrangement that gives a composition its stability. As compositions go, this one is extremely—you could say, wittily—loose-limbed and yet it resides comfortably within the frame. Moreover, Miró acknowledges the frame explicitly by sending small forms to march single file along three of the painting's four edges. Janet Sobel does something comparable in an untitled canvas from 1946.

This is a dripped painting with more than a passing resemblance to the ones that Pollock made with a similar method a year later—*Full Fathom Five*, 1947, for example, and *Lucifer*, 1947. Yet his hand is more resourceful than hers and the space in his paintings is more subtly ambiguous. More than that, his imagery is expansive, while Sobel's is the opposite: a field of splashed color contained by red drips running parallel to the painting's edges. Establishing a frame within the frame, these spattered lines double the effect of enclosure and make it impossible to call this an allover painting. But might not these spatterings win Sobel a place among the first-generation Abstract Expressionists?

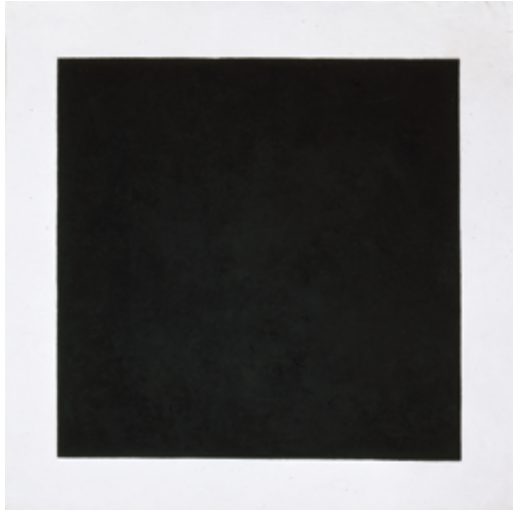
The answer to that question depends on the way you define Abstract Expressionism, a label designating one of a large, milling crowd of "essentially contested concepts," as the philosopher W. B. Gallie calls them. To make a short story of Gallie's long and intricate argument, a concept of this kind emerges when its definition rests on matters of taste and belief that no rational analysis can resolve. He draws his main examples from religion, politics, and, of course, art.⁷⁶ The very idea of "Abstract Expressionism" has remained unresolved ever since Robert M. Coates applied the label to canvases by Hans Hofmann and a few others working in New York in the mid-1940s. He also called them proponents of "the daub-and-spatter school of painting."⁷⁷ By virtue of Sobel's tangled, sometimes splashy patterns of color, David Anfam included her in *Abstract Expressionism*, an exhibition he curated for the Royal Academy, London, in 2016.⁷⁸ There is no knockdown argument against Sobel's

inclusion and we have noted the stylistic resemblances that support it. Yet Abstract Expressionism's house is rambling. In one wing are the grandly contemplative paintings of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko; in another, the gestural urgency of Willem de Kooning and Philip Guston. It seems to me that "Abstract Expressionist" cannot be understood simply as the name of a style. I believe that it functions as a net to catch a flock of artists who stuck together for reasons more personal than stylistic. Newman, the grand geometer, and his wife, Annalee, were close to the painterly Krasner and Pollock; moreover, it was stylistic difference, not affinity, which drew Pollock and de Kooning into their deep, contentious friendship.⁷⁹ It looks as if the only thing the Abstract Expressionists had in common was an ambition, a sense of destiny, that grew in grandeur, even grandiosity, as their community grew more closely knit.⁸⁰ Because Sobel did not belong to this community, I don't see her as an Abstract Expressionist of the first or of any generation.

More important, Sobel's dripped paintings bear not at all on the invention of the allover image; nor does her untitled painting from 1946 work as a composition, for the symmetrical form visible through its veil of drippings—a large "X"—lacks the formal complexity that composition demands. In her *Milky Way*, 1945, symmetry belongs to a zigzag reaching from the lower to the upper edge of the canvas. Like her "X," this is an instance of the pictorial structure dubbed a *unitary image* when it showed up in certain Pop paintings and, a season or two later, in the Minimalist cube. Images of this kind are too uniform to qualify as compositions and they fit too nicely within the frame to be credited with alloverness. Likewise, Kasimir Malevich's *Black Square*, 1915, is not the allover image some have called it but an early instance of a unitary image.

A thirty-one-by-thirty-one-inch patch of solid black pigment on a white background, *Black Square* attained, in the artist's words, "the zero of form."⁸¹ For he purged this painting of all references to the world and everything else that might dilute its purity. *Black Square* is so very blank I'm not sure it should be called a painting, even though it and three later versions consist of paint on canvas. In all his other work Malevich shows himself to be a master of compositional structure, nowhere more impressively than in the Suprematist paintings that evolved, formally, from Futurism, an Italian movement that evolved from the Cubism that evolved from the late paintings of Cézanne, and so on, back to Poussin and, before him, to the Renaissance, with compositional balance in evidence at every step along the way—and in Malevich's

White on White, 1918, a drastically austere and delicately stabilized exercise in reconciling figure with ground. Presenting no figure-ground relationships nor any internal structure, *Black Square* is less a painting than an emblem; or we could see it as an icon drained of all religious import and filled, instead, with Malevich's thoroughly secular "feeling of non-objectivity"—his intuition of Being prior to its separation into the discrete things that provide representational painters with their subjects.⁸² The iconic or even logo-like nature of *Black Square* led Malevich to sign his later, figurative paintings with a small black square. Inexhaustibly significant as it is, this work does not prophesy the allover image. Nor does *Overall Composition*, a canvas Pollock painted at some point between 1934 and 1938.



Kasimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915

A field of quick, jumpy jabs of pigment, *Overall Composition* looks at first glance like a near cousin to Pollock's *Sounds in the Grass* paintings of 1946. However, those paintings have an allover liveliness and this one is inert, a field of black and white brushstrokes careful not to challenge the boundaries of the canvas. To lock his image onto the surface, Pollock sends touches of yellow along the upper edge; an even streak of black performs the same function along the lower edge. Scattering bits of red over the surface, he tries to give the painting some compositional life, but nothing coalesces. Its title notwithstanding, *Overall Composition* is neither a successful composition nor expansive enough to earn a place amid Pollock's allover paintings—or even to offer a hint of alloverness to come. An anomaly in an early career replete with them, it leaves the way open for Janet Sobel to be nominated, time and again, as the allover image's unsung inventor.

Sobel was not the first painter to flick pigment onto a canvas, yet her results look enough like Pollock's to keep a nagging question alive: Is Pollock truly as original as critics and historians have been claiming for more than seven decades? Should Sobel

be put in his place? The question evaporates the moment we see that method does not entail structure. Painters can drip paint and not make allover paintings (Sobel, Hofmann); likewise, they can make allover paintings without dripping (see, for instance, some of Jasper Johns's *Crosshatch* paintings). Still, we might be tempted to see Sobel, Miró, Tobey, Pollock, and Krasner as hovering together on the verge of alloverness, each poised to sail into a previously unimagined future. But Tobey and Miró were superb composers; there is no warrant for supposing that they wanted to make allover images but just couldn't manage it. Nor is there any reason to think that Sobel itched to break free of her symmetries. As sensible as it is to assume that these painters made an impression on Krasner and Pollock, we can't know how that impression worked on them, how it unsettled their ideas of what a painting might be. In tracing artists' relations to one other and their times, patterns of cause and effect are convenient but misleading. Ultimately, the origin of the allover image is unfathomable. Yet there is an intimation of that origin in an art-world confrontation that writers have recounted, in recent years, as often as stories of Pollock's drunken shenanigans.

RELOCATING NATURE

Never reluctant to give unwanted advice, Hofmann once told Pollock that he should "work from nature." Quick on the uptake for once, Pollock snapped back, "I am nature."⁸³ It is not known for certain where this exchange took place, in his New York studio or on the beach at Provincetown, Massachusetts. The dialogue is better remembered than its setting because it sums up so succinctly two vehemently opposed views of what it is to paint. The idea that the painter works from nature was far from fresh. Greeks of the classical period understood art as an exercise in *mimesis*, a word routinely translated as "the imitation of nature"—though caution is needed here. An artist's "imitation" is not merely a copy of some portion of the external world; it is a representation of a subject in some mode or manner that registers a response to observed phenomena.⁸⁴ If Pollock is nature, he has no need to observe anything; he works from within. He never explained what it meant to do this, and Krasner got at the matter negatively, by recalling all that she left behind when she stopped painting in the familiar way—when, in her words, she finally managed to "lose Cubism."

Looking back, she saw that Cubism “separated me from nature, as the Renaissance concept of space separated me from nature. At Hofmann’s, in this sense, there was still the Renaissance sense of space—which means that I, the artist, was *here* observing nature *there*, and making my comment.”⁸⁵ Removing the distance between *here* and *there*, Krasner and Pollock collapsed the distinction between observer and observed. This distinction posits the painter as a creator-god with the power to stand apart from the natural world, to extract portions of its plentitude and reassemble them in a new world of pictorial harmony. The superiority of observer to observed, of artist to nature, is the premise; its corollaries are those patterns of subordination that bring a well-composed painting to its resolution. Godlike creativity engenders transcendent beauty. Coming down to earth, Krasner and Pollock acknowledged nature’s presence in themselves. Working from within, they let their experience of shifting light and spatial instability revise all they knew about their medium. And thus they moved beyond compositional hierarchy to the allover image.

In Krasner’s “hieroglyphic” paintings, bursts of thin, writerly line move over the canvas with the urgent refinement of thoughts pursuing their implications into limitless space. As a group, these works are delicate but too clearly impelled by unwavering intent to look in the least bit fragile. Yet no generalization about her work holds, not, at least, after she escaped the gray uniformity of her “blackout period” and recaptured her versatility. The lines in an untitled “hieroglyphic” painting from 1950 are thick, not thin—assertive, not refined. Circles and rectangles bump against one another, distorting outlines and disassembling the grid that always seems about to coalesce. From a distance, not one of this painting’s shapes clicks into a stable rapport with any of the others. Up close, small things—flicked pigments and rough textures—catch the eye as powerfully as large ones and the feeling of flux intensifies.

This painting is in perpetual motion, not literally, of course, and yet scanning and rescanning the image reconfigures it, for it is too complex to be memorized. A composition, by contrast, is a mnemonic device, like a rhyme scheme in a traditional poem: a clear structure designed to come to mind quickly and whole. An allover image’s zone of contingency and openness, of shifting, even ungraspable possibility, makes a virtue of the uncertainty that goes into its making. At times, uncertainty felt onerous, and there is evidence that Pollock suffered from it more strongly than Krasner did.



Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1950

Usually, he would cut a length of canvas from a roll and launch himself into a new painting. Sometimes he would address only a portion of a long strip, leaving room for another painting—or several more. When he had finished them, he faced a hard question: How, exactly, were they to be separated? In 1969, Krasner told the writer B. H. Friedman that Pollock would call on her at this point. “He’d ask, ‘Should I cut it here? Should this be the bottom?’ He’d have long sessions of editing, some of which I was in on, but the final decision was always his.” And it was always a tough decision, for there was “no absolute top or bottom.”⁸⁶ Friedman’s journal entry for January 21, 1969, tells of talking with Krasner on the phone about “changes she wanted in my interview with her, each a further clarification of clarifications made during previous calls. And yet, despite the nuisance of all these re-re-revisions, I appreciate her caring so much. Almost every change has been self-diminishing, a lessening of her role in relation to Jackson and an enlargement of his as they decided which side of a painting was the top, what margins to retain, if any, etc.”⁸⁷

Nothing in an allover painting is absolute, perfected, settled. It is a habitat well suited to the uncertainty exposed by the question: “Is this a painting?” When Pollock



Jackson Pollock, *Lavender Mist: Number 1*, 1950

uttered this plaintive query about the just completed *Lavender Mist: Number 1*, 1950, he wasn't asking after the quality of the work, good or bad, but its status: Did it count as a work of art? Yes, but in a new way. When a painting's scale and depth are mutable, when a small event looks negligible one moment, pivotal the next, we are left to gather from these fluctuations that the meaning of the image originates in its contingency.

For the first few years after Krasner and Pollock found their way to distinctive versions of alloverness, it remained their exclusive property. A readily available option in later decades, it faced every painter with the same question: To compose or not to compose? Or rather: Is it better to fit an image to the frame's enclosure or to fill it with pictorial forces that treat the frame as incidental? To choose composition is to connect with centuries of tradition. The other choice leaves the past behind; for the allover image, this American invention, is still new when viewed against the backdrop of art history. America is also new, in comparison with China, say, or India, and Americans habitually claim newness as a virtue.

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM: “NOTHING OF EUROPE HERE”

When the naturalist John Burroughs described Walt Whitman as “the Adamic man reborn here in the 19th century,” he meant that the poet, an archetypal American, was innocent; furthermore, that American innocence confers the strength to explore, to innovate, to shape a future unfettered by oppressive precedent.⁸⁸ To choose alloverness is to align oneself with this ideology of the new, at times unthinkingly, though Donald Judd, for one, did so by clear design. Asked in 1964 why he wanted to rid his art “of any compositional effects,” he explained: “Those effects tend to carry with them all the structures, values, feelings of the whole European tradition. It suits me fine if that’s all down the drain.”⁸⁹

And it suited James Russell Lowell, who proclaimed, in his “Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 21, 1865”: “Nothing of Europe here.”⁹⁰ America’s first freedom was its extrication from the Old World, a process not as thorough as Lowell suggests. He inherited the form of his “Ode” from the Greek poet Pindar; likewise, American painters in his time constructed their images with guidance from European predecessors, first among them the seventeenth-century French landscapist Claude Lorrain. And composition persists. It is so integral to our culture that there was never any question of it disappearing under pressure from Krasner’s and Pollock’s innovation. Alloverness was radical but not all-conquering.

Just to show that he could, Willem de Kooning made one allover painting: *Excavation*, 1950. Its angles are springy; lines stretch and become curves that feel to the eye like muscles flexed or voluptuously relaxing. Certain slits in the painting’s fleshy surface are evidently mouths; others may be female genitalia. This is a big painting, over eight feet wide. Across its surface, allusions to the body proliferate and turn topographical; supple flesh becomes fluid, like watery clay, and spreads in currents churned by remnants of anatomy. After his fling with alloverness, de Kooning returned to the virtuosic compositions that led Greenberg to call him a “late Cubist.”⁹¹ Most members of Abstract Expressionism’s second generation mimicked de Kooning’s painterly gestures and employed without much reflection the usual means of structuring an image. In the 1950s, composition flourished on East Tenth Street, where a row of new galleries stretched from Third Avenue to Fourth. Housed in storefronts, run by the artists on their rosters, the Tenth Street galleries were nonprofit enterprises



Willem de Kooning, *Excavation*, 1950

modeled on uptown dealerships. Here a painter without a Fifty-Seventh Street gallery could mount a show and, with luck, attract a reviewer's attention.

By 1959, de Kooning's painting had proliferated in such abundance that Thomas Hess, the editor of *Art News*, asked writers and artists: Is there a new academy?⁹² Answers were subtle and, in the main, evasive. No one wanted to admit that New York painters had fallen into academicism, yet it was hard to deny that a rather standardized idea of abstract painting had taken hold. Al Held, one of the few younger painters to resist, loaded his canvases with dense, dark brushstrokes in all-over patterns. Transposing Pollock into a quasi-representational mode, Alex Katz sent streaks and dabs of color afloat in patterns evoking flowers and foliage. And Sam Francis, a Californian working in Paris, laid on watery, luminous pigments in blithely non-compositional images. Mostly, though, the early history of alloverness took art to regions beyond the boundaries of painting.

Allan Kaprow, a Hofmann student, had an epiphany toward the end of the 1950s: a painting is not just paint on canvas; it is the outcome of actions constrained by certain conventions. Disenchanted by these constraints, he judged that it was no longer necessary for anyone to be a painter of any kind—or a sculptor, for that matter. One could be, simply, an artist. Pollock, he said, “had used the confines of the canvas” as the “limit to an intrinsically limitless form,” and now the time was ripe for bursting through those confines.⁹³ Let the painter’s two-dimensional forms be free to elaborate themselves in the three dimensions of the gallery and beyond, in the unbounded ocean of space. Kaprow made the allover field the premise of a new medium: the Happening, a scripted event that mingles people and objects in shifting, widely spaced locales. After Happenings guided art out of the gallery, into the streets, Earthworks ushered art out of the city, into the Western deserts.

As they conceived and constructed huge outdoor works of art, Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson flirted with alloverness but only Walter De Maria embraced it. On the high plains of western New Mexico, he installed four hundred aluminum poles in a grid pattern measuring one mile by one kilometer. Begun in the early 1970s and completed in 1977, this is *The Lightning Field*, named for the lightning strikes it attracts. The poles vary from fifteen to almost twenty-seven feet in height, an adjustment to the uneven terrain that brings their tips into alignment with a horizontal counterpart to the picture plane and thereby inspires a comparison: just as an allover painting could, hypothetically, extend in every direction forever, so too could *The Lightning Field*. De Maria’s earthwork transfers alloverness from pictorial space to real space; and his grid aggrandizes the Minimalist kind—Sol LeWitt’s *Modular Structure*, 1966, for example. A wooden framework of thirty-six open cubes arranged in six rows of six, this allover object is a sculptural equivalent to Krasner’s “hieroglyphic” paintings and Pollock’s big canvases of the late 1940s.

All the Minimalists fabricated grids and some made serial pieces: evenly spaced sequences of identical forms that end only by arbitrary fiat. Their formal tactics had a deliberate purpose: to prevent the “hierarchies” one sees when a sculpture is “composed,” as Judd put it in “Specific Objects,” his Minimalist manifesto of 1965.⁹⁴ In unacknowledged sympathy with the Minimalists, Andy Warhol blotted canvas after canvas with rows of Marilyn Monroe faces, identical except for glitches the artist invited with his slapdash silk-screening process. Cultivating the technical limitations



LEFT: Walter De Maria, *The Lightning Field*, 1977
RIGHT: Sol LeWitt, *Cubic-Modular Structure*, 1966

of the medium, Warhol displaced the allover image from the rarefied precincts of abstraction to Pop Art's deadpan carnival of consumerism and celebrity worship.

Feminist theory hit the art world hard in the 1970s—not a moment too soon, said Krasner, who added that any woman artist claiming to have suffered no gender discrimination should “have her face slapped.”⁹⁵ Many women campaigned for better representation in museums and galleries; some welcomed the decorative into their art, in defiance of the supposition that painting is high and decoration is low. Resting as it does on the premise that high art is male, while mere decoration is by nature a female enterprise, the painters Joyce Kozloff and Valerie Jaudon rejected this stratification with an energizing sort of fury. During the 1970s they pieced together allover images from variations on architectural ornament, Western and Islamic, while Miriam Schapiro, Cynthia Carlson, and Jane Kaufman found motifs in floral prints, wallpaper, and quilts. Other artists followed parallel paths, converged as kindred spirits, and in the mid-seventies launched a new art movement: Pattern and Decoration.

Never a strictly defined label, it fastened itself to about three dozen artists; many were men and all were happy to have rescued the allover image from the bravura of the New York School's heroic first generation. Crowding their work with the patterns and textures of ordinary life, these artists changed the tenor of American

art. Alloverness and Pattern and Decoration were made for each other; and yet, as close as such alliances may be, they are never exclusive; in 1979 alloverness migrated to the hulkingly macho patterns of broken plates Julian Schnabel attached to his early paintings. Since then, the allover field has led a ramifying life, lending its openness to a wide range of work, with the proliferating clarity of Allan McCollum's *Surrogate Paintings* at one extreme and, at another, the clutter of Thomas Hirschhorn's installations.

A McCollum *Surrogate* is flat and right-angled; it has not only a frame but also a picture plane: a field of black enamel that gives the object a family resemblance to Malevich's *Black Square*. Hung on the wall, it stands in for any and all paintings in whatever style; and if we are troubled by the puzzles posed by this or that style or by style in general, a *Surrogate Painting* solves them all, for it is styleless, unless this denial counts as a style of abstention. Alone, one of these objects would present a unitary image. McCollum, however, shows them in clusters. His *Collection of Forty Plaster Surrogates*, 1982, covers a sizable portion of any wall where it is installed. Nothing in the arrangement of its parts dictates that there be forty of them rather than fifty or a hundred; like an allover painting, this *Collection* could, in principle, multiply in every direction—upward, downward, to the left, to the right. The currents of alloverness flowing through McCollum's oeuvre prompted him, in 1987, to make over ten thousand small, nearly identical objects of plaster, paint each one the same yellow, and nestle them like pebbles on roughly four hundred square feet of floor.⁹⁶ The effect is at once baffling—it is impossible to get a visual grip on this spectacle—and relentlessly orderly.

Cultivating a look of chaos, Thomas Hirschhorn fills his sprawling, labyrinthine installations with empty soda cans, mannikins, images of Che Guevara, ideologically flavored graffiti, photocopied pages from books of social and political theory, stacks of books on these subjects, and much more. Each of his bits and pieces makes a point, clearly or obscurely, and their cumulative effect is to immerse the audience in a boundless field of highly charged symbols. His art, he has said, is “always about the whole world.”⁹⁷ When art first took a conceptual turn, toward the end of the 1960s, the focus was more limited. Downplaying visual imagery in favor of texts, early conceptualists addressed the nature of art, the institutions of the art world, and narrowly defined matters of social and political interest.⁹⁸

LEFT: Allan McCollum, *Collection of Forty Plaster Surrogates*, 1983RIGHT: Thomas Hirschhorn, *Cavemanman*, 2002

The rise of conceptualism prompted commentators to pronounce, not once but many times, that painting had died—or, in the more militant iterations, had been killed off. This pronouncement had to be repeated because painters kept their medium alive and vigorous. Groundless as it was, death-of-painting rhetoric had the effect of illuminating the divide between art that offers detachable messages and art that does not. There was and still is talk of two art worlds, one for those who look and another for those who prefer to read. Yet every work we see as a work of art has something in common with every other: a visual structure. This simple truth can lead us in a tedious direction, toward analyses of the kind that turn self-referential and disconnect themselves from anything we care about. Yet, as I have suggested, form is felt, it is thought through, and a narrow formalism is never adequate. So it is not enough to describe the hierarchical order enforced by composition's formal machinery; we must pinpoint, as well, what its hierarchies signify.

LARGER MEANINGS

John Ruskin wrote, in 1857, “What grace of manner and refinement of habit are in society, grace of line and refinement of form are in the association of visible subjects”—that is, in the construction of a composition. This analogy, he adds, cannot be pushed too far, because “there is no moral vice, no moral virtue, which has not

its *precise* prototype in the art of painting.”⁹⁹ Other writers agreed: a well-structured composition conveys the beauty of virtue, not as a subject but by means of its form, or it reflects the perfect oneness of divine creation. Composing with crisp lines and planes extracted from Cubist ambiguities, the painters of de Stijl meant their paintings to reveal the order of the universe: the harmony of “all things,” as Mondrian put it. His claim that the forms and colors in an “equilibrated composition” reveal the true, underlying nature of everything leads, in his utopian logic, to the further claim that pictorial equilibrium has the power to “signify what is just” in society.¹⁰⁰

The utopia waiting in the wings of Mondrian’s aesthetic would have been rigidly hierarchical: boring, at best, and probably a nightmare of oppression. There was no chance that anyone would ever have to live under a de Stijl regime—the onset of the Second World War awoke modernism from its utopian dreams. The hierarchies of imaginary societies are one thing; those of actual societies are another. In his *Principles of Painting*, 1708, the French academician Roger de Piles says “the objects, lines, colors, lights and shades” of a painter’s image must become “one poetical whole,” its wholeness enforced by “a general subordination, where the darks heighten the lights, and the lights set off the darks, and where the merit of each part is founded on a mutual dependence.” He compares this mutuality to the concord that unifies a peaceful nation, where “the great have need of the lower people, and these have need of the great.”¹⁰¹ Compositional harmony symbolizes social harmony, and yet symbol does not always comport with fact and harsh regimes usually arrange for their stratifications to be mirrored—that is to say, flattered—by gorgeously composed canvases.

Las Meninas, 1656, by Diego Velázquez, shows a scene at the court of King Philip IV. Of the personages present, he and his Queen, Mariana, are the loftiest. The lowliest is a dog. In between are the royal couple’s daughter, the Infanta Maria Theresa, several attendants of various ranks, and the artist, who gazes out at us, brush in hand. Velázquez enmeshes all these figures in a pattern of interlocking triangles. The flow of light and dark through this inexhaustibly subtle composition makes *Las Meninas* one of most entrancing paintings in the history of Western art. Of the thousands who view it every year, few note the disparity between the beauty of its formal structure and the cruelty of the social structure that placed Philip IV at its apex—and why should they? We are encouraged to look to art for the true and the real. Yet we look to it even more intently for openings onto the unreal—the fictive, the

speculative, the imaginary—and no one has offered the unreal in a more splendid guise than Hans Hofmann. Naturally, he called it “the real.” And he saw the artist’s life as the *Search for the Real*, the title of a book assembled, in 1967, from years of his lectures and writings.

An extended exhortation masquerading as an instruction manual, *Search for the Real* declares that “the impulse of nature, fused through the personality of the artist by laws arising from the nature of the medium, produces the rhythm and personal expression of a work.

Then the life of the composition becomes a spiritual unity.”¹⁰² It would have been unfair to ask Hofmann exactly what breathes spiritual life into a composition. His purpose was not to lay out the stages of a practical process but to set students on the upward path to the domain of the ineffable, where “the physical aspects of a thing”—a well-composed painting—become “a self-sustaining spiritual reality.”¹⁰³ Hans Hofmann’s “real” is a fiction in the form of a metaphysical absolute, an ideal of oneness to be apprehended not by reason but by willing intuition. And for all the realism of *Las Meninas*—for all the documentary evidence about the Spanish court it puts on such suave display—we love this painting for ushering us into a realm beyond the real.

This is a realm of hope, for *Las Meninas* and every other well-composed painting promises that, history’s evidence to the contrary, hierarchy can be beautiful. Subordination need not feel oppressive; it can feel graceful, bracing, utopian. By dismantling the hierarchical order of the well-composed painting, Krasner’s and Pollock’s allover image opened their medium to an ideal of equality. This deliberate rejection of pictorial precedent was momentous, for it reshaped Western culture’s concept of an image.



Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656

Composition has long claimed that hierarchy can be beautiful. The allover image proposes that equality can be perfect. The latter is a modern notion, more at home in political discourse than in the discussion of art. After his visit to the United States in 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville reduced the rationale of democratic government to a set of axioms:

With no man different from his fellows, nobody will be able to wield tyrannical power; men will be completely free because they will be completely equal; they will be completely equal because they will be entirely free. Democratic nations aim for this ideal.¹⁰⁴

And they fail to achieve it. Yet their failure has not killed off the ideal. “All men are created equal” states the first sentence of the Declaration of Independence, laying down an article of faith amended by the American feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in 1848, to read: “all men and women are created equal.”¹⁰⁵ If they are created equal, why shouldn’t they *be* equal? This issue had no place on the political agenda of the early Republic. Until the late 1820s, only white male property owners could vote, in local elections and for members of the House of Representatives—but not for senators, who were elected by state legislators, or for the president, who was chosen by the electoral college. Then, during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, political assumptions left over from pre-Revolutionary times collapsed under new social and economic pressures. The federal government granted the vote to all white males and, in the states, legislative districts were redrawn on the principle of one man, one vote. And so began the slow, drawn-out process of extending the vote to citizens of all races and genders. A parallel history traces the effort to guarantee everyone’s civil rights and there have been, as well, fitful attempts to encourage social and economic equality—or at least reduce inequality.

Over the past two hundred years or so, resistance to these hopeful efforts has been dogged and often effective. With his claim that, in America, “men will be completely free because they will be completely equal,” Tocqueville caught the mood of the Jacksonian era but did not prove to be an accurate prophet. Still, prophecies and other works of the imagination have a part to play in the struggle for equality. We remember and read Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin,

and others because they raise the issue of equality, face its obstacles, and imagine ways around them. Elaborated at a distance from the precincts where power is exercised and disparities are maintained, their speculations have, even so, an impact on our politics and society. This proposition is easier to defend when the works under consideration are literary, not visual. The figure of Whitman looms, helpfully, over the fight for gay rights. The sharpest reflection of art's power is to be seen in the attitudes of its enemies. If painting is just an amenity, why the outrage at Pop Art? Why the bitter suspicion directed at the Abstract Expressionists? More than merely aesthetic values must be in the balance.

As the Second World War became the Cold War, Senator George Dondero of Michigan addressed those Americans who, bewildered and even insulted by much recent art, suspected that it was a hoax cooked up by cynical artists and dealers. The threat was far worse than that, he warned. Addressing the Senate in August 1949, Dondero described a Soviet policy of transplanting to America all the avant-garde styles banned within the USSR's own borders. These are "the isms," artistic travesties that have "infiltrated and saturated many of our art centers" and threaten "to overawe, override, and overpower the fine art of our tradition and heritage." Each style has its own mission to fulfill in furtherance of this fiendish plot:

Cubism aims to destroy by designed disorder.

Futurism aims to destroy by the machine myth.

Dadaism aims to destroy by ridicule.

Expressionism aims to destroy by aping the primitive and insane.

Abstraction aims to destroy by the creation of brainstorm.

Surrealism aims to destroy by the denial of reason.⁰⁶

One wonders if Dondero really feared that looking at an abstract painting by Mondrian would bring on a "brainstorm." It is certain, however, that he believed in the importance of traditional art, not just as a fount of aesthetic pleasure but as a bastion of hallowed values. This belief in the familiar and the venerated motivates all the foot-dragging responses to the avant-garde, all the outrage and indignant puzzlement, yet conservatives never say precisely what is admirable about the art they admire. It's enough for them to invoke honored works of the past and vilify, say, a portrait by Picasso.

Nor are proponents of the new any more explicit about art's larger import. Much minute and sophisticated analysis goes into placing new styles on the map of recent developments, but those who seek the new usually take its significance for granted. This is understandable. A work of art gathers us in, immerses us in an experience that resists language, and we reemerge without much to say, just the memory of having felt emotions and intuited meanings not easily articulated. Pressing ourselves to say something, we look for details amenable to comment and ignore large structures. Yet these are the structures that make paintings intelligible, and the terms of their intelligibility are those of society, culture, and our ways of being.

In figuring out a painting's visual logic, we come up against a question that sounds dry when simply put: What is the relation of part to whole? If the painting is properly made à la Poussin or some other grand exemplar, relations are good: clear, stable, and comforting. As troubling as a subject might be, on the plane of form all is well in a well-composed painting. In an allover image, the interplay of parts is unsettled. No hierarchy imposes order on the image, no firm boundaries enclose it, and its scale is uncertain. From this contrast between two kinds of pictorial structure follows another question: Do you see yourself, ideally, as a well-defined presence with a secure place in an orderly cosmos or as a contingent being, free to roam through a potentially infinite field offering more possibilities than reassurances?

It's tempting to say that the drifting, improvisational self is peculiarly American and accounts for our nation's inventiveness. With tradition so elastic, why not, as Emerson recommends, have "an original relation to the universe"?¹⁰⁷ Yet much in American life has solidified into predictability. There are hierarchies, some of them harsh, and not every citizen assents to the vision of a true American Whitman sets forth with his image of "completeness in separatism, of individual personal dignity, of a single person, either male or female, characterized in the main, not from extrinsic acquirements or position, but in the pride of himself or herself alone."¹⁰⁸ In Whitman's America, "separatism" does not isolate; it fortifies the individuality that, inherent in everyone, promises equality. He knows that the promise has not been kept and may not be kept, yet he persists in asserting the ideal. Again, that is what poets and painters do. To compose a painting is not to say that hierarchy is beautiful but that it *ought* to be; and, however unequal our society becomes, the allover image continues to insist that equality *ought* to be perfect. Pictorial structures have moral meanings; lacking any direct

power to rectify wrong, they nonetheless provide us with immediate—even visceral—experiences of our ideals.

In one of the many crescendos that give *Search for the Real* its symphonic grandeur, Hofmann says that, in a successful composition, “All our experiences culminate in the perception of the universe as a whole with man at the center.”¹⁰⁹ As Pollock said, an allover field has no center. Or it is all center—and all periphery. We move through it at will, with nothing to guide us along the right path. Any path we take is as right or as wrong as any other. This freedom is unimaginable from within the universe as painters had been constructing it since the time of Philocles the Egyptian and Cleanthes of Corinth. Sweeping away the assumption that the elements of a painting must coalesce in a stable hierarchy, the allover image fomented the medium’s Copernican revolution—an upheaval strangely delayed, considering that Copernicus rearranged the Western view of the actual universe almost exactly four centuries earlier.

KRASNER PERSEVERES

By inventing alloverness, Krasner and Pollock built into the very structure of painting the ideal of perfect equality, thus transforming an art that, in its essential form, had been unchanged for more than two millennia. On the plane of art, this ideal defined their union. But artists don’t live solely on the plane of art. They live in their studios and in the art world, a place where the aesthetic rubs shoulders with ambition and resentment, opportunism and ingrained biases. Justice is rarely done, though few denied that critics, curators, and *Life* magazine were right to shine a spotlight on Pollock. That his fame kept Krasner in the shadows caused little protest, even from her. Yet her days of deferring to Pollock were over. Determined to escape obscurity, she never doubted that she had a fighting chance. She was, after all, a veteran of the New York art world, a painter with a long, creditable past. Her journey to prominence was even longer.

In 1948 the Bertha Shaefer Gallery presented *The Modern House Comes Alive 1948–1949*, an exhibition that mingled work by artists, designers, and architects. Shaefer included two tables by Krasner, one with a mosaic top and another made by mounting a Little Image painting horizontally, in a four-legged frame, and covering it with a sheet

of glass. A second Krasner painting hung on the wall. Ann Pringle, the *New York Herald Tribune*'s lead reporter on the home-furnishings beat, called Krasner's contribution to the show "magnificent"; and Aline B. Louchheim, writing in the *New York Times*, said that the painting beneath glass, "conceived as an all-over pattern," looks "as well from one angle as from another."¹¹⁰ With these notices, Krasner made her first appearance in the daily press.

Founded in 1931, East Hampton's Guild Hall contains a theater and three galleries for the exhibition of art. In its early days, the Guild Hall was best known as a stopover for plays headed to Broadway. Its galleries presented art amenable to the conservative tastes of its patrons, a policy that became increasingly dubious as avant-garde artists migrated from Manhattan to the Hamptons, some permanently and others just for the summer. By July 1949, the Guild Hall acknowledged this influx with *17 Eastern Long Island Artists*, a mixture of the adventurous and the respectable but stodgy. Typifying the latter were Arthur Brooks and Raphael Soyer, both figurative painters. The abstractionists included James Brooks, Wilfred Zogbaum, Balcomb Greene, and, of course, Pollock and Krasner, who reappeared two months later in *Husbands and Wives* at the Sidney Janis Gallery in Manhattan. Among the other couples with paintings on view were Picasso and Françoise Gilot, Dorothea Tanning and Max Ernst, and Willem and Elaine de Kooning. *Husbands*, said Stuart Preston of the *New York Times*, are more "adventurous" than their wives—a judgment that must have rankled Krasner.¹¹¹ The only trace of an objection is to be found in her studiously offhand remark that the idea of the show was "rather gimmicky."¹¹² Then, after *Husbands and Wives*, came the group show that launched the ascendancy of American art.

One evening in May 1951, Alfred Barr, still the dominant figure at the Museum of Modern Art, and Dorothy Miller, his indispensable colleague, arrived by taxi at a storefront on East Ninth Street. They had ventured downtown for the opening of the Ninth Street Show, an exhibition of painting and sculpture by sixty-one artists then at work in New York. Organized by the participants, it celebrated their largely overlooked existence and directed a high-spirited reproach at the curators and dealers who had done the overlooking. Having made studio visits to just a handful of the artists with work on view, Barr and Miller were astonished by the spectacle that met them on Ninth Street. It was brilliant, shockingly so.

As artists brought their works to the space, Leo Castelli, a collector and soon-to-be New York art dealer, directed the installation, a task that required all his diplomatic aplomb. Few artists were completely happy with his decisions and some threw fits. Only after three days did everyone acquiesce, however grudgingly. On the night of the opening, Castelli led Barr to the Cedar Tavern, the downtown artists' habitual haunt, and explained how the show had come about. Frustrated by their obscurity, convinced that it was undeserved, the artists had taken matters into their own hands. With the Ninth Street Show, they gave themselves the recognition that should have come from the Modern and other uptown institutions. Justifiably, by Castelli's reckoning, for the exhibition "proved that their art was new and important—and better than what was being made in Paris." These American painters, he later said, became his "great enthusiasm. For me, they were just the great thing happening."¹¹³

Krasner was one of eleven women invited to send paintings to the Ninth Street Show, and in October 1951 she had her first solo exhibition, at the Betty Parsons Gallery. Robert Goodnough, another painter, reviewed the show for *Art News*, reporting that Krasner had left behind the Little Image paintings and was now making "large, free abstractions which depend entirely on open areas of square, rectangular shapes and strips of color, these playing over the surface completely free of association. One comes away with the feeling of having been journeying through a vast uninhabited land of quiet color."¹¹⁴ Evoking neither calligraphy nor nature, these are the calmest paintings in Krasner's oeuvre.

None sold and in her disappointment Krasner turned from painting to drawing, filling sheets of paper with organic forms laid on in black ink and gouache. Working nonstop, she covered the studio walls with these images, floor to ceiling. Surveying the panorama, she was so dismayed that she tore all the drawings to bits. Entering her studio a few weeks later, she saw "a lot of things that began to interest me. I began picking up pieces of my own drawings and regluing them. Then I start cutting up some of my oil paintings. I've got something going here and I start pulling out a lot of raw canvases and slashing them as well."¹¹⁵ Her images in fragments, Krasner faced a question: What idea of structure would direct their reassembly? Over the next few years, she answered the question with paintings and collages that employ every option she had ever taken seriously.



Lee Krasner, *City Verticals*, 1953

The shapes that crowd *City Verticals*, 1953, are not just vertical; they are tall. Reaching from the upper to the lower edges of the canvas, they overlap and intersect with a cunning that brings early Cubism to mind. It is only slightly fanciful to see *City Verticals* as a Cubist still life elongated until it becomes an allusion to the modern metropolis. *Shattered Light*, 1954, is an allover painting and particularly powerful; even the smallest scrap of form seems to have been shaped, sometimes violently, by the large currents flowing throughout its immense and fidgety field. And *Blue Level*, 1955, is a composition more imposing than any she ever constructed as a Hofmann student or a muralist for the WPA. Suspended amid slim forms like the ones in *City Vertical* are three large, roughly oval patches of blue. Each has its own imposing personality, and they owe their peaceful coexistence to formal negotiations of the most delicate kind.

The paintings Krasner sent to her 1955 show at the Stable Gallery included both compositions and allover fields. A decade later, Greenberg told the curator Bryan Robertson that Krasner's work from those years was "a major addition to the American art scene of that era."¹¹⁶ Contemporary reviewers agreed. The *New York Times* critic Stuart Preston reported that Krasner confronts the viewer with "a dense jungle of exotic shapes and color," adding that she is a "good noisy colorist."¹¹⁷ The painter Fairfield Porter also read vegetable forms into Krasner's abstractions. Writing in *Art News*, he said that her new paintings and collages "are like nature photographs magnified." He then explained his comparison: "When nature is photographed in detail, its orderliness appears: Krasner's art, which seems to be about nature, instead of making the spectator aware of a grand design, makes him aware of a subtle disorder greater than he might otherwise have thought possible."¹¹⁸ This is astute, a sign that Porter saw, even in the painter's most solidly constructed compositions from 1955, the destabilizing forces that enliven her paintings from that year and every year since she and Pollock invented alloverness.

Though not ablaze, Krasner's career was flourishing. Pollock's was foundering. As Krasner reaped praise for the work she showed at the Stable Gallery, Pollock told B. H. Friedman, "I'm not working much anymore. I go to my studio but nothing happens."¹¹⁹ His downward slide had begun half a decade earlier. Toward the end of September 1950, the photographer Hans Namuth began shooting a film of Pollock at work. Technical difficulties were many and the artist often froze up or grew awkward when the camera rolled. On the Saturday after Thanksgiving, Namuth coaxed one last

performance from him. When it was over, Pollock stalked to the house, where a dozen friends had arrived for a post-Thanksgiving dinner. Taking a bottle of whiskey from the cabinet beneath the kitchen sink, he poured one glassful for himself and another for Namuth. Krasner saw and felt horror as two years of sobriety suddenly ended. During that time, he had made his best paintings. Now he was launching a binge. Calmly, Krasner called their guests to the table.

Unhappily, the shuffle of guests left Namuth seated at Pollock's right. Soon the others heard voices, held low in anger. The word "phony" recurred, nastily. Pollock was charging Namuth with the sin he most feared to commit. Suddenly he stood, his hands under the edge of the table, poised to tip it over. "Now?" he asked, glaring at Namuth, who said, "Jackson—no!" "Now?" he bellowed. He waited, as everyone watched him, then bellowed it again, still louder. Then he tipped the table on its side, sending the meal and several guests to the floor. As Pollock lurched out to the yard, Krasner announced that coffee would be served in the living room.¹²⁰

With its promise of boosting Pollock's celebrity, Namuth's film undid him. From adolescence onward, he had believed that fame would cure his persistent sense of vulnerability; he had once told a friend of feeling like "a clam without a shell."¹²¹ But as fame approached, he feared its sly power to get between him and his art, turning him into the sort of artist who works not from his inward self but for audiences enchanted by the figure he had become. The large allover paintings of the late 1940s that brought acclaim from critics had made him notorious in the eyes of the *Life* magazine reading public. Pleased but also rattled by both kinds of attention, he took a sudden stylistic swerve in 1950.

Banishing color, he worked now in thinned black enamel, with occasional touches of brown; more startling still, he invited figures back into his art—descendants of the creatures who inhabit *The She-Wolf* and *Guardians of the Secret*. They were agitated; their offspring are more so. Pollock's black paintings of 1950–53 writhe with unfocused urgency. Some look thin and abandoned; others feel overworked. A dense field of impacted swirls, *Number 23*, 1951—nicknamed *Frogman*—lets us make out just a few bodily fragments and two bulbous eyes. By 1953 he had gone back to full-color drip painting with increasingly turgid, even fussy results; at mid-decade he was drinking heavily and working only sporadically. Ever more wretched, he was increasingly cruel to Krasner, and it may not have been lust as much as a need to hurt her that drove him into an affair with a young woman named Ruth Kligman.



Lee Krasner, *Blue Level*, 1955

KRASNER IN CRISIS

Pollock met Kligman one night at the Cedar Tavern, in the spring of 1956. The more persuasive accounts suggest that their affair didn't start for several months, that she had to pester him into it. Pollock was afraid of angering Krasner, who loathed his behavior yet refused to consider divorce. Every Tuesday, he went by train to New York for an appointment with a psychologist; afterward, he would spend the night at Kligman's apartment, usually returning home the next morning but now and then staying in town until Thursday or Friday. Before meeting again, they would talk by telephone, Kligman in Manhattan, Pollock at Springs, with Krasner nearby. She refused to acknowledge the affair.

Early one morning, she saw Kligman and Pollock emerging from his studio. With the full force of her outrage, Krasner ordered Pollock to "get that woman off my property before I call the police."¹²² Pollock drove Kligman to a nearby station of the Long Island Railroad. When he came back to Fireplace Road, Krasner said that she would leave him if he continued the affair. Usually, this threat would trigger Pollock's apologies, then threadbare promises to stay sober, to try to paint. Her grief and anger assuaged, Krasner would pretend to be mollified, and the couple would continue as before—embattled but still intertwined. Now Pollock refused to go through the routine. Krasner threatened to sail for Europe. Pollock suggested that she go ahead. She did, and three days later Kligman moved into the house at Springs.

Their life was bearable until Pollock reverted to old habits, passing out, drunk, early in the evening. Or weeping until his anguish turned aggressive and he raged at Kligman as he had raged at Krasner. Once, without letting Kligman know, he arranged for a dozen roses to be sent to his wife's hotel in Paris. After three weeks, Kligman returned to New York. By phone, Pollock begged her to come back to Springs. She relented a week later, calling to say that, on Saturday, August 11, she and a friend would arrive on an early train. Pollock met them with his car, an Oldsmobile convertible with the top down. Sullen, he hardly took note of Kligman's friend, Edith Metzger. On the way to the house, he stopped at a bar for a drink. Squabbling filled the day, as Pollock drank and wept.

That evening, he was expected at the artist Alfonso Ossorio's house for a piano concert. On the way, he stopped at a restaurant and had several more drinks.

Afterward, Metzger refused to get into the car, infuriating Pollock as he staggered across the parking lot. Kligman persuaded her to climb into the back seat, and Pollock sped out of the lot, along Fireplace Road. Metzger screamed, demanding that he stop and let her out. She tried to jump from the car, but the wind forced her back down. A hump in the pavement sent the car to the right. Veering left, Pollock kept the car on the road for a long moment, then it lurched across the shoulder, snagged a thick patch of vegetation, and sailed end over end. Metzger was crushed to death when the car fell to earth. Flying free, Kligman suffered serious injuries. Thrown fifty feet through the air, Pollock died when his head struck a tree.

Just before she left for Europe, Krasner completed a painting called *Prophecy*, 1956. Nothing like the work she showed the year before at the Stable Gallery, it has a family resemblance to *Image Surfacing*, the canvas that signaled the end of her “blackout” period. In both, a figure frees itself from the background, a process further along in *Prophecy*. *Image Surfacing* gives us a choice: see it as an abstraction or take the cues that bring a one-eyed, possibly sinister figure into focus. To see the definitely sinister figure in *Prophecy*, no cues are needed. Flesh-colored forms plainly represent arms and legs, detached and reassembled; sexual organs, male and female, are easily deciphered; and an oval meant as an eye looks directly into the viewer’s eyes—as in *Image Surfacing*. Krasner scratched a second eye into the upper right-hand corner of *Prophecy*’s black background. Not connected in any plausible way to the first eye, this one obliquely states the painting’s theme: disintegration. But not dispersal. All the parts of *Prophecy*’s disturbing creature are in intimate proximity. When Eleanor Ward, proprietor of the Stable Gallery, first saw it, she said, “God, that’s scary.”¹²³

In conversation with Dorothy Seckler, Krasner remembered returning to Springs, after Pollock’s death, and finding *Prophecy* with its face to a studio wall. “I didn’t want to look at it,” she said. Tormented, she nonetheless recognized the obvious: she “had to look at it and do the next painting.”¹²⁴ This was *Embrace*, 1956, a reprise of *Prophecy*, with even more body parts even more urgently crowded together; *Prophecy*’s menacing eyes have become at least ten more. *Embrace* would be suffocating if its forms didn’t look so elastic, so likely to elude one another’s grip. The third painting in this quickly painted sequence is *Birth*, 1956. Krasner took its name from a painting Pollock made around 1941, the year John Graham selected it for his *French and American Painting* exhibition. Pollock’s *Birth* may be the first of his paintings that Krasner saw, and now

she was remaking it in the style of *Prophecy* and *Embrace*. Her version is an expressly nonidentical twin of his.

Both are tall canvases packed with curving, overlapping shapes. Pollock's are flat and jagged—nonfigurative forms mixed with violent grimaces borrowed from the shamans' masks that caught his attention first in an article by John Graham and then at an exhibition of American Indian art at the Modern. The palette is stark: icy whites and blues with thick outlines of red and black. Krasner, too, uses black outlines; hers are heavier than his and her colors are warm, even smoldering. The dominant pink makes a sensuous fit with her blatantly organic imagery. In place of Pollock's masks, she puts naked flesh—and sets us a puzzle: How joyous is the birth this painting memorializes? Its bodily fragments are as monumentally anguished as the ones in *Embrace* and *Prophecy*. In the view of the art historian Robert Hobbs, Krasner is associating “birth with violence and with the breakup of something which had once been complete and whole.”¹²⁵

Pollock's death ended the most important relationship in her life. But how whole, how cohesive, had that relationship been? It may be that Krasner's version of *Birth* not only mourns her loss but looks ahead, uneasily, to the wholeness that awaits her now that she is alone and responsible only to herself. More than alone; she was isolated in the role of Pollock's widow. Asked how she could complete *Embrace*, then *Birth*, then *Three in Two*, 1956, so soon after his death, Krasner replied, “Painting is not separate from life. It is one. It is like asking—do I want to live? My answer is yes—and I paint.”¹²⁶ She also served as the guardian of her husband's legacy.



Jackson Pollock, *Birth*, 1938



Lee Krasner, *Prophecy*, 1956



Lee Krasner, *Embrace*, 1956



Lee Krasner, *Birth*, 1956



Lee Krasner, *Three in Two*, 1956



Lee Krasner, *Sun Woman*, 1957

IN POLLOCK'S ABSENCE

Early in 1956, curators in the Modern's Department of Painting and Sculpture began work on a survey of Pollock's career, then thought to have reached its midpoint. After the car crash, they reconceived the exhibition as a memorial. Of the thirty-five canvases in the show, Krasner lent just short of a quarter, along with nine works on paper. The catalog credited her not as Lee Krasner, her name as an artist, but as Lee Krasner Pollock.¹²⁷ Two years later, the press release for *The New American Painting* listed her as Mrs. Lee Krasner Pollock, the lender of two Pollock canvases. In the show's catalog, the source of these works is given as the Sidney Janis Gallery, then the dealership handling Pollock's estate.¹²⁸

A thoroughgoing Europhile until he visited the Ninth Street Show, Alfred Barr had listened with care to Leo Castelli's case for the importance of the New York painters. So had Dorothy Miller. Her 1952 exhibition, *Fifteen Americans*, tilted toward the Abstract Expressionists and, four years later, these painters dominated *Twelve Americans*. With *The New American Painting*, she gave Abstract Expressionism the Museum of Modern Art's irrevocable seal of approval. During an eight-city tour of Europe, the show provoked startled interest and occasional belligerence from squads of critics and large crowds of museumgoers. For the first time, American art had an international presence. Pollock received the most attention. Miller did not include Krasner and so she was absent when Abstract Expressionism made its debut on the European stage. The only woman in the exhibition was Grace Hartigan, a second-generation acolyte of Willem de Kooning.

The New American Painting left for its first stopover, at the Kunsthalle in Basel, Switzerland, in 1958. Earlier that year, Krasner showed *Prophecy*, *Embrace*, and *Birth* at the Martha Jackson Gallery. Together, these were the prelude to a series of new paintings radiant with hot color and populated by bodily forms evolving into big, curvy suggestions of wide leaves and juicy, opulent petals. *Sun Woman*, 1957, recasts the anguished figure in *Prophecy* as a personification of nature scarcely to be distinguished from nature itself. Stuart Preston, who had become Krasner's most reliable supporter at the *New York Times*, called these new paintings "a raw challenge to the eye." Grabbing the viewer's attention with their "sheer energy," they are "sensuous, sensual, and aggressively decorative."¹²⁹ Insisting violently on light and lush color, the artist

may well have been directing her aggression at the dilemma precipitated by Pollock's death. She later said, "These are special paintings to me. They come from a very trying time."¹³⁰

Krasner's mother died in 1959. Unable to sleep, she painted at night. To avoid the distortions artificial light visits on color, she limited herself to white and shades of the umber that gave the works from these years their collective name. The *Umbre Paintings* are all-over images: raging fields of sweeping, from-the-shoulder brushstrokes. Rather than lure us into measureless depths, Krasner's gesture sends its energy outward, into our space. Approaching, we notice spatters of pigment: feathery evidence of the painter's strength. These canvases are major contributions to the history of all-over painting—homages to Pollock's canvases of the late 1940s but nothing like them, save in their vast scale and the sustained intensity of their improvisations.

Toward the end of the 1950s, French & Co., a gallery on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, hired Clement Greenberg as an adviser. One of Greenberg's mandates preempted all others: to persuade his old friend Lee Krasner to permit a Pollock exhibition. This was not a sure thing. Krasner wanted Pollock's unsold works to go directly from the estate to major museum collections. A gallery show posed the risk of sales to unsuitable collectors. When Greenberg approached her, she hesitated and then said French & Co. could exhibit a selection of Pollock's black-and-white paintings from 1950 and '51. On first viewing, Greenberg had disliked these canvases. With their high contrast and fragmentary figures, the black-and-whites retreated from the advanced position Pollock had attained with his polychrome dripping. That, anyway, is what the critic's theory of modernist painting required him to conclude. Yet French & Co. was so eager for a Pollock exhibition that Greenberg went along with Krasner's offer. Next, she demanded that the gallery show her work. He agreed but with such reluctance that she refused to let him proceed with either exhibition.

Greenberg had hesitated because, he said, to show Pollock and Krasner in quick succession would suggest an unseemly "tie-in."¹³¹ And he gave a further reason for not leaping at the chance to exhibit her *Umbre Paintings*: they weren't much good. This verdict is perplexing, for it is unlikely that Greenberg was blind to the strength of these canvases. Perhaps he rejected the series not to dispense a judgment but to inflict an injury in retaliation for Krasner's attempt to strong-arm him into giving her a show—and for her refusal to put him in at least partial control of Pollock's estate. He had



Lee Krasner, *The Gate*, 1959

done much to promote Pollock; wasn't it time for him to be rewarded? Quizzed over the years about the French & Co. episode, Greenberg contradicted himself, making nothing clear except that Abstract Expressionism was born into a family of artists and critics riven by conflicts they were loath to forget. As the art historian Barbara Rose sees it, Krasner's falling out with Greenberg ruined "her last chance to become part of the official avant-garde."¹³²

Krasner showed a group of *Umbra Paintings* at the Howard Wise Gallery in 1960 and, in 1962, more canvases from the same series. Reviewing the earlier exhibition in *Arts Magazine*, Vivien Raynor said of *Gate*, 1959, that "it would be easier to analyze a breaking wave."¹³³ Not intended as praise, her comment is nonetheless on the mark. For *Gate* and nearly all the *Umbra Paintings* deliberately frustrate our hope of coming to clear-cut terms with them. Everything swirls, whirls, and lunges; the eyes that peer from many of these canvases can be seen in two ways: as panicked by the painterly tides that have captured them or resigned to their capture and hoping to survive in an incessantly turbulent world.

Stuart Preston praised the “powerful, even pulse” of the *Umber Paintings*, and other reviewers found other ways to be favorable.¹³⁴ Krasner’s future with Howard Wise looked bright until he refused to cover the cost of shipping her work to London for a retrospective exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery. Curated by Bryan Robertson, the gallery’s director, *Lee Krasner: Paintings, Drawings and Collages* presented work from every stage of the artist’s career. Opening late in 1965, the survey prompted John Russell, of the London *Times*, to call it “exhilarating.” For Sheldon Williams, a critic at the Paris *Herald Tribune*, it confirmed his belief that Krasner was “a prime mover in the abstract-expressionist revolution.” After praising the show in the pages of the *Weekend Observer*, Nigel Gosling said, “I doubt that anyone would guess from [Krasner’s] paintings that they are by a woman. On the other hand, they are unmistakably American.”¹³⁵

Before Gosling published his misogynistic compliment—a replay of the one Krasner had received years before from Hans Hofmann—B. H. Friedman addressed the subject of art and gender in his introduction to the Whitechapel catalog:

First, it must be noted that Krasner is a woman—in a field which still, even now in 1965, barely tolerates women, condescends to them with the phrase “woman painter,” as odious and pejorative as “woman writer” or “woman driver.” In her work, Lee Krasner wants to be judged—or, better, experienced—as a painter. She wants no special categories. It may even be, whether consciously or unconsciously, that this is why she took the androgynous name “Lee.”¹³⁶

As if to support Friedman’s charge of intolerance, Maurice Tuchman excluded Krasner from *New York School: Paintings from the 1940s and 1950s*, an exhibition he organized, in 1965, for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Krasner was absent as well from *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940–1970*. Curated by Henry Geldzahler for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, this show celebrated the Met’s centennial and American art’s rise to international prominence. The second of these celebrations implied a boast made explicit by the title of a book the art historian Irving Sandler published in 1970: *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*. Casting Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and, of course, Jackson Pollock as the warriors who liberated America

from the long dominance of Europe, Sandler's epic doesn't mention Krasner even in the character of Pollock's wife. That she, a woman, was among the most important members of this triumphal generation could not be acknowledged—could not, perhaps, be imagined—by these male curators and historians.

KRASNER TRIUMPHANT

The barricades of prejudice are high but never perfectly constructed. William Rubin included Krasner in a 1969 show at the Museum of Modern Art entitled *The New American Painting and Sculpture: The First Generation*. She was exhibiting recent work at Marlborough-Gerson, in New York: big, splashy canvases filled with evocations of life, animal and vegetable, though signs of the former are sometimes lost in leafy, flowering bursts of exhilarated brushwork. And in 1973, Marcia Tucker, of the Whitney Museum of American Art, selected eighteen works for *Lee Krasner: Large Paintings*.

This was the artist's first solo exhibition at a New York museum. Comparing the explosive *Pollination*, 1968, and other paintings from the late 1960s with works from a few years later, Tucker said in her catalog essay, "The linear gestures of the earlier paintings have become, in pictures like *Palingenesis* [1971], *Peacock* [1973], or *Mediterranean* [1973], the interstices of areas of bright, pure color that sweep across the canvas. These are no longer abstract expressionist paintings. They have moved far from the tradition which her earlier work helped to create."¹³⁷ Tucker is getting at Krasner's shift from brushy, spontaneous shapes to flat, hard-edged expanses of color. This imagery is still organic but its new clarity recalls old times: Krasner's years on the WPA, when her mural studies featured crisp, geometric forms. In contending that the artist has left Abstract Expressionism behind, Tucker lauds her independence—a trait the artist had been displaying ever since she fought free of Hofmann and Cubism. Yet *Palingenesis*, *Peacock*, and other paintings in this group have the grand, Abstract Expressionist scale. Moreover, they are gestural despite their smoothly applied colors: you feel, in the placement of forms, the energies of arm and shoulder.

After the Whitney show came *Lee Krasner: Selections from 1946–1972*, at the Miami-Dade Community College, and, the following year, *Lee Krasner: Collages and Works on Paper, 1933–1974*, at the Corcoran Gallery, in Washington, DC. Krasner had



Lee Krasner, *Palingenesis*, 1971



Lee Krasner, *Peacock*, 1973

by then left Marlborough for Pace Gallery, where her work was shown every other year. Reviews were progressively less mixed, as she glided into the position of a well-respected elder. Now in her mid-sixties, Krasner had reached the top of the porcelain mountain and it remained only for her place in the history of Abstract Expressionism to be acknowledged. Fittingly, this mission was taken on by Gail Levin and Robert Hobbs, art historians young enough to have neither the gender biases of earlier decades nor any calcified notions about American art in the years just after the Second World War. Their exhibition *Abstract Expressionism: The Formative Years* opened at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University, traveled to a museum in Tokyo, and returned to the Whitney, in New York, toward the end of 1978. The first to place Krasner's Little Image paintings in the company of other Abstract Expressionist canvases from the 1940s, this show delivered her from art historical darkness. One of the movement's earliest and most powerful practitioners, her preeminence had now been demonstrated.

The effect of Hobbs and Levin's revision was amplified by *Krasner/Pollock: A Working Relationship*, Barbara Rose's 1981 show at the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, of New York University. With telling juxtapositions, Rose's installation argued that, throughout their life together, the two painters reacted as equals to one another's paintings; and in her catalog essay she notes the ongoing studio conversations that accompanied—and sharpened—their reactions. "Of the many things Krasner and Pollock did for each other as artists," says Rose, "including criticize and support each other's work, the greatest thing they did was to free each other from the dogma of their respective teachers"—Benton in Pollock's case, Hofmann in Krasner's.¹³⁸ Like Hobbs and Levin, Rose stops short of suggesting that Krasner collaborated with Pollock in the invention of the allover image. All three made a more general point: Krasner was not Pollock's widow and—in the phrase that dogged her throughout her career—a painter in her own right. She was, simply, a painter of major significance.

To be major had always been her ambition. Moreover, she wanted to be recognized as major. A New Yorker propelled into the aesthetic present by her first visits to the Museum of Modern Art, she wanted, above all, to see a retrospective survey of her career in the familiar galleries of that institution. Barbara Rose wanted to see the same show and set about organizing it upon becoming a consulting curator at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts, in 1981. Opening two years later, in Houston, *Lee Krasner: A*

Retrospective contained one hundred and fifty-one paintings and collages. Debilitated by rheumatoid arthritis, the artist attended the opening in a wheelchair. When the retrospective traveled to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, she was too ill to fly to California. Krasner died in June 1984, six months before an abbreviated version of her retrospective went on view at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Though she never saw it, she knew, of course, that a full measure of recognition had finally come to her.

This ultimate honor was preceded by others. In 1979, the Women's Caucus for Art gave Krasner its Outstanding Achievement in the Visual Arts award. Saying in her acceptance speech that she was "really very pleased," she added, "The belated recognition I have recently received is largely due to consciousness-raising by the feminist movement, which I consider the major revolution of our time. Thank you."¹³⁹ Her thanks were in earnest for she understood, after a long life in the art world, that nothing less than a revolution would have changed male attitudes toward female artists even a little bit. Krasner had marched on the picket line organized by Women in the Arts, in 1972, to protest the Museum of Modern Art's neglect of female artists, but she never joined any feminist organizations. Like the artists groups of the 1930s, they struck her as ingrown—politically or aesthetically or both.

Krasner embodied the heroic image of the independent artist. There is, then, an irony in her life with Pollock: after nearly obliterating her, this entanglement led to an equal part in creating the allover image and onward, to unencumbered freedom. Once her "blackout" period was over, she never faltered; and even when she was in the depths of it, grappling with the "gray slabs," she persevered. For this was not a fallow interlude. Krasner's "blackout" was an ordeal willingly undertaken. "I was waiting for something to happen," she said in 1979. "Incidentally, I was pretty confident in this period that something would happen."¹⁴⁰ And it did: she reimagined her art and thus herself. That it took three years shows how unreservedly she had embraced the traditional idea, reinforced by every facet of Hofmann's teaching, that a gap separates artist from subject—or, as Krasner put it, that "I am here and nature is there." As her "blackout" continued, she realized that she could accept nothing she painted as real, as authentic, unless it emerged from "a total unity" between the world and her inward being.¹⁴¹

The dissatisfaction that generated one "gray slab" after another is a sign of high standards unyieldingly maintained. *Image Surfacing*, the painting that brought her

“blackout” period to an end, did not quite meet those standards. Her first all-over paintings did. With these works, she became what she had long believed she was: an authentically original artist. Carrying on, she learned a stark and demanding truth: to be an original artist was, for her, simply to be. By the time of her death, the art world had recognized her originality; since then, recognition has become celebration.

After five years at Pace Gallery, she moved to Robert Miller; since 2017, her estate has been represented by Paul Kasmin. Frequent solo exhibitions at these dealerships have made Krasner a fixture on the New York scene—one of a small number of artists who is perennially present and always noticed. Over the years, critical comment became more laudatory but never uniformly so. On the occasion of *Lee Krasner: The Nature of the Body, Works from 1933 to 1984*, a 1995 exhibition at the Guild Hall, M. G. Lord asked, in the pages of the Sunday *New York Times*, if Krasner was an art-world power broker operating from the base established by her husband’s estate, an opportunist who slipstreamed her way to fame in Pollock’s wake, or an artist whose devotion to the “sublime” inspired her attempt to leap beyond “this world to some transcendent reality.”¹⁴² Failing to do justice to Krasner or her art, this is the stuff of celebrity journalism adjusted to an art-world subject. It is noteworthy, nonetheless, as a reminder that, in the years after her death, Krasner has received from the popular press at least a touch of the notoriety it bestowed on Pollock decades earlier.

At the turn of the millennium, *Lee Krasner: Retrospective* opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. After appearances in Des Moines, Iowa, and Akron, Ohio, the show came to the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Organized by Robert Hobbs for Independent Curators International, this is still the only full-scale retrospective of Krasner’s career to have been seen in New York. Since then, her work has appeared front and center in surveys of postwar American art mounted by the Museum of Modern Art, Buffalo’s Albright-Knox Gallery, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Denver Art Museum’s especially notable *Women of Abstract Expressionism*. After stops at two other venues, this compendious exhibition arrived, in 2017, at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, the site of Krasner’s first retrospective more than half a century earlier. *Abstract Expressionism*, an even bigger show, opened at the Royal Academy of Art, also in London, the previous year. Krasner was one of five women included. The others, in addition to Janet Sobel, were Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler, and Louise Nevelson.

The plate section of the Royal Academy's catalog has a kind of preface: reproductions of self-portraits by Krasner and Pollock. Both paintings are from the early 1930s.¹⁴³ He looks out with blank, possibly terrified, eyes. Her gaze is stern and quietly challenging. I am serious, she seems to say, and you would do well not to forget it. No one did, although, as we've seen, many found rationales for ignoring her seriousness during her years with Pollock and for decades after his death. The reassessment that solidified Krasner's place in the canon began slowly, accelerating only as Abstract Expressionism's heroic years receded, taking their unheroic biases with them. Yet they linger, in updated form, and it was in defiance of still-dismissive attitudes toward women that the Fennimore Art Museum, in Cooperstown, New York, entitled a 2019 group show *Heroines of Abstract Expressionism*. Krasner was prominent among them and rightly so, as much as she might have balked at the word "heroine." Repeatedly insisting that she was a *painter*, not a *woman painter*, she would have found it more fitting to be called, simply, a hero.

The word suits her, a point buttressed by the almost universally positive response to *Lee Krasner: Living Color*, a retrospective curated in 2019 for the Barbican Centre, London, by Eleanor Nairne.¹⁴⁴ Multitudinous, Krasner worked in many styles, manners, and modes. Every reviewer of *Living Color* found one or another cluster of works particularly admirable, the brightest highlight in an exhibition abounding with them. In a *Wall Street Journal* review of the show's installation at the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Peter Plagens wrote that the gallery "containing work from Krasner's *Primary Series* is just about the best roomful of abstract paintings I've ever seen. The pictures—including the overall-ish *Chrysalis* and *Icarus*, both 1964, the chromatically minimal orange-and-raw-linen *Courtship*, 1966, and the huge but mysteriously next-to-nothing *Kufic*, 1965—are individually and collectively breathtaking." Summing up, he praised the Barbican exhibition "for telling the story of a great artist—and Lee Krasner is a great artist."¹⁴⁵ When Krasner was painting the canvases singled out by Plagens, only Barbara Rose, Bryan Robertson, and a very few others called her great. In the aftermath of *Living Color*, this judgment takes its place in our stock of collective wisdom.



Lee Krasner, *Icarus*, 1964



Lee Krasner, *Kufic*, 1965



Lee Krasner, *Courtship*, 1966



Lee Krasner, *Pollination*, 1968

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ENDNOTES

- 1 In recent years, other women have been nominated for places in the first generation of Abstract Expressionists—Perle Fine, Ethel Schwabacher, and Hedda Sterne among them. However, in the early to mid-1940s, when first-generation Abstract Expressionism was coalescing, these painters worked in older styles. During these years, Fine placed Alexander Calder—esque forms in configurations derived from Cubism; Ethel Schwabacher evolved a quasi-figurative manner that owed much to Henri Matisse and a general idea of biomorphic form; Sterne evolved from a wiry, graphic style of realism to a nonfigurative manner that mixed Cubism with forms borrowed from Paul Klee. It is sometimes argued that Sterne must be a first-generation Abstract Expressionist because she appears in *The Irascibles*, Nina Leen’s 1951 photograph of Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock, and fifteen other painters who protested an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art entitled *American Painting Today—1950*. Their main objection, conveyed in a letter to the museum’s president, Roland L. Redmond, was that the various juries charged with selecting the show were dominated by conservative artists determined to ignore the liveliest New York painting of that moment. After Newman brought the letter to the city editor of the *New York Times*, it appeared on the newspaper’s front page. This exposure produced enough furor to persuade *Life* magazine to publish an article on the Metropolitan’s exhibition and to illustrate it with Leen’s photograph of the protesters. Most of the artists in the picture are first-generation Abstract Expressionists. The exceptions are Jimmy Ernst and Hedda Sterne; Bradley Walker Tomlin is a borderline case. As it happens, Hedda Sterne began working in an Abstract Expressionist style in the 1950s, as did Perle Fine and Ethel Schwabacher. The timing of their stylistic shift qualifies them as second-generation Abstract Expressionists.
- 2 Lee Krasner, in *Lee Krasner: The Long View*, directed by Barbara Rose (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1978).
- 3 Lee Krasner, in “Lee Krasner in Conversation with Barbara Novak,” videotaped for WGBH, New Television Workshop, Boston, MA, 1979; reprinted in *Lee Krasner: The Umber Paintings 1959–1962*, exhibition catalog (New York: Paul Kasmin Gallery, 2018), 108.
- 4 Lee Hall, *Elaine and Bill: Portrait of a Marriage* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 98.
- 5 Lee Krasner, quoted in John Gruen, *The Party’s Over Now: Reminiscences of the Fifties—New York’s Writers, Artists, Musicians, and Their Friends* (Wainscott, NY: Pushcart Press, 1967), 230.
- 6 John Bernard Myers, quoted in Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 394.

- 7 Krasner, quoted in Gruen, *The Party's Over Now*, 230.
- 8 Lee Krasner, in Carter Ratcliff, "Interview with Lee Krasner," *Art in America*, September-October 1977, 82.
- 9 Clement Greenberg, "Art: Marc Chagall, Lyonel Feininger, Jackson Pollock," *The Nation*, November 27, 1943, 621; reprinted in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 165.
- 10 Robert M. Coates, "The Art Galleries: Situation Well in Hand," *New Yorker*, November 20, 1943, 97–98; reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, 50.
- 11 Clement Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," *Horizon*, October 1947, 28–29; reprinted in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, 166.
- 12 Dorothy Seiberling, "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?," *Life*, August 8, 1949, 42–45. Reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, 63–64.
- 13 Gaby Rodgers, "She Has Been There Once or Twice: A Talk with Lee Krasner," *Women Artists Newsletter*, December 1977, 3.
- 14 Lee Krasner, quoted in Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 104.
- 15 Ibid., 103.
- 16 Ruth Krasner Stein, quoted in Gail Levin, *Lee Krasner: A Biography* (New York: William Morrow, 2011), 25.
- 17 Lee Krasner, in Dorothy Seckler, "Oral history interview with Lee Krasner, Session One, November 2, 1964," Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-lee-krasner-12507#transcript>.
- 18 Franklin Delano Roosevelt, radio address, May 10, 1939, quoted in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 87.
- 19 Harold Rosenberg, in *ART/WORK/USA: American Art in the Thirties*, directed by Barbara Rose (New York, 1976). See also Barbara Rose, *Lee Krasner: A Retrospective*, exhibition catalog (Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts; New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1983), 34.
- 20 This was Hofmann's standard practice. See Lillian Orlowsky, *The Provocative Years 1935–1945: The Hans Hofmann School and Its Students in Provincetown*, exhibition catalog (Provincetown, MA: Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 1990), 4.
- 21 Hans Hofmann, *Search for the Real and Other Essays*, ed. Sara T. Weeks and B. Hayes, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 44.
- 22 Ibid., 46, 47.

- 23 Ibid., 40, 59, 61.
- 24 Hans Hofmann, *The Color Problem in Pure Painting, Its Creative Origin* (New York: Kootz Gallery, 1955), 2. This pamphlet was published on the occasion of Hofmann's 1955 exhibition at the Kootz Gallery.
- 25 Hans Hofmann, quoted by Krasner in Rose, dir., *Lee Krasner: The Long View*.
- 26 Hans Hofmann, "The Painter and His Problems," typescript, March 21, 1963, 10. Library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 27 Lee Krasner, quoted in Bryan Robertson, "The Nature of Lee Krasner," *Art in America*, November–December 1973, 84.
- 28 Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 402, 404.
- 29 Krasner, in Seckler, "Oral history interview with Lee Krasner, Session Two, December 14, 1967."
- 30 For Jimmy Ernst's two versions of this story, see Jimmy Ernst, *A Not-So-Still Life: A Memoir* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984), 241–42, and Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (New York: Putnam, 1985), 71–72.
- 31 The simplicity of symmetrical form is the antithesis of the variety characteristic of successful composition, a point implied by the art critic and encyclopedist Denis Diderot, who wrote, in 1781, "Symmetry, which is essential in architecture, is proscribed in every genre of painting." In painting, he added, "The unity of the whole is born of the subordination of the parts; and of this subordination is born harmony, which presupposes variety." This is perhaps the most succinct description of pictorial composition ever formulated. See Denis Diderot, "On composition and on the choice of subject," trans. Kate Tunstall, in *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas 1815–1900*, ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 668–69.
- 32 "Gray slabs": Lee Krasner, quoted in Grace Glueck, "Scenes from a Marriage: Krasner and Pollock," *Art News*, December 1981, 60; "blackout": Krasner, in "Lee Krasner in Conversation with Barbara Novak," 112.
- 33 Lee Krasner, in Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with 15 Women Artists*, rev. ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), 74.
- 34 "Lose Cubism": Krasner, in Glueck, "Scenes from a Marriage," 60.
- 35 John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing* (New York: Dover, 1971), 27.
- 36 For an account of thought's dependence on language, a social activity, see Donald Davidson, "The Socratic Concept of Truth," in *Truth, Language, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 259.
- 37 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 7.

- 38 Clement Greenberg, quoted in Ellen G. Landau, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 10.
- 39 Pliny, *Natural History*, vol. 9, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1912). Philocles and Cleanthes: 271, 273; Kora and Butades: 371, 373.
- 40 Plutarch, “Were the Athenians More Famous in War or in Wisdom?,” in *Moralia*, vol. 4, trans. F. C. Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1936), 495.
- 41 Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Frank Granger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1931), 71.
- 42 There is a distant affinity between Alberti’s warning about the appearance of cracks in the surface of a painting and Hofmann’s prohibition against “holes” in the picture plane. See note 20.
- 43 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Greyson (London: Penguin, 1991). Perspective, 39–59; drawing, 64–71; modeling, 82–83.
- 44 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, rev. ed., trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 72, 75.
- 45 Victor Cousin, “The Different Arts,” trans. O. W. Wight, in *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas 1815–1900*, 194.
- 46 Stéphane Mallarmé, “The Impressionists and Édouard Manet,” in Charles S. Moffat, *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874–1886*, exhibition catalog (San Francisco: Fine Art Museums of San Francisco, 1986), 30.
- 47 Paul Cézanne, quoted in Ambroise Vollard, *Cézanne* (New York: Dover, 1984), 67.
- 48 André Félibien, “Preface to Seven Conferences,” in *Art in Theory 1648–1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 116.
- 49 John Golding, *Cubism: A History and Analysis 1907–1914*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 15.
- 50 Krasner, in Ratcliff, “Interview with Lee Krasner,” 82.
- 51 Jackson Pollock, letter to Charles Pollock, July 29, 1943, in Francis V. O’Connor, *Jackson Pollock*, exhibition catalog (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1967), 28.
- 52 See *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works*, ed. Francis Valentine O’Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, vol. 4, *Other Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 204, figs. 3, 4.
- 53 Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 21.

- 54 Francine du Plessix and Cleve Gray, "Who Was Jackson Pollock?," *Art in America* 55, no. 3 (May–June 1967); reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, ed. Pepe Karmel (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 32.
- 55 Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict* (London: André Deutsch, 1983), 316.
- 56 Lee Krasner, quoted in Barbara Rose, "An American Great: Lee Krasner," in Hans Namuth, *25 Artists* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1982), n.p.
- 57 Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, 223–24.
- 58 For Hofmann, the edges of a canvas or sheet of paper are not just the boundaries of a composition but compositional elements in themselves. See Hofmann, *Search for the Real*, 42.
- 59 Ellen G. Landau, *Lee Krasner: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 99.
- 60 Krasner, in Seckler, "Oral history interview with Lee Krasner, Session One, November 2, 1964."
- 61 du Plessix and Gray, "Who Was Jackson Pollock?," 33.
- 62 Glueck, "Scenes from a Marriage," 58. Yet Krasner sometimes downplayed her and Pollock's equality, minimizing her contribution to their parallel developments, and exaggerating his independence.
- 63 In a review of a 1908 exhibition of paintings by Georges Braque, Louis Vauxcelles wrote that "he reduces everything . . . to cubes." See Louis Vauxcelles, "Braque at the Galerie Kahnweiler," in *Cubism*, ed. Edward Fry (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 50. By 1911, the critic's comments on "cubes" had evolved into "Cubism."
- 64 Pablo Picasso, "Statement to Marius de Zayas," in *Cubism*, 168.
- 65 John Ashbery, "Last Month," in *Collected Poems 1956–1987*, ed. Mark Ford (New York: Library of America, 2008), 128.
- 66 Jackson Pollock, quoted by Lee Krasner in B. H. Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, 36–37.
- 67 "I think it takes two people to paint a picture. The artist, and that that isn't solely enough, you have to have the first receiver." Krasner, in Rose, dir., *Lee Krasner: The Long View*.
- 68 Jackson Pollock, in Robert Goodnough, "Pollock Paints a Picture," in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, 78. Pollock makes a complementary remark in Hans Namuth's documentary *Jackson Pollock 51*: "There is no accident, just as there is no beginning and no end."

- 69 Lee Krasner, in Berton Roueché, “Unframed Space,” in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, 19.
- 70 Clyfford Still, interview with Ti-Grace Sharpless, in *Clyfford Still 1904–1980: The Buffalo and San Francisco Collections*, exhibition catalog, ed. Thomas Kellein (Munich: Prestel, 1992), 162.
- 71 Annihilating the “Euclidean prison”: Clyfford Still, letter to Mark Rothko, November 10, 1951, in *Clyfford Still*, exhibition catalog, ed. John P. O’Neil (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), 57; “sterile conclusions”: Still, letter to Gordon Smith, January 1, 1959, in *Clyfford Still*, 195.
- 72 See Selden Rodman, *The Insiders: Rejection and Rediscovery of Man in the Arts of Our Time* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 34.
- 73 Clement Greenberg, “‘American-Type’ Painting,” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1961), 218. When Greenberg first published this essay, in the *Partisan Review* in 1955, he did not mention Janet Sobel. She appears only in the version of the essay revised in 1961 for inclusion in *Art and Culture*. These revisions were subsequently dropped when the essay was included in Greenberg’s *Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, where it occupies pages 217–35.
- 74 André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, ed. and trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 26.
- 75 William Rubin, *Miro in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 81–82.
- 76 W. B. Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” in *The Importance of Language*, ed. Max Black (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 121–46.
- 77 Robert M. Coates, “The Art Galleries,” *New Yorker*, March 30, 1946, 83. It is likely that Coates borrowed “Abstract Expressionism” from Alfred H. Barr, Jr., who coined the phrase to describe Wassily Kandinsky’s quasi-abstract paintings from the 1910s. Of Kandinsky’s *Improvisation No. 30 (Cannons)*, 1913, Barr wrote that it seems “to have been done almost in a trance,” adding that “as expressions of lyrical, spontaneous excitement,” canvases like these “anticipate the more abstract Surrealist work of [André] Masson and Miró both in method and in form.” Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art*, exhibition catalog (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 64–66. Thus Barr suggests a connection between Kandinsky’s *Improvisations* and the automatist procedures André Breton described in 1924. See note 74.
- 78 The Sobel painting included in this exhibition was *Illusion of Solidity*, c. 1945. See *Abstract Expressionism*, ed. David Anfam, exhibition catalog (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2016), 153.
- 79 De Kooning would tease Pollock and others for their outsized images of themselves as heroic

pioneers. They “stand all alone in the wilderness—breast bared,” he once said, adding, “This is an American idea.” See Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters & Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 9. Pollock’s replies were blunt. He would say, typically, that de Kooning was “a god-damned European.” Jackson Pollock, quoted by Grace Hartigan, interview with the author, January 28, 1992. In fact, de Kooning was born and raised in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and studied at the Rotterdam Academy of Fine Arts and Techniques.

- 80 In 1950, a group of New York artists convened to discuss a wide range of topics. When the conversation got around to a name for the group, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., one of the moderators, noted that “Abstract-Expressionist,” “Abstract-Symbolist,” and “Intra-Subjectivist” had been proposed in recent years. Robert Motherwell offered another possibility: “Abstract-Objectivist.” None was accepted and Willem de Kooning brought this phase of the discussion to an end by saying, “It is disastrous to name ourselves.” See “Excerpts from Artists’ Sessions at Studio 35,” ed. Robert Goodnough, in *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, ed. Ellen G. Landau (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 164.
- 81 Kasimir Malevich, “From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting,” in *Essays on Art, 1915–1933*, ed. Troels Andersen, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (New York: George Wittenborn, 1971), 19.
- 82 Kasimir Malevich, “Suprematism,” in *The Non-Objective World*, trans. Howard Dearstyne (Chicago, IL: Paul Theobald, 1957), 118.
- 83 Jackson Pollock, quoted by Lee Krasner in Barbara Rose, undated, unpublished interview with Krasner, 10. See also Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock*, 486, 869.
- 84 See Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 349–69.
- 85 Lee Krasner, statement, in Robertson, “The Nature of Lee Krasner,” 84.
- 86 Krasner, in Friedman, “An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock,” 38.
- 87 B. H. Friedman, “Lee Krasner: An Intimate Introduction,” in Robert Hobbs, *Lee Krasner*, exhibition catalog (New York: Independent Curators International and Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 22. That Pollock welcomed and may have relied on Krasner’s judgment is suggested by John Bernard Myers, who said, “There never would have been a Jackson Pollock without Lee Pollock, and I put this on *every level*.” See Landau, *Jackson Pollock*, 253, n. 2; italics in the original.
- 88 John Burroughs, in R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 41.

- 89 Donald Judd, in Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 148.
- 90 James Russell Lowell, "Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 21, 1865," in *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Hollander (New York: Library of America, 1993), vol. 1, 701.
- 91 Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, 222.
- 92 "Is There A New Academy? Part I," *Art News*, Summer 1959, 34–37, 58–59; "Is There a New Academy? Part II," *Art News*, September 1959, 36–39, 58–60.
- 93 Allan Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966), 154.
- 94 Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Marfa, TX: Judd Foundation, 2016), 183.
- 95 Lee Krasner, in Cindy Nemser, "Forum: Women in Art," *Arts Magazine*, February 1971, 18.
- 96 Allan McCollum, *Over Ten Thousand Individual Works*, 1987–91 (cast in 1987, painted in 1991 and 2005). Enamel on cast hydrocal, each unique element 2 inches in diameter, lengths variable; overall dimensions variable, approximately 400 square feet. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 97 Paul Schmelzer, "Interview: Thomas Hirschhorn on *Cavemanman*," Walker Art Center, *Sightlines*, November 6, 2006, <https://walkerart.org/magazine/audio-blog-thomas-hirschhorn>.
- 98 See Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" and "Sentences on Conceptual Art," in *Sol LeWitt*, exhibition catalog, ed. Alicia Legg (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 166–68.
- 99 John Ruskin, "The Elements of Drawing," in *Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism 1840–1910*, ed. Eric Warner and Graham Hough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), vol. 1, 40, 41.
- 100 Piet Mondrian, "A Dialogue on Neoplasticism," in Hans L. C. Jaffe, *De Stijl* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971), 121, 123.
- 101 Roger de Piles, "The Principles of Painting," in *Art in Theory 1648–1815*, 312.
- 102 Hofmann, *Search for the Real*, 58.
- 103 Ibid., 40.
- 104 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (London: Penguin, 2003), 583.
- 105 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Declaration of Sentiments," in "*All Men and Women Are Created Equal*": *Elizabeth Cady Stanton's and Susan B. Anthony's Proverbial Rhetoric Promoting Women's Rights*, ed. Wolfgang Mieder (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 65.

- 106 George Dondero, "Modern Art Shackled to Communism," in *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 667–68.
- 107 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Essays and Poems* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), 9.
- 108 Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. James E. Miller (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 464.
- 109 Hoffman, *Search for the Real*, 61.
- 110 Ann Pringle, "Modern Houses Inside and Out," *New York Herald Tribune*, September 20, 1948, 20; Aline B. Louchheim, "Gallery, Decorator and Work of Art," *New York Times*, September 26, 1948, Section 10, 9.
- 111 Stuart Preston, "By Husband and Wife," *New York Times*, September 25, 1949, Section 10, 6.
- 112 "Mrs. Jackson Pollock," *Time*, March 17, 1958, 64.
- 113 "New and important": Leo Castelli, in Mary Gabriel, *Ninth Street Women: Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler: Five Painters and the Movement that Changed Modern Art* (New York: Little, Brown, 2018), 12; "great enthusiasm": Castelli, in Barbara Rose, "Oral history interview with Leo Castelli, July 1969," Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-leo-castelli-11784#transcript>.
- 114 Robert Goodnough, "Lee Krasner," *Art News*, November 1951, 59.
- 115 Lee Krasner, in Cindy Nemser, "A Conversation with Lee Krasner," *Arts Magazine*, April 1973, 45.
- 116 Clement Greenberg, quoted in Bryan Robertson, *Lee Krasner: Paintings, Drawings, and Collages*, exhibition catalog (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1965), 4.
- 117 Stuart Preston, "Modern Work in Diverse Shows: Contemporary American and Italian Work in New Displays," *New York Times*, October 2, 1955, Section 10, 15.
- 118 Fairfield Porter, "Lee Krasner," *Art News*, November 1955, 66.
- 119 Jackson Pollock, quoted in B. H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), xvi.
- 120 Naifeh and Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, 651–53.
- 121 Jackson Pollock, quoted by Grace Hartigan, interview with the author, January 28, 1992.
- 122 Lee Krasner, quoted in Ruth Kligman, *Love Affair* (New York: Morrow, 1970), 45.
- 123 Eleanor Ward, quoted by Krasner in Munro, *Originals*, 116.

- 124 Krasner, in Seckler, “Oral history interview with Lee Krasner, Session Three, April 11, 1968.”
- 125 Robert Hobbs, *Lee Krasner* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 66.
- 126 Lee Krasner, in Louise Elliott Rago, “We Interview Lee Krasner,” *School Arts*, September 1960, 32.
- 127 See “Catalogue of the Exhibition,” in Sam Hunter, *Jackson Pollock*, exhibition catalog (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956), 34–35.
- 128 The International Council at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, press release, March 11, 1958, 7, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/2342/releases/MOMA_1958_0025.pdf. In the catalog of the show, the lender of the two paintings—Pollock’s *Number 26* and *Number 27*, both 1951—is listed as the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York. See *The New American Painting as Shown in Eight European Countries 1958–1959* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1958), 94.
- 129 Stuart Preston, “The Week’s Variety,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1958, Section 10, 9.
- 130 Lee Krasner, quoted in “Mrs. Jackson Pollock,” *Time*, March 17, 1958, 64.
- 131 Clement Greenberg, quoted in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 333.
- 132 Barbara Rose, *Lee Krasner: A Retrospective*, exhibition catalog (Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts; New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1983), 155.
- 133 Vivien Raynor, “Lee Krasner,” *Arts Magazine*, January 1961, 54.
- 134 Stuart Preston, “Art: Allusive Portraits,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1960, 43.
- 135 John Russell, Sheldon Williams, and Nigel Gosling, in Landau, *Lee Krasner: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 316–17.
- 136 B. H. Friedman, “Introduction,” in Robertson, *Lee Krasner, Paintings, Drawings, and Collages*, 5.
- 137 Marcia Tucker, *Lee Krasner: Large Paintings*, exhibition catalog (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1973), 16.
- 138 Barbara Rose, *Krasner/Pollock: A Working Relationship*, exhibition catalog (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1981), n.p.
- 139 Lee Krasner, quoted in Levin, *Lee Krasner*, 421.
- 140 Krasner, in “Lee Krasner in Conversation with Barbara Novak,” 113.
- 141 *Ibid.*, 111.
- 142 M. G. Lord, “Lee Krasner, Before and After the Ball Was Over,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1995, Section 2, 31–32.
- 143 See *Abstract Expressionism*, ed. Anfam, 130.

- 144 After opening at the Barbican Centre, London, in May 2019, *Lee Krasner: Living Colour* traveled to the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, in October 2019; Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, in February 2020; and Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Bilbao, in September 2020.
- 145 Peter Plagens, "'Lee Krasner: Living Color' Review: From Pain to Primacy," *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/lee-krasner-living-color-review-from-pain-to-primacy-11573300800>.

FIGURE DETAILS

Lee Krasner, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1931-1933
Oil on linen, 18 x 16 in., 45.7 x 40.6 cm
© 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Image courtesy Kasmin Gallery.

Lee Krasner, *Nude Study from Life*, 1938
Charcoal on paper, 24 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 19 in., 61.4 x 48.3 cm
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Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1940
Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in., 76.2 x 63.5 cm
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Lee Krasner, *Mural Study for Studio A, Radio Station WNYC*, 1941
Gouache on paper, 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 29 in., 49.5 x 73.7 cm
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Lee Krasner, *War Service Window Cryptography*, 1942
Photomontage and collage, dimensions are unknown.
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Lee Krasner, *Image Surfacing*, 1945
Oil on canvas, 27 x 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., 68.6 x 54.6 cm
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Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1946
Oil on linen, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., 70.5 x 76.8 cm
© 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Jonathan Urban. Collection of Bobbi and Walter Zifkin. Image courtesy Barbican Centre.

Lee Krasner, *Noon*, 1947
Oil on linen 24 x 30 in., 61 x 76.2 cm
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Lee Krasner, *Abstract No. 2*, 1946-1948
Oil on canvas, 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., 52 x 59 cm
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Lee Krasner, *Shattered Color*, 1947
Oil on canvas, 22 x 26 $\frac{1}{8}$ in., 55.9 x 66.4 cm
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Lee Krasner, *Mosaic Table*, 1947
Mixed media mosaic of various elements including broken glass, keys, coins, ceramic, and pebbles set in cement on iron wagon-wheel armature with steel legs, 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 46 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 46 in., 55.2 x 118.7 x 116.8 cm
© 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, New York. Private Collection.

Lee Krasner, *White Squares*, 1948
Enamel and oil on canvas, Overall: 24 x 30 in., 61 x 76.2 cm
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Lee Krasner, *Stop and Go*, 1949
Oil and enamel on panel, 45 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., 116.2 cm diameter
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, New York. Private Collection.

Lee Krasner, *Untitled*, 1950
Oil on canvas, 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 56 $\frac{1}{2}$, 90.2 x 143.5 cm
© 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Image courtesy Kasmin Gallery. Photography by Christopher Stach.

Lee Krasner, *City Verticals*, 1953
Oil, paper, and canvas on masonite, 41 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ in., 104.8 x 79 cm
© 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Private Collection.

Lee Krasner, *Blue Level*, 1955

Oil, paper and burlap collage on canvas, 82 ¼ x 58 in., 208.9 x 147.3 cm

© 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Image courtesy Kasmin Gallery.

Lee Krasner, *Prophecy*, 1956

Oil on cotton duck, 58 ⅞ x 34 in., 147.6 x 86.4 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Birth*, 1956

Oil on canvas, 82 ½ x 48 in., 209.6 x 121.9 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Three in Two*, 1956

Oil on canvas, 75 x 58 in., 190.5 x 147.3 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Embrace*, 1956

Oil on canvas, 64 x 57 in., 162.6 x 144.8 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Sun Woman 1*, 1957

Oil on canvas, 97 ¼ x 70 ¼ in., 247 x 178.4 cm

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Lee Krasner, *The Gate*, 1959

Oil on canvas, 91 ⅞ x 145 ½ in., 233.4 x 369.6 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Chrysalis*, 1964

Oil on cotton duck, 44 ⅞ x 46 ⅞ in., 112 x 117.2 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Icarus*, 1964

Oil on canvas, 46 x 69 in., 116.8 x 175.3 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Kufic*, 1965

Oil on canvas, 81 x 128 in., 205.7 x 325.1 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Courtship*, 1966

Oil on canvas, 51 x 71 in., 129.5 x 180.3 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Pollination*, 1968

Oil on canvas, 81 ¼ x 83 in., 206.375 x 210.82 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Palingenesis*, 1971

Oil on canvas, 82 x 134 in., 208.3 x 340.4 cm

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Lee Krasner, *Peacock*, 1973

Oil on canvas, 82 x 82 in., 208.3 x 208.3 cm

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Jackson Pollock, *Birth*, 1938-1941
Oil on canvas, 45 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{2}{3}$ in., 116.3 x 60.1 cm
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Jackson Pollock, *Stenographic Figure*, 1942
Oil on linen, 40 x 56 in., 101.6 x 142.2 cm
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Jackson Pollock, *The She Wolf*, 1943
Oil, gouache, and plaster on canvas, 41 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 67 in., 106.4 x 170.2 cm
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Jackson Pollock, *Mural*, 1943
Oil and casein on canvas, 95 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 237 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., 243 x 604 cm
© Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy the University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City.

Jackson Pollock, *Shimmering Substance*, 1946
Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., 76.3 x 61.6 cm
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Jackson Pollock, *Magic Lantern*, 1947
Oil, enamel, and carpet tacks on canvas, 42 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., 108.9 x 55.2 cm
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Jackson Pollock, *Sea Change*, 1947
Artist and commercial oil paint, with gravel, on canvas, 57 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 44 $\frac{1}{8}$ in., 47 x 112.1 cm
© Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Gift of Signora Peggy Guggenheim. Courtesy the Seattle Art Museum. Photography by Eduardo Calderón.

Jackson Pollock, *Lavender Mist*, 1950
Oil, enamel, and aluminum on canvas, 87 x 118 in., 221 x 299.7 cm
© Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Pablo Picasso, *Man with Violin*, 1911-12
Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 28 $\frac{13}{16}$ in., 100 x 73.2 cm
The Philadelphia Museum of Art / Art Resource, New York. © Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Claude Monet, *Meules, fin de l'été (Haystack, End of Summer)*, 1891
Oil on canvas, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., 60.5 x 100.8 cm
© RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, New York.

Paul Cézanne, *Bibémus*, c. 1894-9
Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., 71.4 x 90.2 cm
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation / Art Resource, New York.

Nicolas Poussin, *Parnassus*, 1630-31
Oil on canvas, 57 x 77 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., 145 x 197 cm
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation / Art Resource, New York.

Barnett Newman, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950-51
Oil on canvas, 95 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 213 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., 242.2 x 541.7 cm
© 2020 Barnett Newman Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller.

Clyfford Still, *1951-T No. 3*, 1951
Oil on canvas, 214 x 82 in., 238.8 x 208.3 cm
© 2020 Clyfford Still / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York. Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund.

Piet Mondrian, *Tableau 2*, 1922
Oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 21 in., 55.5 x 53.3 cm
© 2020 Mondrian / Holtzman Trust. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation / Art Resource, New York.

Adolph Gottlieb, *Augury*, 1945
Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in., 101.6 x 76.2
Adolph Gottlieb © VAGA at ARS, New York.
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation / Art
Resource, New York.

Janet Sobel, *Milky Way*, 1945
Enamel on canvas, 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ in., 114 x 75.9 cm
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Art Resource, New York.

Janet Sobel, *Untitled*, 1946
Oil and enamel on composition board, 18 x 14 in.,
45.7 x 35.5 cm
© The Estate of Janet Sobel. The Museum of Modern
Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.
Gift of William Rubin.

Max Ernst, *The Bewildered Planet*, 1942
Oil on canvas, 43 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 55 $\frac{1}{8}$ in., 110 x 140 cm
Max Ernst © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York / ADAGP, Paris. Courtesy the Tel Aviv
Museum of Art.

Andre Masson, *Figure*, 1926-27
Oil and sand on canvas, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., 46.1 x 26.9 cm
Andre Masson © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York / ADAGP, Paris. © The Museum of Modern
Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.

Hans Hofmann, *Spring*, 1944-45
Oil and enamel, 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. 28.6 x 35.8 cm
© The Renate, Hans and Maria Hofmann Trust /
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
© The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA /
Art Resource, New York.

Mark Tobey, *Lines of the City*, 1945
Tempera on paper mounted on board,
17 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., 45.5 x 55.3 cm
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Phillips Academy, Andover, MA / Art Resource, New
York. Bequest of Edward Wales Root.

Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, ca. 1923
Oil on canvas, 41 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 41 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., 106 x 106 cm
Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.
Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.

Willem de Kooning, *Excavation*, 1950
Oil on canvas, 81 x 100 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., 205.7 x 254.6 cm
Willem de Kooning © 2020 Artists Rights Society
(ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. The Art Institute of
Chicago / Art Resource, New York. Mr. and Mrs. Frank
G. Logan Purchase Prize Fund; restricted gifts of Edgar J.
Kaufmann, Jr.

Walter De Maria, *The Lightning Field*, 1977
Long-term installation, western New Mexico.
© Estate of Walter De Maria. Photo: John Cliett, courtesy
Dia Art Foundation, New York.

Sol LeWitt, *Cubic-Modular Wall Structure, Black*, 1966
Painted wood, 43 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 43 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ in., 110.3 x 110.2
x 23.7 cm
So LeWitt © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New
York / ADAGP, Paris. The Museum of Modern Art/
Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.
Gift of Alicia Legg.

Allan McCollum, *Collection of Forty Plaster Surrogates*.
1982 (cast and painted in 1984)
Enamel on cast Hydrostone, Forty panels ranging from
5 x 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ to 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ in., 12.8 x 10.2 to 51.3 x 41.1 cm
© Allan McCollum. The Museum of Modern Art /
Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Cavemanman*, 2002
Exhibition view 'Heart of Darkness', Walker Art
Center, Minneapolis, 2006. Courtesy D. Daskalopoulos
Collection.

Diego Velazquez, *Las Meninas*, or *The Family of Felipe IV*,
Ca. 1656
Oil on canvas. 125 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 108 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., 318 x 276 cm
Museo Nacional del Prado / Art Resource, New York.