

A GESTURE OF CONVICTION
Women of Abstract Expressionism
Works from the 1950s and 60s

Mary Abbott

Anna-Eva Bergman

Amaranth Ehrenhalt

Perle Fine

Helen Frankenthaler

Judith Godwin

Grace Hartigan

Martha Jungwirth

Lee Krasner

Charlotte Park

Judit Reigl

Yvonne Thomas

Michael Corinne West

1st December 2018 – 23rd February 2019

Opening: 30th November 2018, 7 pm

Welcome speech: Kay Heymer, Head of Modern Art, Museum Kunstpalast, Dusseldorf

PRESS RELEASE

Jackson Pollock said of his wife Lee Krasner, "I'd be dead by now if it weren't for her". Krasner, certainly one of the most important and innovative artists of her time, sacrificed her own genius to guide her husband Jackson Pollock through his life of excessive drinking and make him a star. He went on to lead a dazzling career thanks to Krasner and Clement Greenberg. Pollock's wife Lee Krasner herself remained in the background as an artist. Her virtuoso all-over works were only truly discovered and appraised after her death.

The exhibition *A Gesture of Conviction - Women of Abstract Expressionism - Works from the 1950s and 60s* is dedicated to the art of Krasner along with 9 other American and 3 European painters. Their expressive works clear up the cliché of gestural painting as primarily "masculine" artistic expression.

The group exhibition refers to the aesthetic changes and innovations of the New York School and abstraction in Europe based on the art of these brilliant companions of painters such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Hans Hartung et al.

Long disadvantaged by both the art market and art history, stylized into "muses" and marginalized, many female artists fought for recognition, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. In New York, they took part in discussions in the renowned group "The Club" - but they were refused membership for a long time. They were

represented in groundbreaking exhibitions - including the Stable Gallery and Betty Parsons - but had overall fewer exhibition participations compared to their male colleagues. Their works were much harder to sell and went for far lower prices. For this reason, some of them, such as Lee Krasner, Grace (George) Hartigan, or Michael (Corinne) West, adopted male or at least gender-neutral artist names.

With the 2016 exhibition *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, the Denver Art Museum laid the institutional spotlight on the remarkable protagonists of the 1940s and 1950s for the first time.

In an actual "gesture of conviction" the presentation at SETAREH joins the efforts and achievements - especially more recent ones - to relight the canon of art history and the art market. It is the first gallery exhibition of its kind in Europe.

In addition to the gestural works of the now recognized artists Lee Krasner and Helen Frankenthaler, works from their New York colleagues Mary Abbott, Amaranth Ehrenhalt, Perle Fine, Judith Godwin, Grace Hartigan, Charlotte Park, Yvonne Thomas and Michael Corinne West will also be presented. Their vibrant paintings are complemented by the cool abstractions of the Norwegian artist Anna-Eva Bergman, who belongs to the *Nouvelle École de Paris*, and by the powerful action paintings of Judit Reigl, who was born in Budapest and works in Paris. These are flanked by the delicate watercolors of the somewhat younger Viennese painter Martha Jungwirth.

The power, skill and virtuosity of the painters of the 1950s and 60s can be clearly felt in the exhibition. Together, the works bear witness to these artists' creative urge and passion to find an affective and spontaneous means for the artistic expression of their time.

"There are no rules. That is how art is born, how breakthroughs happen. Go against the rules or ignore the rules. That is what invention is about."

Helen Frankenthaler