



PARRISH ART MUSEUM

Affinities for Abstraction: Women Artists on Eastern Long Island, 1950–2020

Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., May 2–July 25, 2021 (4.28.21)

Introduction Wall Text

Affinities for Abstraction: Women Artists on Eastern Long Island, 1950–2020

Beginning in the 1950s, women artists who pursued abstraction were consistently relegated to an ancillary role in the male-dominated realm of Abstract Expressionism, despite their novel and often critical contributions to the movement. Several of these influential artists—Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler—happen to have made the East End of Long Island their home for a week, a season, or a lifetime. *Affinities for Abstraction* brings together works by these five seminal figures with those of thirty-five other women artists who, over the past seven decades, have transformed abstract art and continue to expand its limits. All the artists in the exhibition have experienced the East End as a nexus of creativity, affording them camaraderie and inspiration amid the abundant natural beauty of land, light, and sea.

Affinities for Abstraction reveals often surprising connections between the well-known early practitioners and successive waves of artists who have enlarged and exploited the language of abstraction. In 1952, Frankenthaler became the first artist to unfurl an unprimed canvas on the floor and flood it with paint that seeped and stained of its own volition; with this signature gesture, she invented a particularly lyrical type of color-field abstraction. Hartigan’s canvases, though filled with active gesture, never abandoned content and were often embedded with social commentary. Later generations have revised the term “abstract” in myriad ways that reflect the ongoing vitality of the pursuit: Mary Heilmann counters the rigors of Minimalism with rollicking brushwork; Joan Snyder’s vertical paint streaks freeze mid-drip; and Howardena Pindell’s hole-punched circles build up complex surfaces. Today, artists such as Amy Sillman, Jacqueline Humphries, and Sue Williams affirm and reinvigorate this tradition with new and distinct strategies toward content, shape, color, line, and gesture.




Often rejecting the dominant midcentury themes of myth and archetype to pursue a different collective vision, the women artists of the East End, from then to now, have traced an interweaving skein of approaches that reveal a deep, ever-evolving engagement with abstraction.

Alicia G. Longwell

Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Chief Curator, Art and Education

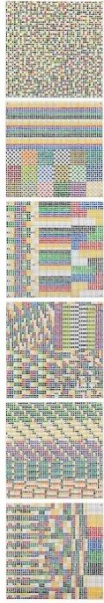



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| 1. | <p>Mary Abbott (American, 1921–2019) <i>Imrie</i>, 1953 Oil on canvas 71 x 74 inches Collection Thomas McCormick and Jane Kanter, Chicago</p> |  |
| 2. | <p>Marina Adams (American, born 1960) <i>Left Hand of the Dreamer</i>, 2020 Acrylic on linen 98 x 78 inches Courtesy the artist and Salon 94, New York Immersive in scale, Marina Adams's paintings, though abstract, are rooted in textile design and architecture. "Pattern is a language that crosses boundaries. It offers common ground."</p> |  |
| 3. | <p>Victoria Barr (American, born 1937) <i>Blaze</i>, 1970 Acrylic on canvas 67 x 78 ½ inches JPMorgan Chase Art Collection</p> |  |


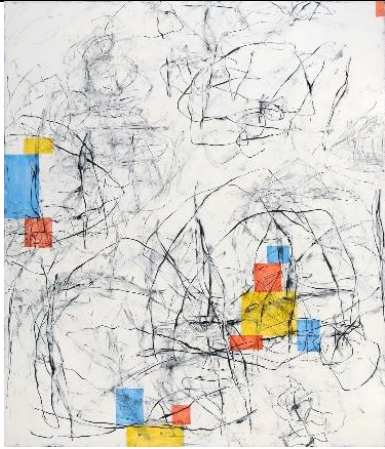



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| <p>4. Jennifer Bartlett (American, born 1941) <i>One Through Six System Using Six Colors</i>, 1970 Enamel over silkscreen grid on baked enamel steel plates Six 12 x 12-inch units (77 x 12 inches overall) Private collection, courtesy The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY</p> <p>Also breaking down the process of painting, Jennifer Bartlett chose to create work on foot square steel plates silk-screened with a one inch grid, melding the system based aesthetic of Conceptual art with the painterly approach of Neoexpressionism.</p> |  |
| <p>5. Lynda Benglis (American, born 1941) <i>Untitled</i>, 1971 Purified pigmented beeswax and Damar resin on Masonite 36 x 5 3/4 x 2 3/4 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Hans W. Kertess, 2002.8</p> <p>Asked to summarize her artistic ambitions in the 1960s, Lynda Benglis replied, "I wasn't breaking away from painting but trying to redefine what it was." She began to make wax reliefs, layers of molten beeswax clinging to a Masonite board, then hardening into ridges and furrows in a spectrum of pastel hues—all in the pursuit of what the artist called "the frozen gesture."</p> |  |



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| <p>6. Nanette Carter (American, born 1954) <i>Cantilevered #60</i>, 2021 Oil on Mylar 72 x 65 30inches Courtesy Berry Campbell Gallery, New York</p> |  |
| <p>7. Louisa Chase (American, born Panama, 1951–2016) <i>Untitled</i>, 1988 Oil on canvas 84 x 72 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Theodore and Ruth Baum, 2000.7</p> |  |
| <p>8. Elaine de Kooning (American, 1920–1989) <i>Sun Wall</i>, 1986–1987 Oil on canvas 98 x 132 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Domna Stanton, 1999.13.4</p> <p>Women artists have, each in her own way, staked out territory for a unique style by inventively pushing the boundaries—their collective agency well reflected in Elaine de Kooning’s famous pronouncement: “Painting. . . is primarily a verb, not a noun.” After living on the East End in the 1970s, de Kooning returned</p> |  |



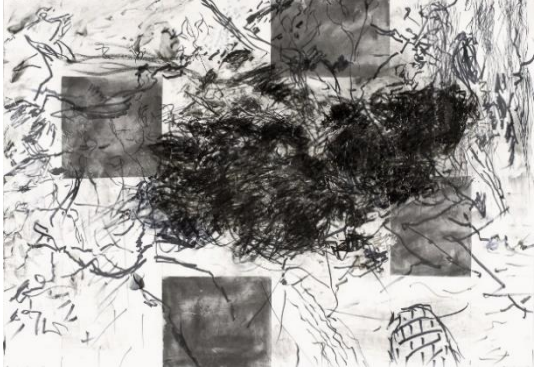


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| | <p>in 1974 when she and her husband Willem reconciled. She purchased a house on Alewife Brook Road in East Hampton, adding a studio in 1978. Her late paintings from the 1980s focus on the imagery of the Paleolithic caves at Lascaux and Altamira.</p> | |
| 9. | <p>Elaine de Kooning (American, 1920–1989) <i>Mihsien Lake (Cave No. 186)</i>, 1988 Sumi ink on rice paper 22 x 30 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Arlene Bujese, 2019.21.1</p> | |
| 10. | <p>Natalie Edgar (American, born 1932) <i>Corelli</i>, 2018 Oil on canvas 38 x 66 inches Courtesy Mark Borghi, New York</p> | |
| 11. | <p>Perle Fine (American, 1908–1988) <i>Plan for the White City</i>, 1950 Oil and sand on canvas 56 1/4 x 38 1/4 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Dr. Melvin Fine, 1956.3</p> | |





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| <p>12. Perle Fine (American, 1908–1988) <i>Image d’Hiver</i>, 1958 Oil and mixed media on canvas 36 x 36 inches Private Collection, Switzerland, courtesy Ekaterina Klim</p> |  |
| <p>13. Audrey Flack (American, born 1931) <i>Untitled</i>, 1950 Ink, watercolor and graphite on paper 11 ½ x 17 ½ inches (sight) Collection Louis K. and Susan P. Meisel</p> |  |
| <p>14. Connie Fox (American, born 1925) <i>Weeds 7</i>, 2010 Charcoal, ink, and acrylic on paper 30-1/4 x 44 in. Courtesy the artist</p> |  |






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| 15. | <p>Helen Frankenthaler (American, 1928–2011) <i>Yellow Vapor</i>, 1965 Acrylic on canvas 69 1/8 x 77 3/4 inches JPMorgan Chase Art Collection © 2021 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.</p> |  |
| 16. | <p>Jane Freilicher (American, 1924–2014) <i>Blue and Green Abstraction</i>, 1960 Oil on linen 45 x 29 inches Private Collection, Coral Gables, Florida</p> <p>Jane Freilicher studied with artist Hans Hofmann in the late 1940s and pursued the then dominant style of abstraction. She would soon, however, recognize her need for what she called “the seen.”</p> |  |
| 17. | <p>Gertrude Greene (American, 1904-1956) <i>Untitled</i>, 1937 Collage on paper with cotton cloth 8 1/4 x 5 1/2 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, Gift of Dr. Lawrence and Regina Dubin, 2011.3.1</p> |  |





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| <p>18. Gertrude Greene (American, 1904-1956) <i>Yellow Structure</i>, 1950 Oil on canvas 40 x 24 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, Gift of Marilyn Walter Grounds, 2002.13.1</p> |  |
| <p>19. Gertrude Greene (American, 1904-1956) <i>Crescendo</i>, 1951 Oil on canvas 48 1/4 x 35 7/8 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Mr. Balcomb Greene, 1971.9</p> |  |
| <p>20. Grace Hartigan (American, 1922-2008) <i>Untitled (The Cardinal)</i>, 1959 Oil on canvas 88 x 72 inches Private Collection, Southampton, New York</p> <p>Grace Hartigan transforms this homage to Old Master portraits into a dynamic interplay of colliding colors and forceful gestures. "I want an art that is not 'abstract' and not 'realistic,'" she said. Hartigan was the only woman included in MoMA's New American Painting, an exhibition that traveled throughout Europe in the late 1950s and established Abstract</p> |  |



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| | <p>Expressionism as a dominant international style.</p> | |
| 21. | <p>Mary Heilmann (American, born 1940) <i>Narrow Lane #3</i>, 2001 Oil on canvas 50 1/4 x 40 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Museum purchase with funds provided by the Parrish Art Museum Collector's Circle, 2007.1</p> |  |
| 22. | <p>Virva Hinnemo (American, born Finland, 1976) <i>My Studio</i>, 2019 Acrylic on canvas 60 x 50 inches (2 panels) Courtesy the artist and Anita Rogers Gallery</p> |  |


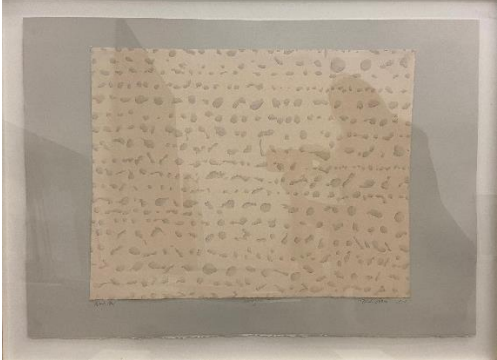


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| 23. | <p>Sheree Hovsepian (American, born Iran, 1974) <i>Diegesis</i>, 2020 Gelatin silver prints, photograms, and nylon 49 3/8 X 37 3/8 inches Courtesy Higher Pictures Generation, New York</p> |  |
| 24. | <p>Sheree Hovsepian (American, born Iran, 1974) <i>Mimesis</i>, 2020 Gelatin silver prints, photograms, and nylon 49 3/8 X 37 3/8 inches Courtesy Higher Pictures Generation, New York</p> |  |
| 25. | <p>Jacqueline Humphries (American, born 1960) <i>Untitled</i>, 1991 Oil on canvas 80 x 80 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Lauren and Steven P. Schwartz, 2020.11</p> |  |





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| <p>26. Michi Itami (American, born 1938) <i>Untitled</i>, 1973 Lithograph on paper Artist's Proof 22 x 29 ¼ inches Courtesy of the Artist</p> |  |
| <p>27. Michi Itami (American, born 1938) <i>Sasayaki II</i>, 1974 Lithograph on paper Artist's Proof 17 ¼ x 21 inches Courtesy of the Artist</p> |  |
| <p>28. Virginia Jaramillo (American, born 1939) <i>Site: No. 15 13.5099° S, 71.9817° W</i>, 2018 Acrylic on canvas 72 x 72 inches Courtesy the artist and Hales, London and New York</p> <p>Throughout her career, Virginia Jaramillo has pursued what she describes as “an aesthetic investigation into our physical, mental, and spiritual worlds.” Her approach to abstraction has been informed by archaeology, science fiction, and cultural mythologies. <i>Site No.15</i> is inspired by Sacsayhuamán, a citadel on the northern outskirts of Cusco, Peru, historic capital of the Inca Empire.</p> |  |



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| <p>29. Lee Krasner (American, 1908–1984) <i>Comet</i>, 1970 Oil on canvas 70 x 86 inches Pollock-Krasner Foundation, courtesy Kasmin, New York</p> <p>Lee Krasner reinvented her artistic style several times over the course of her career, struggling to pursue an artistic identity separate from her role as wife (or, after 1956, widow) and relentless champion of her husband Jackson Pollock. <i>Comet</i> is a canvas that she revised many times over the course of a four-year period. In this final version she had become more interested in surface and in holding the picture plane, marking a trend toward more minimal and controlled forms with harder edges.</p> |  |
| <p>30. Gina Knee (American, 1898-1982) Untitled, ca. 1950 Etching on paper 4 x 3 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, Promised Gift of Arlene Bujese</p> |  |





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| <p>31. Agnes Martin (American, born Canada, 1912-2004) <i>Rain (Study)</i>, 1958 Oil on canvas 25 x 25 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, Gift of Robert Elkon, 1979.26 Agnes Martin's study for <i>Rain</i> was made soon after her move to New York City, where she kept a studio on Coenties Slip and counted as neighbors artists Jack Youngerman and Ellsworth Kelly. In 1960 she exhibited along with them at the artist-run Signa Gallery in East Hampton.</p> |  |
| <p>32. Mercedes Matter (American, 1913–2001) <i>Untitled (Number 11)</i>, 1933 Oil on paper laid down on canvas 20 X 17 inches Courtesy Mark Borghi, New York</p> |  |
| <p>33. Mercedes Matter (American, 1913–2001) <i>Untitled (Still Life)</i>, 1978 Oil on canvas 48 x 36 inches Courtesy of Mark Borghi, New York</p> <p>Mercedes Matter untitled work from the early 1930s, made when she was just twenty years old, is an accomplished abstract color study—not surprising as her father, the noted American modernist, Arthur B. Carles, taught her about Cézanne when she was just six years old.</p> |  |





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| <p>34. Joan Mitchell (American, 1925–1992) <i>Slate</i>, 1959 Oil on canvas 77 x 74 1/2 inches JPMorgan Chase Art Collection Joan Mitchell once said of her painting in the 1950s: “The freedom in my work is quite controlled.” <i>Slate</i> presents an apparently spontaneous—but in fact carefully orchestrated—buildup of brushstrokes. Unlike many of her Abstract Expressionist contemporaries, Mitchell rejected an all-over compositional approach, preferring a balance of figure and ground—even in a fully abstract image.</p> |  |
| <p>35. Joan Mitchell (American, 1925–1992) <i>Pour Patou</i>, 1976 Oil on canvas 78 x 45 1/2 inches Private Collection, Coral Gables, Florida Joan Mitchell referred to the matter of her paintings as “feelings,” or memories of distinct times and places. In <i>Pour Patou</i>, the artist has aimed not to describe nature but “to paint what it leaves me with.”</p> |  |
| <p>36. Louise Nevelson (American, born Ukraine, 1899–1988) <i>Series of Unknown Cosmos x 11</i>, 1979 Wood collage on paper 46 x 37 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Morton Schrader, 2015.5</p> |  |






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| <p>37. Ruth Nivola (American, born Germany, 1917—2008) <i>Timeless Pendulum</i>, 1976-78 Crocheted, whipped, and hammered metallic yarns 23 1/8 x 17 1/4 inches, framed Nivola Family Collection</p> <p>Even among her wide circle of artist friends on the East End, few knew of Ruth Nivola's artistic pursuit expressed in these totemic crocheted, embroidered, knotted, and appliquéd ornaments evoking past empires and storied archetypes.</p> |  |
| <p>38. Ruth Nivola (American, born Germany, 1917—2008) <i>Byzantine Seeds</i>, 1979-1980 Crocheted and braided yarns and silks, and old buttons 33 1/8 x 14 1/4 inches, framed Nivola Family Collection</p> |  |

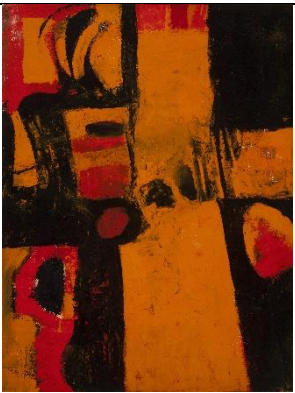



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| <p>39. Ruth Nivola (American, born Germany, 1917—2008) <i>Reflection of a Temple</i>, 1981 Crocheted, whipped, hammered and appliquéd metallic yarns, and Indian silk 19 1/8 x 19 1/8 inches, framed Nivola Family Collection</p> |  |
| <p>40. Ruth Nivola (American, born Germany, 1917—2008) <i>Three Icons</i>, 1982 Crocheted, whipped, hammered and appliquéd metallic yarns, and Indian silk 19 1/8 inches (diameter) Nivola Family Collection</p> |  |
| <p>41. Charlotte Park (American, 1918-2010) <i>Untitled #3</i>, 1952 Ink on paper 22 x 36 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, Gift of the Artist, 1992.2.3</p> |  |



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| <p>42. Charlotte Park (American, 1918–2010) <i>Initiation</i>, ca. 1955 Oil on canvas 48 1/2 x 36 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York, Gift of the James and Charlotte Brooks Foundation, 2017.13.83</p> <p>Charlotte Park and her husband artist James Brooks first came to the East End in the 1950s. Here Park brings a highly expressive abstracted vocabulary to <i>Initiation</i>. After spending extended periods in Paris in the twenties and thirties, exploring Cubism and Constructivism, Gertrude Greene returned to the U.S. and in 1937 became a founding member of American Abstract Artists. By the 1950s her style had evolved into a formalized geometric abstraction.</p> |  |
| <p>43. Betty Parsons (American, 1900-1982) <i>Indian Acorn</i>, 1966 Acrylic on canvas 68 ¼ x 41 inches Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, Gift of the Betty Parsons Foundation, 2014.13</p> <p>Perhaps best known as the gallerist who gave the Abstract Expressionist artists (both men and women) their first wide exposure, Betty Parsons was herself an artist and in 1946 opened her first gallery with Northwest Coast Indian Painting, organized by artist Barnett Newman.</p> |  |



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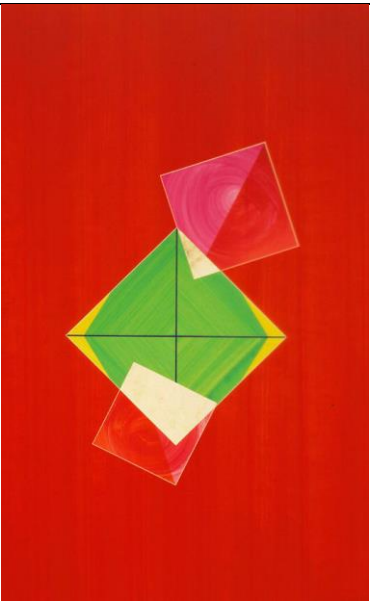
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| <p>44. Betty Parsons (American, 1900-1982) <i>It Was That Way</i>, 1971 Acrylic on wood 18 x 28 x 1 ½ inches Private Collection courtesy Berry Campbell, New York</p> |  |
| <p>45. Howardena Pindell (American, born 1943) <i>Untitled - III</i>, 1976 Mixed media; embedments and handmade paper 19 x 19 inches Courtesy JPMorgan Chase Art Collection</p> |  |
| <p>46. Howardena Pindell (American, born 1943) <i>Untitled - IV</i>, 1976 Mixed media; embedments and handmade paper 19 x 19 inches Courtesy of the JPMorgan Chase Art Collection</p> |  |



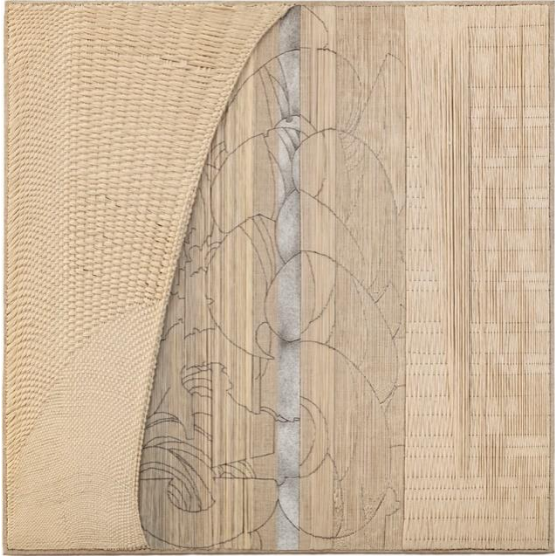
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47. Dorothea Rockburne (American, born Canada, 1932)
The Cross is in the Center, Tintoretto, 1988–89
Watercolor and gold leaf on prepared acetate
93 x 59 5/8 inches
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Susanne Emmerich in Memory of André Emmerich, 2012.1

Dorothea Rockburne has long mined geometry for its rigor and abstract beauty, experimenting with mediums and materials from crude oil to rolled steel. Applied as an unmixed, undiluted pigment, watercolor here produces vibrant color and a virility not usually associated with the medium.






48. Dorothy Ruddick (American, 1925–2010)
Untitled (T.014), 1981
Cotton thread, ink and gesso on linen
27 x 27 inches
Estate of the artist, courtesy The Drawing Room, East Hampton, New York




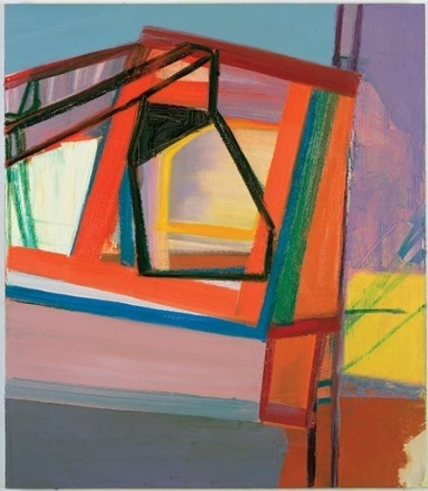


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| <p>49. Dorothy Ruddick (American, 1925–2010) <i>Untitled (T.031)</i>, 1982 Cotton thread on linen 17 x 32 inches Estate of the artist, courtesy The Drawing Room, East Hampton, New York</p> <p>Early in her career, Dorothy Ruddick, a graduate of Black Mountain College, was a lead designer at Knoll and also a painter. She returned to a childhood interest in embroidery for distraction during marathon watching of the 1973 Watergate hearings.</p> |  |
| <p>50. Anne Ryan (American, 1889–1954) <i>Untitled</i>, ca. 1950 Collage with paper and cloth, 4 3/4 x 8 1/4 inches Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Harriet Vicente, 2003.4</p> <p>In 1948 poet Anne Ryan saw an exhibition of German artist Kurt Schwitters's collages and was inspired by his use of color, texture, and the all-over composition in such small works. Taking up the practice, Ryan exclusively used the highlyprized handmade papers from the artist Douglas Morse Howell—some even made from flax that he grew behind his house in Oyster Bay, Long Island.</p> |  |
| <p>51. Sonja Sekula (Swiss, 1918–1963) <i>Pour l'animal noir</i>, 1945 Ink and gouache on paper 12 x 16 1/2 inches Courtesy Peter Blum Gallery, New York</p> <p>Born in Lucerne. Switzerland, Sonja Sekula came to the U.S. with her family as a young woman and later studied at the Art Students League. She became associated with the</p> |  |



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| | <p>dominant Ab-Ex style, counting among her influences artists Jackson Pollock and especially Mark Rothko, whose resonant dark palette was a strong influence.</p> | |
| 52. | <p>Sonja Sekula (Swiss,1918–1963) <i>Fields</i>, 1958 Oil and mixed media on cardboard laid on board 27 1/2 × 19 5/8 inches Courtesy Peter Blum Gallery, New York</p> |  |
| 53. | <p>Amy Sillman (American, born 1955) <i>C</i>, 2007 Oil on canvas 45 x 39 inches Bronzini Vender Family Collection</p> <p>In the 1980s, Amy Sillman set out to rescue “gestural form from its bad ideology,” meaning all the clichés about masculinity in postwar American abstraction. Her paintings, with their playfulness and colorful spirit mixed with angst, are often seen as reinvigorating Abstract Expressionism</p> |  |



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54. Joan Snyder (American, born 1940)
Weeping Cherry Tree & Thee, 2020
Oil, acrylic, papier-mâché, burlap, straw, and paper on linen,
60 x 96 inches (3 panels)
Courtesy Canada Gallery

As a young artist, Joan Snyder challenged the prevailing dominance of Color Field painting and Minimalism with the declared goal of putting more in a painting, not less and showing the anatomy of the work, the different layers as it is being made—the process. Snyder did not shy away from incorporating poetry, nature and everyday life into her narrative abstractions. “It was April 2020,” the artist said of this work, “our weeping cherry tree was so beautiful in bloom. . . how could I not paint it!”

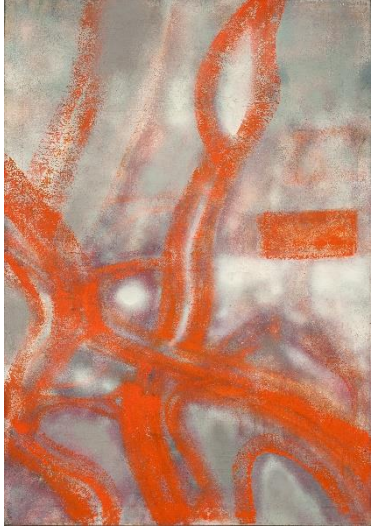



55. Pat Steir (American, born 1940)
Triptych Sparkle, 2008
Hand-painted monoprint
72 x 72 inch
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of Lawrence Rundie





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| 56. | <p>Hedda Sterne (American, born Romania, 1910–2011) <i>Road #11, 1957</i> Oil spray paint on canvas, 60 x 42 in. The Hedda Sterne Foundation, New York</p> |  |
| 57. | <p>Michelle Stuart (American, born 1933) <i>Passage Bream Bay, 1999</i> Beeswax and pigment on canvas mounted on wood, 4 units 49 x 49 inches overall Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, N.Y., Gift of the Artist in honor of Trudy C. Kramer, 2007.9</p> <p>Michelle Stuart evokes the mystery and exoticism of Captain Cook's voyage of discovery to Bream Bay on New Zealand's east coast in this painting made with the artist's signature pigmented beeswax.</p> |  |



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58. Sue Williams (American, born 1954)
Irritated Weave, 2001
Oil and acrylic on canvas
82 x 132 inches
Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

The painter Sue Williams has said, "I like to think my lines just float, and if I could eliminate the background entirely, I would." Her procedure involves making marks, then wiping away the ones she doesn't like: she puts something down, responds to it, then responds to that until for whatever combination of reasons she decides the work is finished. So the wondrously freewheeling *Irritated Weave* may in fact be the result of a much more involved process. "Having a plan is good, but when you stop having a plan something good can happen, too. One door closes, another opens."

