

Drucie Belman
Pioneering Women: The Abstract Expressionist
Women of the 1940-1950s

April 3

Lee Krasner 1908-1984

A powerhouse of an artist, Krasner was always learning and evolving. She was the heart and soul of the New York School, having been a founder of the American Abstract Artists, a group formed in New York City in 1936 to promote and help the public appreciate abstract art. Overshadowed by her legendary husband, Jackson Pollack, Lee's career did not take off until after he died in 1956.

April 10

Elaine de Kooning 1918-1989

Elaine was a prolific artist, art critic, portraitist, and teacher during the 1940s and 1950s and well beyond. She took inspiration not only from her community of artists, but also from her avante-garde fascinations such as bullfights, and cave paintings. Elaine's complicated marriage to Willem de Kooning, an art star of the 20th century, often eclipsed Elaine's own work.

April 17

Grace Hartigan 1922-2008

Hartigan's initial work was complete abstraction, but in 1952 she began incorporating recognizable motifs and characters from various sources into her work, moving fluidly between figuration and abstraction throughout her long career. Hartigan believed that painting must have "content and emotion.

April 24

Helen Frankenthaler 1928-2011

Frankenthaler began her career with Abstract Expressionist painting practices but developed her own distinct approach to the style. She invented the "soak-stain" technique, in which she poured turpentine-thinned paint onto canvas, producing luminous color washes that appeared to merge with the canvas. Her breakthrough gave rise to Color Field Painting, which celebrated the joys of pure color and gave a new look and feel to the surface of the canvas.

May 1

Joan Mitchell 1925-1992

Taking inspiration from the natural world and poetry, and certainly the work of great modern masters, primarily Van Gogh and Monet, her aim was not to paint recognizable landscapes but rather, in her words, to "catch a feeling." Mitchell spent most of her life in France, specifically where Monet painted his waterlilies and Van Gogh his sunflowers.

May 8

Jay DeFeo 1929-1989

Jay DeFeo came to the Bay Area to get her BA/MA at Berkeley in 1950. She experimented widely with a range of unorthodox materials, exploring the parameters of painting, sculpture, drawing, collage, photocopies, and photography. DeFeo became a pivotal figure in the historic San Francisco community of artists, poets, and jazz musicians at the time. We will also look at the work of Ruth Wall and Adelle Landis, other important abstract expressionists under-recognized at the time.

May 15

Optional Field Trip