

New York School Abstraction, November 9, 2001-February 17, 2002

In 1949, the artist Robert Motherwell coined the phrase "New York School" to describe the group of Abstract Expressionists who were working in Manhattan after the Second World War. These artists typically explored non-representational styles that were characterized by the use of gestural brushwork - or Action Painting - and flattened, abstract forms. There was no "New York School" academy, other than the exchange of ideas at various downtown studios, at the Cedar Bar, and at an organization called the Artists' Club. Exhibition opportunities included the "9th Street" New York Painting and Sculpture annuals and shows at the Stable Gallery and the Charles Egan and Betty Parsons Galleries.

A number of the "New York School" artists were immigrants, and many were war veterans or persons who had contributed to the war effort at home. Among the latter was Grace Hartigan, who had been a draftsman in a defense plant. Some had been employed by the Works Projects Administration in the 1930s, but all rejected the social realism of that period. The art that replaced it celebrated the two-dimensional surface with personalized, often aggressive, paint application.

Several "New York School" painters continued to explore figural motifs, but a majority of the artists in this loose association moved even further away from recognizable content. Earlier German Expressionist and French Cubist and Surrealist paintings were among the sources for their work, which found expression in pictographs, automatic writing, collage, loose patterning, and studies of pure color and line.

Although the principles of Abstract Expressionism were explored across the United States after the war, a significant number of artists first tested its theories as part of the "New York School" group. This exhibition, which is selected principally from the Museum's collection, only partially represents the participants. It serves as an indication of the vitality of this postwar movement that renewed modern art and made New York its center in the second half of the 20th century.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Karl Knaths, American, 1891-1971
The Rooster, 1948
Oil on canvas
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Frederick Slafsky 81.301



RISD MUSEUM

Mark Rothko, American, 1903-1970

Untitled, 1954

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase in honor of Daniel Robbins: The Chace Fund, The Collectors' Acquisition Fund, Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund, Mary B. Jackson Fund, Walter H. Kimball Fund, Jesse Metcalf Fund, Museum Gift Fund, and gifts of Mrs. George Harding, Mrs. Lewis Madeira, Mrs. Malcolm Farmer, Mrs. Frank Mauran, George H. Waterman III, Mrs. Murray S. Danforth, Mrs. Russell Field, Mrs. Albert Pilavin, Mr. and Mrs. Bayard Ewing, Mr. and Mrs. Tracy Barnes, Mr. and Mrs. William Boardman, Mr. and Mrs. Roy Neuberger, Mrs. Lee Day Gillespie, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Haffenreffer, and Richard Brown Baker 71.091



Grace Hartigan, American, 1922-2008

Homage to Matisse, 1955

Oil on canvas

Anonymous gift 56.120



RISD MUSEUM

Larry Rivers, American, 1923-2002
Portrait of Berdie, 1953
Oil on canvas
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Reis 54.129



Theodoros Stamos, American, 1922 - 1997
Black Mountain, 1950
Oil on masonite
Gift of Mr. Ben Weiss 66.030



Peter Busa, American, 1914 - 1983
Autumn Foil, 1900s
Oil on canvas
Gift of Emil J. Arnold 66.343



RISD MUSEUM

Helen Frankenthaler, American, 1928 - 2011

Holocaust, 1955

Enamel, oil, and turpentine on canvas

The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th-Century American Art
72.108



Franz Kline, American, 1910-1962

Studio Shapes, 1951

Oil paint on newsprint

Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th-Century American Art: Gift
of Roy Neuberger 70.008



RISD MUSEUM

Ad Reinhardt, American, 1913-1967
No. 18, 1956
Oil on canvas
Gift of Richard Brown Baker 1996.11.43



Buffie Johnson, American, 1912-2006
Palimpsest, ca. 1955
Oil on canvas
Anonymous gift 57.095



RISD MUSEUM

Anne Ryan, American, 1889-1954

The Quest, ca. 1945-1949

Color woodcut with hand additions on black paper

Gift of James D. and Diane Davies Burke 2000.110.4



Philip Pearlstein, American, b. 1924

Ancient Building, 1959-60

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. Ben Weiss 66.028



Charles Green Shaw, American, 1892-1974

Impact in Space, 1959

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. George Henry Warren 59.051



RISD MUSEUM

Willem de Kooning, American, 1904-1998
Black and White Abstraction, ca. 1950
Sapolin enamel on chart paper
Museum Works of Art Fund 56.186



David Smith, American, 1906-1965
Untitled, 1960
Ink and oil paint on paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 78.049



Philip Guston, American, 1913-1980
Winter Forms, 1963
Gouache on paper
Gift of the Estate of Musa Guston 1992.059.1



RISD MUSEUM

Joan Mitchell, American, 1926-1992

Untitled, 1966

Watercolor on paper

Gift of The Bayard and Harriet K. Ewing Collection 1993.105.3



Aaron Siskind, American, 1903-1991, (RISD Faculty 1971-1976,
Photography)

Gloucester, 1949

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Mr. Robert B. Menschel 77.145.25



Hans Hofmann, American, 1880-1966

Abstraction (red-yellow contra blue-black), 1954

Oil on canvas

The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th-Century American Art
72.034

