HUXLEY—PARLOUR

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Women and the Void:
Abstract Expressionism on Paper
16 February - 9 March 2022



UNTITLED, C. 1960 ***ALMA THOMAS***

Women and the Void: Abstract Expressionism on Paper displays 20 works on paper by women working in abstraction between 1945 - 1970: Mary Abbott, Dusti Bongé, Jay DeFeo, Perle Fine, Anne Ryan, Alma Thomas, and Michael West.

Both the post-war action painters and the colour field Abstract Expressionists shared the same common belief: that following the war and the surrealist movement, abstract painting was able to achieve a transcendentalism that figurative painting could not. As Barnett Newman stated in 1948, 'Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or "life", we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings'. How can we reconcile this narrative with a distinct lack of women and painters of colour in the canon?

The exhibition comes at a unique time when there is a burgeoning interest in the plight of twentieth-century female abstract artists, both amongst revisionist scholars and museum curators, popularised by Mary Gabriel's 2018 book, *Ninth Street Women*. In America, The Whitney Museum of American Art is currently exhibiting *Labyrinth of Forms: Women and Abstraction, 1930-1950*;

while in London, Dulwich Picture Gallery exhibits *Helen Frankenthaler: Radical Beauty*.

Huxley-Parlour's exhibition builds on this project by focusing on works beyond painting: all works are on paper and at a smaller scale than is generally associated with Abstract Expressionism. The exhibition, too, explores the practises of women in abstraction beyond the mainstream big five.

Biographies

- **Mary Abbott** (1921-2019) was born in New York. She was one of three women invited to be part of 'The Club', founded by Phillip Pavia. Recently, she was one of only three living artists who exhibited in the 2016 Denver Art Museum show, Women of Abstract Expressionism. Her work is inspired by her time spent in Haiti and Saint Croix, both places where she briefly lived.

- **Dusti Bongé** (1903-1993) is considered Mississippi's first Abstract Expressionist and first Modern artist. Inspired by surrealist motifs, her work explores conceptual themes such as 'The Void'.

- **Jay DeFeo** (1929-1989) was born Mary Joan DeFeo in New Hampshire. DeFeo worked across mediums, including drawings, paintings, sculpture, jewellery, photographs, photocopies, collages, and photo collages. Despite resisting the label 'Abstract Expressionist', many have come to see her work as associated with the expressive experimentalism of the movement.

- **Perle Fine** (1905-1988) was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Her parents were Russian immigrants. Her work capitalises on the aesthetics of modern European masters to inform her use of colour, form, and line. Exhibiting widely across America, Fine's work has been incorporated into many prominent, international collections.

- **Anne Ryan** (1889-1954) was born in Hoboken, New Jersey. Although working predominantly in painting and drawing, she took imaginative departure from the abstract collage of Kurt Schwitters later in life. Ryan was one of the oldest women associated with the New York school, also exhibiting in Castelli's 1951 *Ninth Street Show*.

- **Alma Thomas** (1891-1978) lived and worked in Washington DC. She is known for her brightly coloured, densely patterned painting. She was the first Black woman to have a solo show at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art in 1972.

- **Michael West** (1908–1991) also known as Corrinne Michael West, was born in Chicago, Illinois. West was one of the few members of the New York Art School movement, and began to use the moniker Michael, or Mikael in 1936 in order to pursue better opportunities within the Arts.

Women and the Void Talk

Curating Women in Abstraction: A Conversation with Jane Findlay and Eleanor Nairne

March 7th, 6:30 - 8pm

Please join us for a conversation chaired by Thea Gregory (Director of Exhibitions, Huxley-Parlour) with Jane Findlay (Curator of the current *Helen Frankenthaler: Radical Beauty* at Dulwich Picture Gallery) and Eleanor Nairne (curator of the 2019 *Lee Krasner: Living Colour* at the Barbican).

The talk will be followed by a short Q&A and a drinks reception. Please email lydia@huxleyparlour.com to RSVP.

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