



E-Newsletter | September 2016

Abstract Painters

The Denver Art Museum is currently hosting a Touring Exhibit entitled "The Women of Abstract Expressionism". Viewing that exhibit reminds us yet again that women's stories are not told and that women's accomplishments are not always part of "mainstream" history. The video that accompanies the exhibit tells us that at least some of the abstract expressionists featured in the exhibit just wished to be known as "painters" not "women painters". In this month's enewsletter, we profile two abstract painters: Alma Thomas and Lee Krasner.



Alma Thomas

The first African-American woman to have a solo exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art (in 1972 at the age of 80), **Alma Thomas** was the first arts department graduate at Howard University in 1924. Her desire was to be an architect and build bridges but she pursued a career that was more acceptable at the time, teaching art in the District of Columbia schools. In her off hours she painted; it was only after her retirement that Thomas developed her signature abstract painting style.

Thomas' paintings contain brilliantly hued short brushstrokes aligned either in vertical stripes or radiating circular compositions; her style is described as colorful and exuberant. She said that she focused on beauty and light, instead of man's inhumanity to man. Upon her exhibition at the Whitney, Thomas said that growing up "one of the things we couldn't do was go into museums, let alone think of hanging our pictures there. My, times have changed." Yes,

thankfully, they have.



Lee Krasner

One of the few female artists to have a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, **Lee Krasner's** career as an artist was often overshadowed by that of her husband, Jackson Pollock. Highly trained and very skillful, Krasner worked in a number of styles and utilized different techniques over her career. She studied at an art high school in New York City, at the

Women's Art School at Cooper Union, and as well as at the Illustrious National Academy of Design. Hired by the Works Progress Administration's Public Works of Art Project during the Great Depression, Krasner worked under the aegis of Federal Government from 1934 to 1943.

She is well known for the "all-over" technique which led to Pollock's "drip" paintings. Krasner had very high standards and cut up many of her earlier pieces, using the pieces in her collage work. Krasner's work is in museum collections all over the world including at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. The Pollock-Krasner home on Long Island, New York, where Krasner and Pollock lived and painted is now under the stewardship of the State University of New York - Stonybrook and the house and studio have been declared a National Historic Landmark.

Alma Thomas and Lee Krasner are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Their accomplishments inspire us and remind us as well how important it is to continue to tell women's stories.

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Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America
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