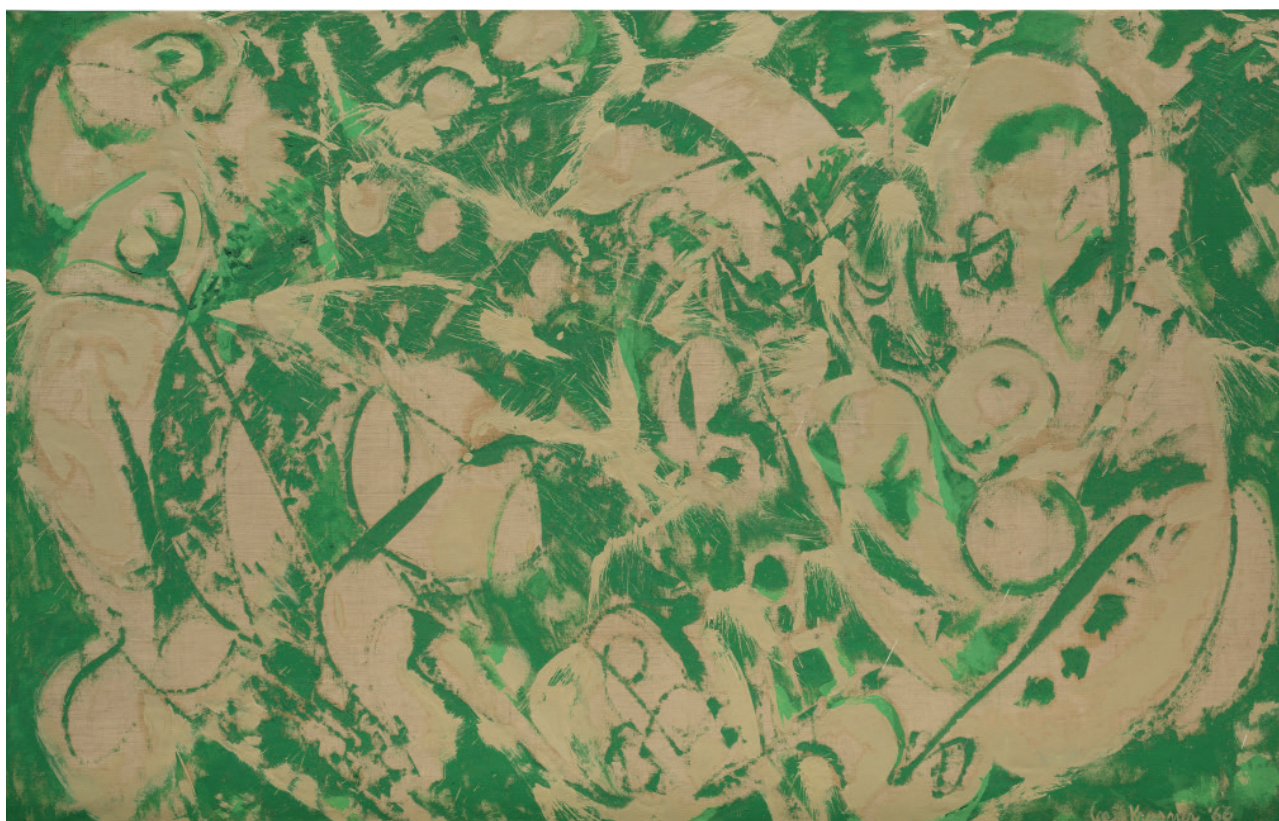


GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



Opening on September 18

Lee Krasner: Living Color

Sponsored by



We at Seguros Bilbao would like to welcome you to the exhibition *Lee Krasner. Living Color*, a vibrant explosion of color and form that resounds with the hopes that we now all place in recovery, within this suspended context in which we have all lived over the last few long months. Art has served to encourage humanity, especially in difficult times, and we believe that specifically the art of Lee Krasner can provide us with inspiration for dealing with the future at a time like this. Incessant creativity and constant reinvention are the hallmarks of this American artist's work over the course of five decades, summarized in the Museum through a selection of her most emblematic pieces.

Although today she is considered one of the most representative figures in American Abstract Expressionism, Krasner did not have it easy. Her status as a woman and the economic hardships of the Great Depression which dominated the US during her formative years turned her wish to become an artist into a fierce struggle. She managed to stand out in painting thanks to her talent, her iron will, and her solid work ethic. Today in Bilbao we can enjoy her astonishing output, which clearly reflects Krasner's statement of intentions: "I like a canvas to breathe and be alive. Be alive is the point." Without a doubt, the public will be able to take advantage of the unique opportunity provided by this exhibition to appreciate the vitality and organic qualities of her works.

Remaining true to our conviction that we must support art—even, or especially, when the socioeconomic conditions are not the most favorable—we at Seguros Bilbao are extraordinarily pleased to sponsor this great international show, the most important one organized on Lee Krasner in Europe in the past 50 years. By providing our support for exhibitions of this scope, we seek to continue contributing to promoting the essential role of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao as a benchmark international cultural institution.

Javier Maiztegui

Director General of Seguros Bilbao

Lee Krasner. Living Color

- Dates: September 18, 2020 – January 10, 2021
 - Curators: Eleanor Nairne, Barbican Art Gallery, and Lucía Agirre, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
 - Exhibition organized by the Barbican Centre of London in collaboration with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.
 - Sponsored by Seguros Bilbao
-
- Lee Krasner's works are characterized by incessant reinvention and exploration throughout her entire career: from her early self-portraits and life drawings to her exuberant, monumental works from the early 1960s, along with her *Little Images* from the late 1940s and her groundbreaking collages from the 1950s.
 - Unlike many of her contemporaries, Lee Krasner rejected the idea of a "signature image" because she found it overly rigid; the artist worked in series and constantly sought new means of authentic expression.
 - After the death of several of her loved ones in the 1950s and a period of mourning in which her works took on umber tones, Krasner allowed light and color to burst back into her works in the 1960s.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is presenting *Lee Krasner. Living Color*, a retrospective devoted to this New York artist who was a pioneer in Abstract Expressionism. The show brings together a broad range of pieces, some of them never before shown in Europe. In this exhibition, the public will be able to see the incessant reinvention and exploration that characterizes the oeuvre of Lee Krasner (1908–1984) throughout the 50 years of her career: from her earliest self-portraits and life drawings to her exuberant, monumental works from the early 1960's, along with her *Little Images* from the late 1940's and her groundbreaking collages from the 1950's.

Born in Brooklyn to an Orthodox Jewish immigrant family, Lee Krasner decided she wanted to be an artist at the age of 14. After years of training as an artist, Lee Krasner became a touchstone and active member of the budding Abstract Expressionism, a multifaceted movement that turned New York into the art hub of the post-war era.

In 1942, Lee Krasner's work was included in the exhibition of American and French painting held at the McMillen Inc. gallery along with her friends Willem de Kooning and Stuart Davis. The only artist participating in that exhibition whom Krasner did not know was Jackson Pollock, whom she visited in his studio and married in 1945.

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Lee Krasner rejected the idea of making a “signature image,” as she found it overly rigid. The artist worked in series and constantly sought new means of authentic expression, even in her most difficult times, such as after Pollock’s sudden death in a car crash in 1956.

TOUR THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

From Lena to Lee

The artist’s original name was Lena Krasner, but in 1922 she took the more English-sounding name “Lenore,” which then turned into “Lee” when she studied at the Women’s Art School at The Cooper Union. The three self-portraits at the beginning of the exhibition are from this early period. She painted one of them in the summer of 1928 in her parents’ home in Greenlawn, Long Island. To do so, she nailed a mirror onto a tree in the garden and painted her likeness over a wooded background.

By the age of 19, she had graduated and spent a brief spell at the Art Students League. She was due to start studying at the prestigious National Academy of Design and hoping that her *Self-Portrait* (ca. 1928) would gain her admission into the life-drawing class. Even though the school at first refused to believe that she had painted the portrait outdoors and instead thought that she had painted it indoors and later added the wooded background, Krasner protested and was admitted. Nonetheless, the artist would struggle against the Academy’s traditional approach and criticized its “sterile atmosphere of... congealed mediocrity.”

Life Drawing

The Great Depression of the 1930s forced Krasner to leave the National Academy and enroll in a teaching class at the City College of New York, where the education was free. At the same time, she began attending life-drawing classes at Greenwich House with Job Goodman, who had been a disciple of regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton and clung to a classical drawing method inspired by Renaissance masters like Michelangelo. The four *Studies from the Nude* (1933) exhibited here show Krasner’s disinhibition about nudity with her use of Conté crayon to highlight the muscles of the model’s body.

In 1937, she won a scholarship to study at the Hans Hofmann School on New York’s West 9th Street. Hofmann was a German Modernist who had lived and worked in Paris and knew Picasso and Matisse, whom Krasner regarded as “gods.” Hofmann taught a version of Analytical Cubism and was primarily interested in the tension between flatness and three-dimensionality, which he called the “push-pull” of a work. The six drawings displayed here show Krasner’s earliest forays into abstraction.

War Service Windows

After the 1929 stock market crash, President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched a series of programs aimed at rebuilding the U.S. economy. In 1935, he created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to create

public works jobs all over the country for the millions of unemployed persons. That same year, the Federal Art Project was founded under the aegis of the WPA to offer support to artists and finance projects that upheld the American spirit and its values of hard work, community, and optimism.

Krasner worked on several of these projects throughout the 1930s, and in 1942 she was assigned to oversee the design and assembly of 20 department store window displays in Manhattan and Brooklyn advertising war training classes. The artist had just met Jackson Pollock and got him assigned to her project team. Krasner decided to photograph the courses and use the pictures in her designs, along with dynamic typography and abstract markings that hinted at her artistic leanings. Even though these works no longer exist, photographs of the original collage designs are projected here on the scale of the window displays.

Little Images

In the fall of 1945, when Krasner moved to the farm in Springs that she and Pollock had bought with the financial assistance that Peggy Guggenheim had given him, she managed to work beyond an artistic impasse: the death of her father the previous year had left her unable to paint anything other than what she called her “gray slabs.”

This immersion in nature soon led to the emergence of a new type of iconography, and Krasner began to work on her *Little Images*, vibrant, jewel-like abstractions. In some of them she applied dense layers of paint with a palette knife, which she later spread with a stiff-bristled brush, while in others she created interlocking arabesques using paint diluted with turpentine. Examples of these works are *Shattered Color* (1947), *Abstract No. 2* (1947), and *Untitled* (1947).

This gallery also displays *Mosaic Table* (1947), which the artist made using an old wagon wheel that she found on the farm and then adding elements like leftover tesserae, fragments of jewelry, keys, coins, and bits of glass.

Stable Gallery

After her *Little Images*, Krasner began to work on her first solo exhibition in 1950, which opened at the Betty Parsons Gallery in October 1951. She created 14 geometric abstract works for the show, all in soft, luminous colors, which garnered positive criticism but did not sell. Disappointed, the artist began to work on a series of black and white drawings which she tacked to the walls of her studio floor to ceiling in the hopes of finding a new direction. One day she walked into the studio, decided that she “despised it all,” and tore them up. She found herself incapable of going back to the studio for several weeks, but when she did she was surprised to discover that she found “a lot of things there that began to interest me.”

The shredded paper became the starting point of a series of collages which she glued over twelve of the canvases from the Betty Parsons Gallery exhibition. She layered on pieces of burlap, torn newsprint, and photographic paper, as well as several discarded Pollock drawings, and then added dabs of paint. All these

large-scale works, like *Shattered Light* (1954), *Bird Talk* (1955), *Bald Eagle* (1955), and *Milkweed* (1955), were displayed at Eleanor Ward's Stable Gallery in September 1955.

Prophecy

In the summer of 1956, at a complicated time in her relationship with Jackson Pollock, Krasner painted *Prophecy*, a work that looks like none other before it. It is dominated by undulating, fleshy shapes outlined in black with touches of pink that underscore the bodily iconography. The artist herself said that the painting "disturbed me enormously," and she left it propped on the easel when she set out for France by herself. On August 12, she got a phone call notifying her that Pollock had died in a car crash. A few weeks later, Krasner picked up her paintbrushes again and created three works that continued the series that started with *Prophecy: Birth, Embrace, and Three in Two*. Two of these paintings, *Birth* and *Three in Two*, are on display in this exhibition and seem like unsettled landscapes driven by dark psychological forces. When asked about her decision to paint while in mourning, Krasner's words were: "Painting is not separate from life. It is one. It is like asking: do I want to live? My answer is yes—and I paint."

Night Journeys

In 1957, Krasner decided to move into Pollock's studio in the barn at Springs, which enabled her to make works in sizes that had been impossible until then. She tacked the canvases directly to the walls, without using stretchers. Suffering from chronic insomnia at the time, she worked at night and decided to limit her palette to white and earth tones, since she did not like to apply color under artificial light. The choice of umber gives her works an organic quality, while the thin layers of paint kept her true to her "original impulse."

Her friend the poet Richard Howard christened these works her "Night Journeys," and Krasner herself explained that some titles like *Assault on the Solar Plexus* (1961) were "embarrassingly realistic ... I had had the blow-up with Greenberg, my mother died ... it was a rough life." This blow-up was with the influential art critic Clement Greenberg, who decided to cancel an exhibition Krasner was preparing because he did not like the direction her painting was taking. Instead of dropping the series, the painter threw herself into it wholeheartedly and showed the resulting works to considerable acclaim at the Howard Wise Gallery in 1960 and 1962.

Primary Series

In the early 1960's, Krasner allowed color to burst back in her paintings. Just like her "Night Journeys," *Another Storm* (1963) has a limited palette, but the umber had given way to a more luminous alizarin crimson. When Krasner broke her right arm, she learned how to paint with her left hand, applying the paint directly from the tube and using the fingers of her right hand to guide the movements. This yielded more tactile works, such as *Through Blue* (1963) and *Icarus* (1964). In the ensuing years, Krasner's gestures became looser and more calligraphic, with bold shapes in dissonant tones.

The colors that Krasner used in this series were exuberant, harking back to Matisse, her artistic hero, who had declared that “with color one obtains an energy that seems to stem from witchcraft.” The confidence that the artist exudes during this period may be due to her individual show organized by Bryan Robertson, curator at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1965; it was her first exhibition in a public institution, and the reviews were glowing.

Drawings from the *Primary Series*

Krasner wanted each of her paintings to emerge authentically from inside her, so she never made preparatory sketches. However, in 1968, she found a stash of handmade paper by the local artisan Douglass Howell, and she decided to use it in a new body of work in which she experimented with the simplicity of using just one or two pure pigments. “I was just mad for doing them and they went at quite a clip.” This exhibition displays 14 of these works.

Palingenesis

In the early 1970s, Krasner evolved yet again, shifting from the soft biomorphic shapes of her recent works to abstract compositions with harder forms. She had earned her reputation as a colorist in the 1955 exhibition at the Stable Gallery and with her more recent *Primary Series*, but now her work exuded a more contained energy. As art historian Cindy Nemser has noted, her newer works seemed to be “expansive yet contained ... stately and slow-moving.”

Displayed first at the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, the paintings were a prominent part of the exhibition *Lee Krasner: Large Paintings* curated by Marcia Tucker and held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1973. This was the first major individual show of her works at a public institution in New York, her hometown. The paintings attest to Krasner’s creative drive, even in the later stages of her career.

Palingenesis (1971), the largest painting in this space, gets its title from the Greek word that means “rebirth,” a fundamental concept in Krasner’s practice. As the artist explained in an interview with the curator Barbara Rose, “evolution, growth, and change go on. Change is life.”

Eleven Ways

In 1974, Krasner found an old folder of drawings she had made when she was studying at Hans Hofmann’s school and decided to use them as the raw material for a new series of collages. She cut them out with scissors in angular shapes and arranged them in dynamic compositions on the canvas, mirroring the geometry of the original drawings. She also added the spectral images that appeared on the back of some of the drawings and left other parts of the canvas untouched, echoing the empty space around the nude model.

The collages were displayed in the Pace Gallery in 1977 under the collective title *Eleven Ways to Use the Words to See*. The title of each work was a different verb form, such as *Imperfect Indicative* (1976),

Imperative (1976), and *Future Indicative* (1977). The critics stressed the inventive use of her previous works, and *Art in America* described how the energy in the original drawing “is recharged by the energy of this reworking, which both idolizes them like so many trophies and dismisses them as a pole past’

Lee Krasner died on June 19, 1984, after finally earning much-deserved recognition at the end of her life. However, she herself admitted that in certain respects, the fact that she had been ignored had been a “blessing.” Freed from harsh critical pressure and the control of a slew of dealers and collectors, Krasner created the works that she was driven to make, riding each new wave as it came without being obligated to repeat herself.

This exhibition is made possible through support from the **Terra Foundation for American Art**.

DIDAKTIKA: MORE THAN ONE LEE KRASNER

As part of the Didaktika project sponsored by BBK, the Museum designs didactic spaces, online contents, and special activities that complement each exhibition to provide tools and resources to help visitors appreciate the works on display.

Thus, the *In Focus* educational space designed for this exhibition and located in the same gallery, *More than One Lee Krasner*, shares insights into the main forces that forged the artist’s personality and output, such as the tenacity she showed from her beginnings, and even bolsters her role within the context of the first generation of American Abstract Expressionist creators.

The experience is enhanced with an audiovisual produced specifically for the exhibition which includes several interviews with the artist.



Activities associated with the exhibition:

A conversation on Lee Krasner (Thursday, September 24)

Lee Krasner. Living Color curators Eleanor Nairne (Barbican Art Gallery) and Lucía Agirre (Guggenheim Museum Bilbao) will be talking about the exhibition dedicated to the American abstract expressionist painter, her life and work.

Shared Reflections*

Unique tours led by professionals from the Museum's Curatorial and Educational areas which offer different perspectives on the contents of the new exhibition.

- Curatorial Vision (September 23): Exhibition curator Lucía Agirre will lead a tour through the most important works in the show.
- Key Concepts (September 30): Luz Maguregui, Education Coordinator, will speak with participants about the general and didactic keys to the works.

*Sponsored by Fundación Vizcaína Aguirre

Interviews with Lee Krasner (October 22)

Screening of the documentary *Lee Krasner, in her Own Words*, which includes a selection of highly personal interviews with the artist by Chris Crosman, Nancy Miller, Larry Rivers, and others. Produced specifically for this exhibition by the Barbican Centre in London, the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern, and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

Creative session +18

The techniques used by Krasner (November 5)

This workshop for aged 18 and over conducted by artist Veva Linaza will focus on the techniques and materials used by Lee Krasner in her practice —positioning a canvas on an easel, flat on a table or the floor, using collage— and will propose participants to reenact these in an interesting exercise.

CATALOGUE

On this occasion, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is publishing a volume edited by Eleanor Nairne. Organized chronologically and thematically, the catalogue offers a visual overview of Krasner's production and analyzes her work through the essays written by Nairne, Katy Siegel, John Yau, and Suzanne Hudson. This volume also includes a comprehensive chronology as well as a revealing interview of Gail Levin with the artist.

BIOGRAPHY

1908: Lena Krasner is born on 27 October in Brooklyn, New York, three years after her Orthodox Jewish family had emigrated to America from a shtetl near Odessa, Russia (which today would be in the Ukraine) fleeing brutal pogroms and the Russo-Japanese War.

1926: Graduating at the age of seventeen, she goes on to study at the Woman's Art School at The Cooper Union and (after a brief spell at the Art Students League) at the National Academy of Design.

1935: Krasner is assigned to the Mural Division of the Fine Arts Project (FAP), part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a federal initiative to help artists with public commissions.

1937: Krasner enrolls at the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts.

- 1940:** Krasner shows her work with the American Abstract Artists (AAA) for the first time as part of the Fourth Annual Exhibition at the American Fine Art Galleries, New York.
- 1941:** On the occasion of the exhibition American and French Paintings, at the McMillen Gallery, Lee Krasner meets Jackson Pollock.
- 1942:** Krasner designs large-scale displays for department-store windows in New York which promote war-training courses being made available at municipal colleges.
- 1943:** Krasner leaves the AAA, because of the group's rigid mindset: they had denied membership to Alexander Calder and rejected the proposal for Hofmann to give a lecture.
- 1944:** Krasner participates in the exhibition Abstract and Surrealist Art in America, which is selected by Sidney Janis and organized by the San Francisco Museum of Art.
- 1945:** In October, Krasner and Pollock are married and later move to Springs, Long Island.
- 1946:** Krasner makes a breakthrough with a new series of works she calls her Little Images.
- 1948:** Krasner begins to be called 'Lee Krasner' in professional and public contexts. She exhibits a selection of her Little Images and one of her mosaic tables in the exhibition *The Modern House Comes Alive 1948–49* at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery in New York to critical acclaim.
- 1951:** In October, Krasner's first solo exhibition, *Paintings 1951, Lee Krasner*, opens at Betty Parsons Gallery. Krasner reuses many of the canvases shown to create the collages she later exhibits in a solo exhibition at the Stable Gallery in 1955.
- 1956:** During the summer, Krasner works on a painting she will call *Prophecy*. Her relationship with Pollock is suffering from his alcoholism. She decides to travel alone to Europe for the first time. She is in Paris when she learns that Pollock has died in a car accident.
- 1958:** In February, Krasner's recent paintings are shown in a solo exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, and the Uris Buildings Corporation commissions her to design two large-scale mosaic panels for the company's headquarters.
- 1959:** Krasner's mother dies. She begins a new body of work all painted under artificial light at night, as Krasner is suffering from chronic insomnia. Richard Howard describes these paintings as 'mourning' pictures, each generated by a 'night journey.'
- 1965:** In September, Krasner's first retrospective *Lee Krasner, Paintings, Drawings and Collages*, opens at the Whitechapel Gallery in London.
- 1968:** In March, Krasner has her first exhibition of new work at the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery in New York, *Lee Krasner Recent Paintings*.
- 1972:** In April, Krasner joins a group called Women in the Arts and pickets the Museum of Modern Art to protest its neglect of female artists.
- 1973:** In November, the Whitney Museum of American Art presents *Lee Krasner: Large Paintings*, Krasner's first solo show at a major New York museum.
- 1975:** *Lee Krasner: Collage and Works on Paper, 1933–74* opens in January at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. The exhibition tours to the Pennsylvania State University Museum of Art and the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University in Massachusetts.
- 1976:** Krasner joins Pace Gallery, becoming the third woman they represent; the following year she presents her series *Eleven Ways to Use the Words To See* at the New York gallery.
- 1978:** Barbara Rose's documentary, *Lee Krasner: The Long View*, is released.

1980: Krasner receives the Outstanding Achievement in the Visual Arts award from the Women's Caucus for Art.

1981: The Guild Hall opens Krasner/Pollock: A Working Relationship, curated by Barbara Rose. The exhibition tours to Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University.

1982: Krasner is awarded the 'Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' in France, presented to her by the French Minister of Culture, Jack Lang.

1983: The day of Krasner's seventy-fifth birthday, Lee Krasner: A Retrospective, curated by Barbara Rose, opens at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The exhibition travels to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia; Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona; and the Museum of Modern Art.

1984: On 19 June, Krasner dies in New York Hospital.

Cover image:

Lee Krasner

Siren, 1966

Oil on canvas

128.6 x 206.1 cm

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution,
Washington D.C. The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest, 1981, 86.2768

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Photo: Cathy Carver, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

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All the information on the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus (Press Room).

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In the press area of the Museum's website (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es), you may register to download high-resolution images and videos of both the exhibitions and the building. If you do not yet have an account, you can register and download the material you need. If you are already a user, enter your username and password and you can access images directly.

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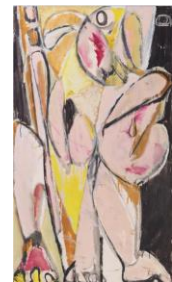
1. Lee Krasner
Self-Portrait, ca. 1928
Oil on canvas
76.5 x 63.8 cm
The Jewish Museum, New York
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
Courtesy Jewish Museum, New York



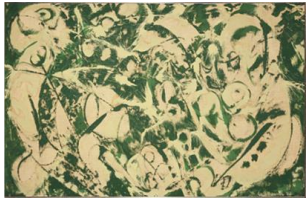




2. Lee Krasner
Shattered Color, 1947
Oil on canvas
53.3 x 66 cm
Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
Courtesy Christie's Images Limited



3. Lee Krasner
Mosaic Table, 1947
Mosaics and mixed mediums on wood
Diameter 116.8 cm
Private collection
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York
4. Lee Krasner
Composition, 1949
Oil on canvas
96.7 x 70.6 cm
The Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of the Aaron E. Norman Fund. Inc., 1959-31-1
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
5. Lee Krasner
Bald Eagle, 1955
Oil, paper, and canvas collage on linen
195.6 x 130.8 cm
Collection of Audrey Irmas, Los Angeles
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
Photo: Jonathan Urban
6. Lee Krasner
Prophecy, 1956
Oil on cotton duck
147.6 x 86.4 cm
Private collection
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
Courtesy Kasmin Gallery, New York
Photo: Christopher Stach
7. Lee Krasner
Polar Stampede, 1960
Oil on canvas
243.8 x 412.4 cm
The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
Courtesy Kasmin Gallery, New York



8. Lee Krasner
Another Storm, 1963
Oil on canvas
238.8 x 447.7 cm
Private collection, courtesy of Nevill Keating Pictures
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
Courtesy Kasmin Gallery, New York
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9. Lee Krasner
Combat, 1965
Oil on canvas
179 x 410.4 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1992
(IC1-1992)
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
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10. Lee Krasner
Siren, 1966
Oil on canvas
128.6 x 206.1 cm
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington D.C. The Joseph H. Hirshhorn
Bequest, 1981, 86.2768
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation.
Photo: Cathy Carver, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
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11. Lee Krasner
Palingenesis, 1971
Oil on canvas
208.3 x 340.4 cm
Pollock-Krasner Foundation, New York
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
Courtesy Kasmin Gallery, New York
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12. Lee Krasner
Imperative, 1976
Oil, charcoal, and paper on canvas
127 x 127 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
Gift of Mr and Mrs Eugene Victor Thaw, in honor of the 50th anniversary
of the National Gallery of Art
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation.
Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
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13. Anonymous photographer
Lee Krasner, ca. 1938



14. Irving Penn
Lee Krasner, Springs, NY, 1972
© The Irving Penn Foundation

