

ELAINE DE KOONING (1918-1989)

Elaine de Kooning continues to steadily emerge from the shadow of her teacher and husband, Willem de Kooning, as an important artist in her own right and it has been only recently that her work has gained the market recognition it deserves. Her work is highly representative of her dedication to the traditional academic approach as well as her passion for non-conventional methods and styles most intimately associated with the New York School and Abstract Expressionists. In addition to artistic skill, Elaine positioned herself as an art critic for major art magazines, giving her the means to shape the art world, as well as the career of her husband.

The 1950s were an artistically prosperous time for Elaine, as she secured several solo exhibitions at notable galleries, such as the Stable Gallery and the Graham Gallery, and also participated in numerous noteworthy shows including the *Ninth Street Show*, 1951; *Young American Painters* at the MoMA, 1956; and *Artists of the NY School: 2nd Generation* at the Jewish Museum, 1957. She was included in the *Ten Best* list in ArtNews in 1956 as well as the *Great Expectations I* article written by Thomas Hess that same year.

Elaine would continue painting in an abstract manner for the rest of her life, with the exception being her renowned portraits and series paintings (Bull, Basketball, Bacchus). Her ability as an exceptional portrait artist was confirmed with her commission to paint a series of portraits of President John F. Kennedy, for the Truman Library, in 1963, just before his death. Her mastery in this genre is exemplified in her ability to effectively convey a moment, a feeling, a gesture, a sense of likeness about the person, as opposed to their physicality. She wavered between precisely configured portraits and those of extreme abstraction, many times faceless, but regardless of the approach, the character of Elaine's subject was always alive with a personality unique to themselves.

In her series paintings, Elaine brought the same level of likeness as her portraits, with an added immediacy to the moment. Her brushstrokes dance around the figures, sweeping up and down, in and out, constantly shaping the multi-dimensional contours of their actions, creating a transcendence of energy throughout the entire painting; evidence of her extraordinary talent as an action painter.

Throughout her career Elaine's gallery, museum, and peer recognition were strong, but like other female artists living in the shadow of their famous husbands, only now is her work beginning to receive market recognition which is long overdue.