

WILLEM DE KOONING DRAWINGS



de Kooning

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Essay by Peter Schjeldahl

Matthew Marks Gallery

His Hand

Peter Schjeldahl

Look at your hand, the one you draw with. Everybody has drawn. Pressing an instrument against a surface, your hand moves, leaving substance from the instrument behind. The movement accords with something in your mind that dictates direction, pressure, rhythm, and so on. The mental factor, which may be urgent or gratuitous and serious or silly, does its work whether you are conscious of it or not.

What is your hand's identity? Is it you or is it yours, yourself or something like property? Does it express or only serve you? Certainly, it is purposeful. It broadcasts capacity for action. What can it do? What can't it? What should or shouldn't it do? Why are hands sometimes slapped, handcuffed, or, in Afghanistan, judiciously chopped off?

Imagine that your hand is that of somebody terrifically skilled: a surgeon, a violinist, a shortstop. Feel your esteem for this object that is not an object rise. Now imagine that your hand is paralyzed and useless. Tragedy.

Finally, think of Willem de Kooning's hand, the one he draws with. It had the same complement of blood vessels, muscles, and nerves as your own, which you are scrutinizing. It was fantastically skilled, of course, but in ways not readily comprehended. It was hardly handicapped, but it was subject to strangenesses. You might say that it was palsied by genius, if you don't mind that word "genius." I can't think of another word that fits, but only bunches of words that come down in the same place.

Simply, no scale of comparison, derived from normal experience, exists for what matters most when de Kooning drew, especially toward the end of his career. I include in this statement our normal experience of art. How does one rate the late drawings? I think that one can't. Like Shakespeare's sonnets – the all-time model for prodigies of renegade creation – they are something apart, begging judgments of good and bad. They can seem both eccentric and generic, less kinds of drawings than oddly accented, sudden, summary propositions about drawing as drawing.

I submit that de Kooning's hand occupied the place of everybody's hands when he drew without predictable style, as he did more often than not from the early 1960s onwards in an adventure of draftsmanship whose every mark is like a sound that breaks a silence. We are startled continually by the products of de Kooning's hand, no matter how familiar we become with them. The products keep playing hob with our senses of what we know and are. We struggle for inward balance as we gaze.

The body of drawing here surveyed is the unquietest in the world. It teems. It is an irrepressible turmoil, a steady-state rumpus. It is also somehow exquisitely poised throughout. It may appear willfully messy, as if in thrall to a spirit of negligence, but never, not once, does it issue in a mess. Given a minimum of receptive looking, every welter of lines or blotches coheres as some species of image. Could any mark be altered or omitted without loss? The notion is unthinkable. The most incidental-seeming scrawl may, at some instant of viewing, be a particular drawing's fulcrum of passion. While courting gross chaos, most of the work is remarkably fast and light in its effects, as frictionless as Mozart.

De Kooning's hand jumps at us everywhere in gestures as peremptory as a jab or a tickle. We feel as well as see what it does. We feel it in our hands! My own hand twitches at times like a dreaming dog when I contemplate a de Kooning drawing – as my whole arm may in the case of a de Kooning painting, infected by the ferocious choreography of his brushstrokes. Yet more powerfully kinesis is the artist's lyrically punched and fondled sculpture, a raid on the third dimension with which he briefly extended his process into social space.

The physicality of de Kooning's sculptures – running the hand movements of his drawing and painting into masses of ductile stuff – cannot be overstated. It reminds me of an image from the New Testament: the hand of Doubting Thomas conducted to touch the spear wound in the resurrected Jesus's side. Think of what a wound is; how a wound looks. The facture of such de Kooning Sculptures as *Clamdigger* stirs similar sensations of shocking intimacy and matter-of-factness, enforcing the same terrible authority of physical knowledge. Not to touch de Kooning's sculptures, at least in thought, is not to engage them in a meaningful way.

When we look at de Kooning's late drawings, we automatically track what his hand is up to – as when one hangs on the exact words of a great poem or notes of a riveting jazz solo. Because we are lazy, we seek excuses to break off that grueling concentration, the sustaining of which is thus the sternest test of any artist's power. I emphasize the mental focus of our response to de Kooning's drawings because nothing else in art beats it. Others have drawn with equally superlative eye, intellect, and, for want of better terms, heart and guts, but the Dutchman owns the hand.

De Kooning's friend and sometime mentor Arshile Gorky showed him technical and formal means to make eloquent spectacles of feeling with varieties of line. Other artists who come to mind, more by affinity than as even possible influences, tend to be rather isolated individuals: Edvard Munch, Chaim Soutine, Giacometti, perhaps Henri Michaux. (We recall, in each case, like the taste of Proust's madeleine, the savor of an exceedingly peculiar sort of line in and of itself.) But de Kooning's drawings are not contained, let alone explained, by family resemblances.

When I attempt to conjure a historical and aesthetic context for these drawings, there stretches before me an endless vista of drawing per se, including peaks of da Vinci and Picasso and swamps of your and my doodles. I conclude that the actual and constant subject of this work is drawing and something that humans do. What happens when we draw? Why do we bother about it? What can it mean? After the early 1960s, de Kooning's hand seldom strayed from the ground zero of those homely mysteries.

Each sheet is a discovery. It's less as if de Kooning set out to make a drawing than as if, at a given moment, he would find himself drawing again, to his surprise. Every acute de Kooning critic notes the uncanny middleliness of his art, a phenomenon ever unfolding between inexplicable beginnings and inconceivable ends. Except when the word is "Woman," there are few nouns or pronouns – either subject or object – in a de Kooning visual sentence, which is most usually unmoored verb and adverb and the odd itinerant adjective. We get not what a thing is but in what manner it is and how it behaves.

Things in de Kooning behave with generosity and anguish for the most part. They are palpably pressured and goaded, whipped into activity. What drives them? I don't know. Here we enter spiritual zones where de Kooning gives us negative guidance. Among the century's great artists, he was an outstanding materialist and pragmatist. He was anti-gnostic: Mr. Take It Or Leave It, never minding that "It" was boundlessly ambiguous. His model for being an artist was having a job. How does one square this with profundity? One doesn't try, if one is wise.

The single defining project to which de Kooning ever submitted himself pertained to a certain moment in history, whose end is felt in the earliest of these drawings. In the end of cultural revolution after World War II, he undertook to reconfigure European-type mastery for his adopted nation, performing roughly the service in painting that George Balanchine fulfilled in ballet. He forged an art at once vernacularly American and palpably continuous with Rubens and Ingres. His reward was dubious. As it turned out, many Americans hankered for something at once more aesthetically radical and transcendently nebulous, which we got from Jackson Pollock. It seemed for a while that de Kooning had been defeated. In fact, he was freed.

The earlier work here, from calligraphic ink drawings related to de Kooning's abstract landscape paintings of the late 1950s through a circa 1965 suite of spavined nudes in charcoal on lined legal paper, enacts a devolution of style: terminal spasms of a "de Kooning look." The gamy Women are piercingly poignant in this regard, as not only a valediction of the artist on his formerly dominant theme but a ghostly coda of a grand, sensual metaphysic – the equation art material = female flesh – that had reigned in Western art from the Venetian Renaissance to Picasso and Matisse. When viewing these drawings think of Titian's Venuses. The two bodies of work bracket a now lost civilization.

By the late 1960s, de Kooning had plainly accepted that his hand was unemployed by art history: overqualified for contemporary art's assigned tasks in a downsizing industry of the spirit. He could have turned bitter – others turned bitter on his behalf – but he did not. It is hard to say just what he turned. He was a baffling man! But the adjustment of his hand is blazingly apparent. That hand commenced to expand without regret or stint its whole accumulated capital of ability and memory. A hand trained by the Rotterdam Academy (before Cubism and Gorky taught it modern moves) and long accustomed to being audacious went for broke.

I started by noting that something in the mind directs one's hand when one draws. We commonly value drawings for a sense they give of harmonious accord between mental proposal and manual execution. "Academic" taste so adores such accord that it forgets to weigh the worth of the mental proposal, tolerating weary and trivial motives. Late de Kooning is academicism's polar opposite: positively cultivating discord with and between contents of the mind that, though we cannot begin to sort them out, feel as vital and fundamental as fight-or-flight options in an emergency.

De Kooning's hand in his late drawings can seem to overrule, on principle, whatever his mind has told it to do. The principle is the most pronounced visual commitment to personal liberty in art history. The hand in these drawings embodies not only all hands but an all-hands mutiny on a ship – the individualist paradigm of artistic significance – that in the art worlds of the 1960s and 1970s, furthermore, appeared to be sinking. The ship did not perish, after all. Today American art culture makes amends to the much-insulted prerogatives of individual talent, which is back in esteem. But don't even think of apologizing to de Kooning's hand. It would ridicule you.

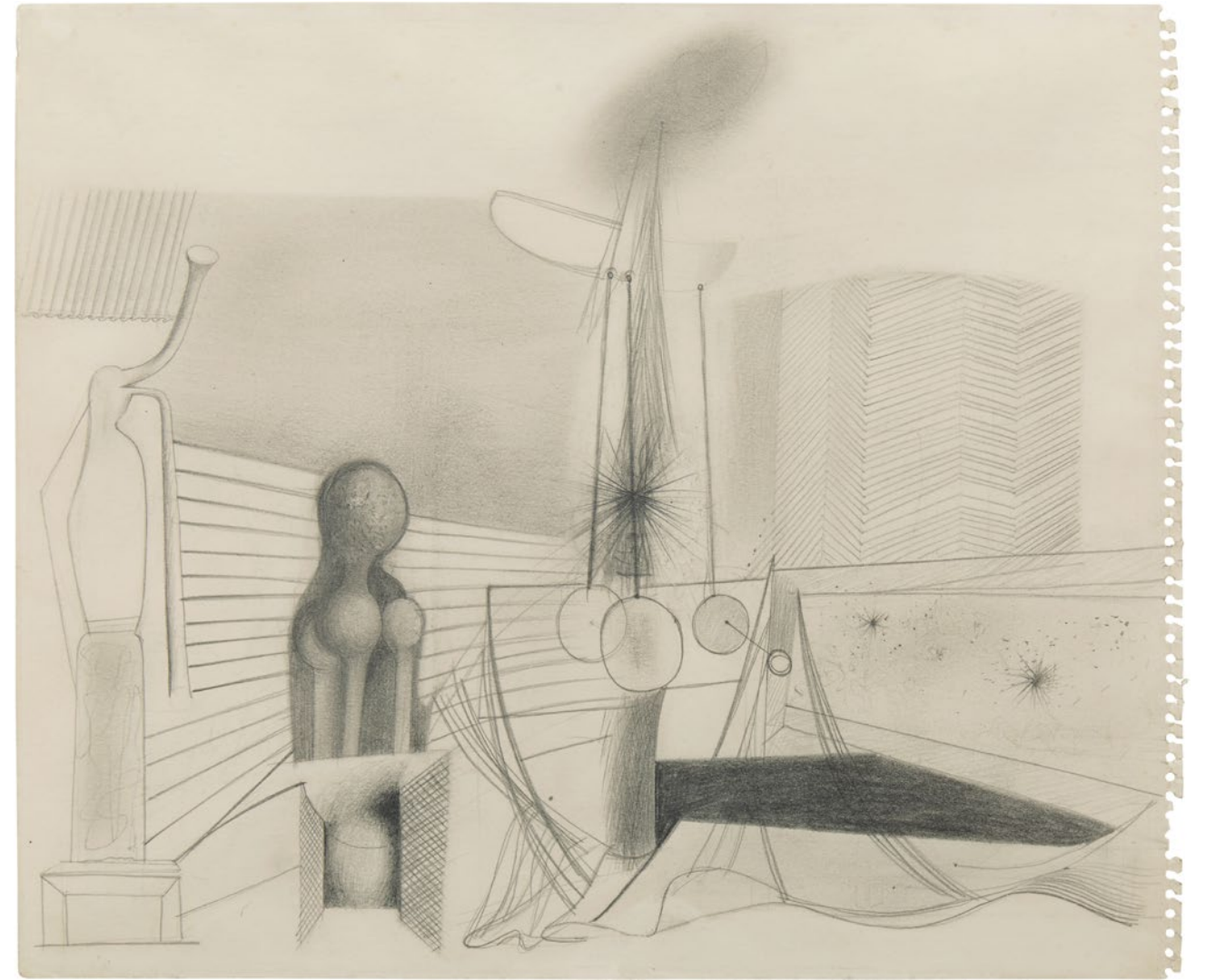
A hovering demonism of mockery, compounded by something like despair and something like exaltation, attends these drawings, as if forbidding us to take them straight. Sheer giddiness, if not "the melodrama of vulgarity" that de Kooning once complained of being captive to, asserts itself in whiffs of wacky figuration and landscape elements knocked around like bowling pins. At other times, linear and painterly marks (most insolently in casual monoprints, often on newspaper,

from temporary states of paintings) all but boast of being as mindless as a child kicking a stone along a sidewalk on a summer afternoon.

But oh, the specifics of the drawings! By which I mean just about every single touch of an instrument to paper, even in background passages of the scribble-and-find technique whereby one lays down a flurry of random lines and then picks out, say, faces in it. Randomness eluded de Kooning. He was incapable of formlessness. When he left a mark, it couldn't help but vibrate with a space-making, just-so quiddity. I fancy him as a faerie Frankenstein whose inventions, instantly breaking free of whatever he meant for them, swarms the world with uncontrollable, fearsome aliveness.

I think that Willem de Kooning was a hand with a man attached. Through epochs of ideology, cerebral artifice, and toxic irony in contemporary art, that hand kept singing like a bird of what hands can know. Present history amplifies the song. We ought to answer it. How?

PLATES



1. *Untitled (Study for World's Fair Mural "Medicine")*, 1937



2. Seated Man, 1938



3. *Three Studies of Men*, 1938



4. *Portrait of a Man (Harold Rosenberg)*, c. 1938



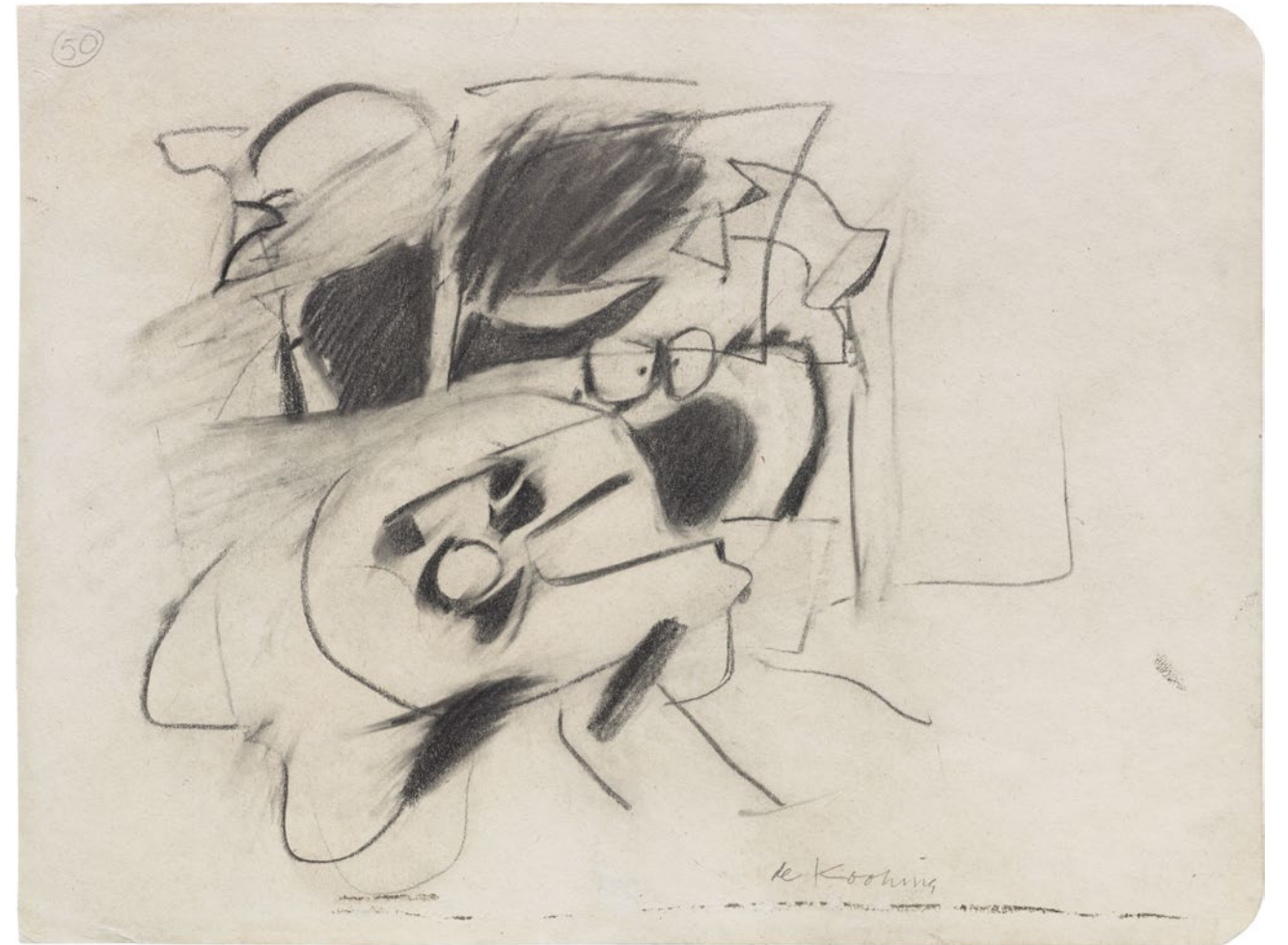
5. *Reclining Nude (Juliet Browner)*, c. 1938



6. Study for Glazier (Self-Portrait), c. 1940



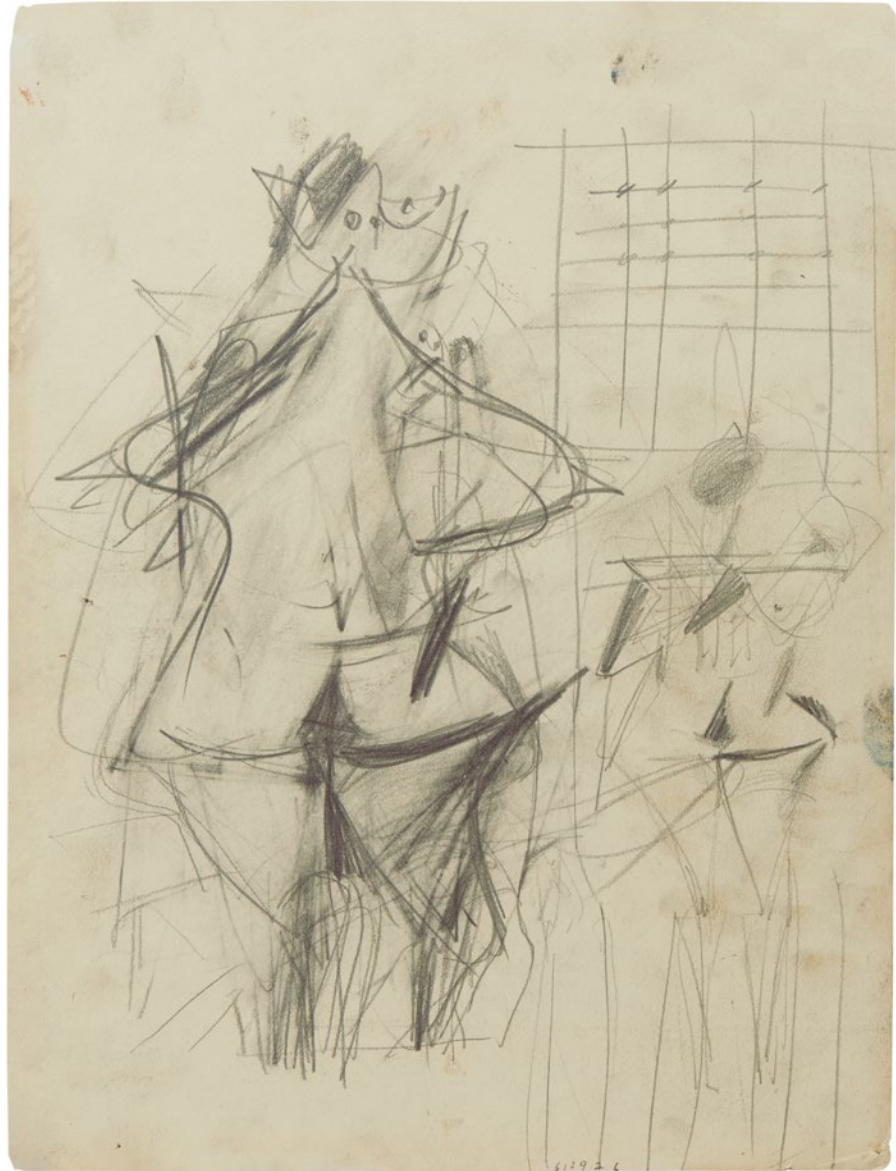
7. *Studies of a Woman's Head* (Elaine de Kooning), c. 1942



8. *Abstraction*, 1945



9. *Two Women*, c. 1950



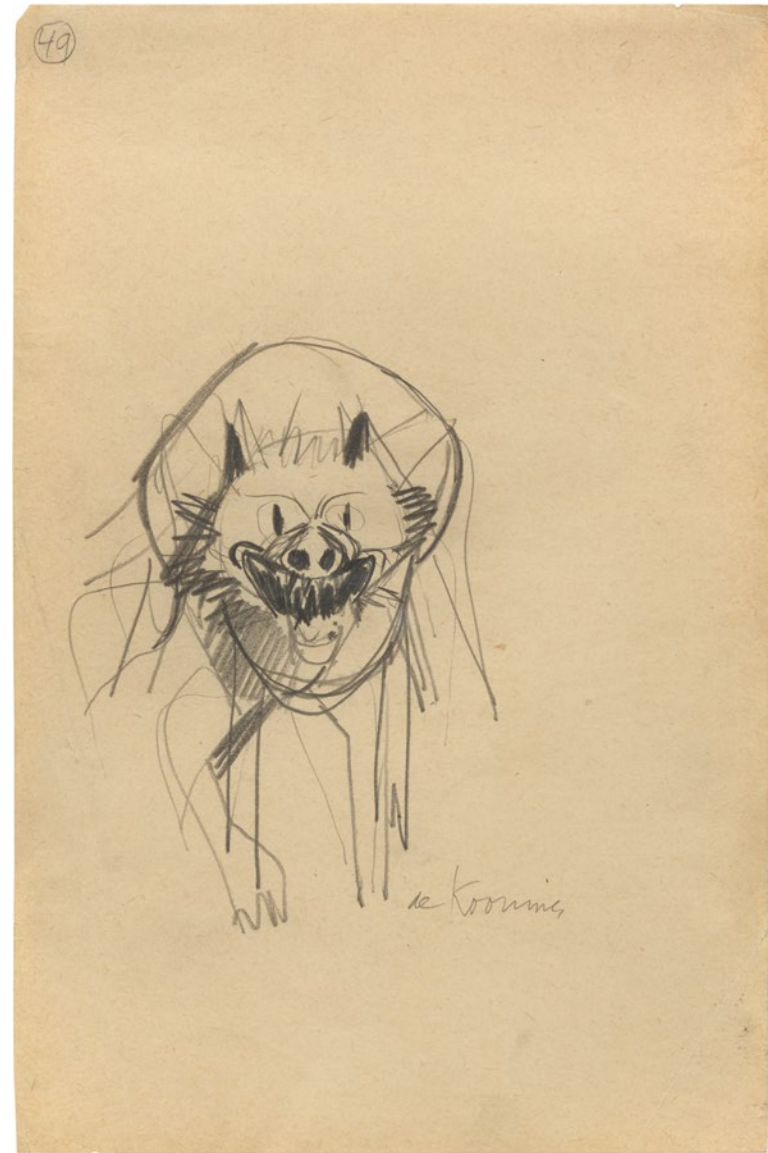
verso



10. *Woman*, c. 1950



11. *Untitled (Woman)*, c. 1950



12. *Dog*, c. 1949-53



13. *Two Women*, 1955



14. *Leaves*, 1958





16. *Woman Study*, 1964



17. *Woman in a Rowboat*, c. 1964



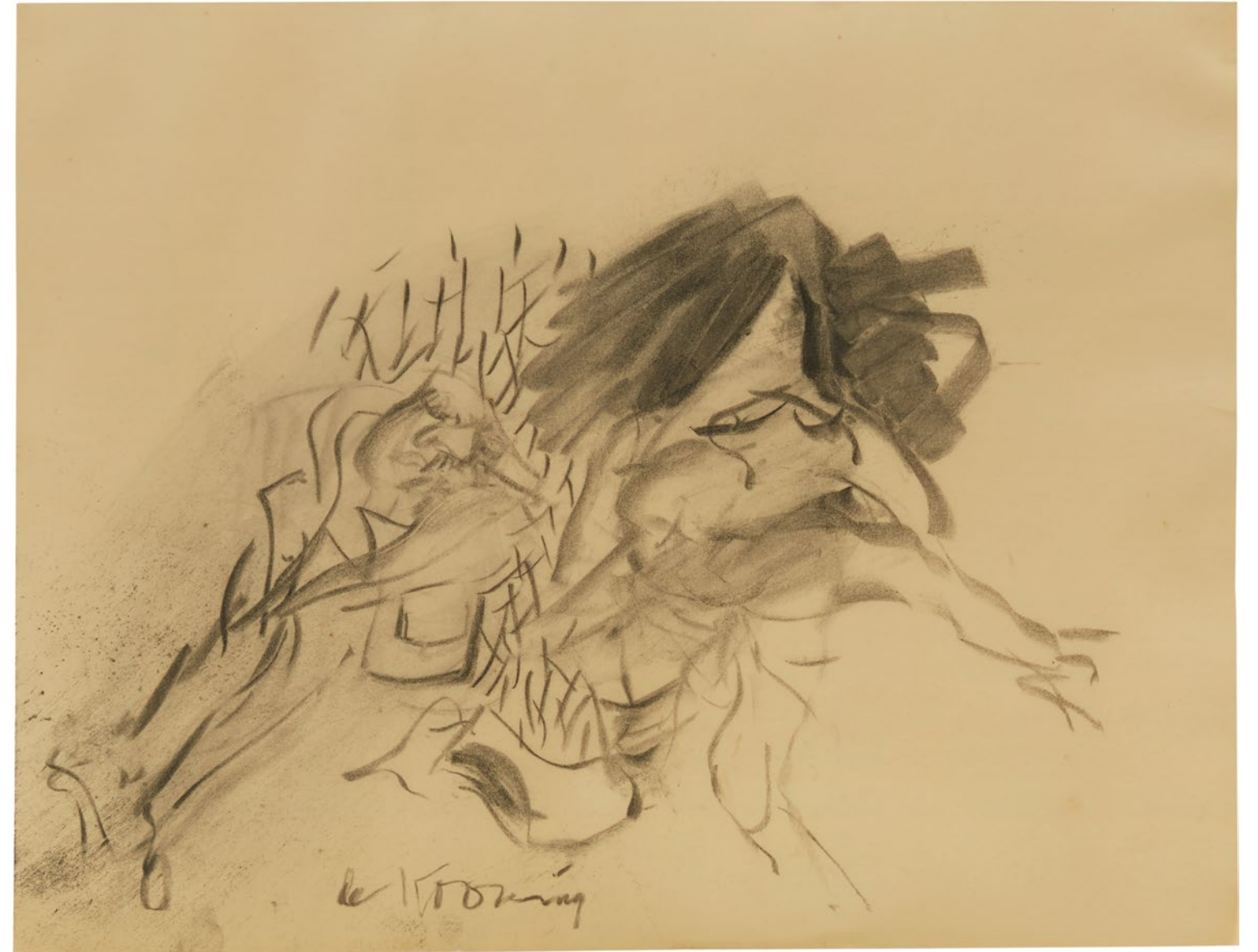
18. *Untitled (Woman)*, c. 1966

19. *Floating Females*, 1966





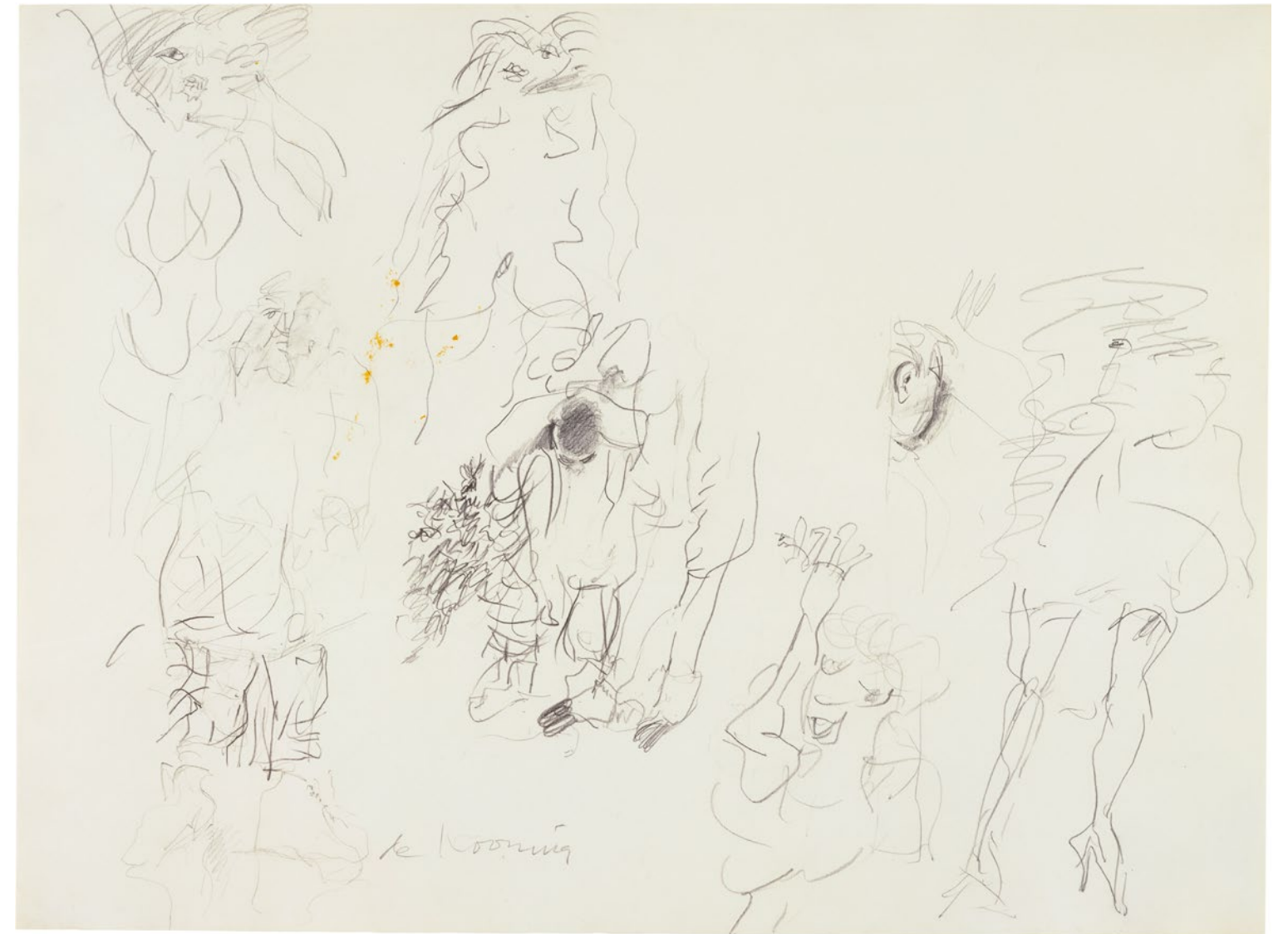
20. *Untitled (Crucifixion)*, 1966-67



21. *Untitled (Figures in Landscape)*, 1966–67



22. *Untitled (Figure in Landscape)*, 1968



23. *Untitled*, 1969



24. *Untitled (Clamdigger)*, c. 1970



25. *Untitled*, c. 1970-75

26. *Head of a Man*, c. 1975





27. *Head of a Man*, 1975



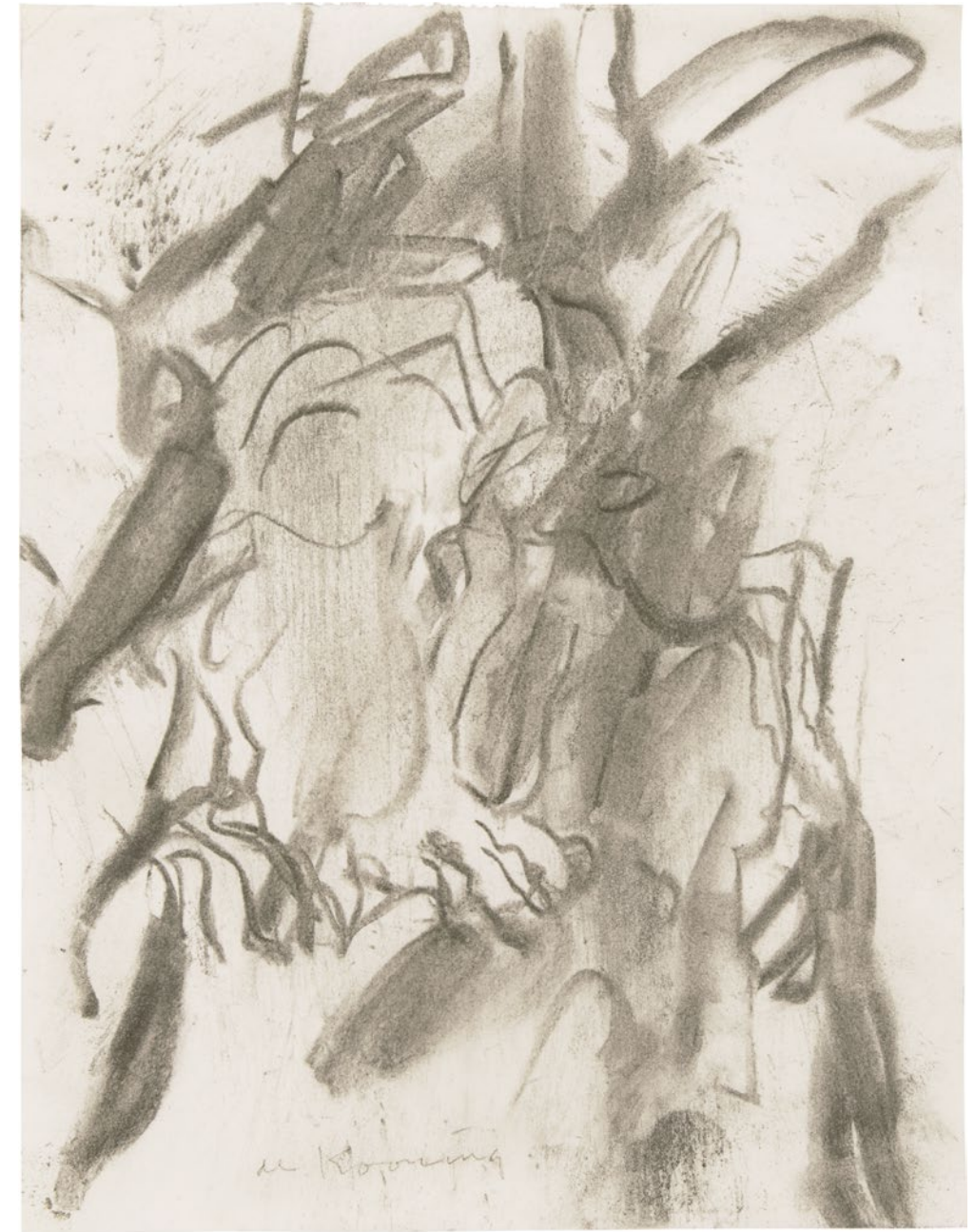
28. *Untitled (Figure)*, c. 1975



30. *Untitled (Two Figures)*, c. 1975–80

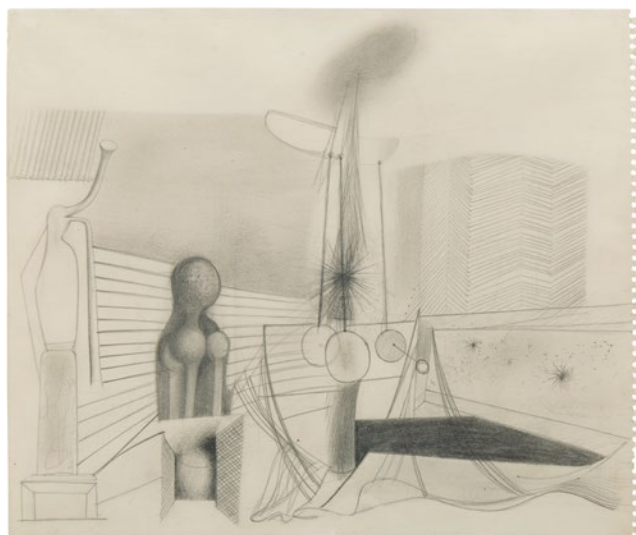
31. *Untitled (Woman)*, c. 1975–80





32. *Untitled*, c. 1975–80

CATALOGUE OF WORKS



1.
Untitled (Study for World's Fair Mural "Medicine"), 1937
 Graphite on paper
 9⁷/₈ × 11³/₄ inches; 25 × 30 cm

Provenance
 Allan Stone, New York, acquired in 1974
 Estate of Allan Stone

Exhibited
 Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*, March 10 – April 21, 1974. Traveled to Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, June 7 – July 21, 1974; Washington, DC, Phillips Collection, September 14 – October 27, 1974; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, December 3, 1974 – January 19, 1975; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, February 21 – April 6, 1975; and Saint Louis, Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, May 30 – June 20, 1975

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984. Traveled to Berlin, Akademie der Künste, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*, March 11 – April 29, 1984; and Paris, Centre Pompidou, June 26 – September 24, 1984

New York, Queens Museum of Art, *Queens Artists: Highlights of the 20th Century*, March 20 – July 6, 1997

New York, Allan Stone Gallery, *Willem de Kooning Drawings: 1920s–1970s*, October 30, 2007 – January 19, 2008

Literature
 Harold Rosenberg. *De Kooning*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1973, pl. 7, ill. (as *Untitled*)

Philip Larson and Peter Schjeldahl. *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974, cat. no. 1, n.p., ill.

Barbara Rose. *Miró in America*. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1982, fig. 30, ill.

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 4, p. 28, ill.

Philippe Sollers. *De Kooning, Vite I*. Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1988, cat. no. 3, p. 79, ill. (as *Untitled*)

Philippe Sollers. *De Kooning, Vite II (Oeuvres)*. Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1988, cat. no. 3, n.p., ill. (as *Untitled*)

Diane Waldman. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988, fig. 13, p. 25, ill.

Sally Yard. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: Rizzoli, 1997, fig. 5, p. 14, ill.

Donald Kuspit. *Willem de Kooning Drawings: 1920s–1970s*. New York: Allan Stone Gallery, 2007, p. 11, ill. in color

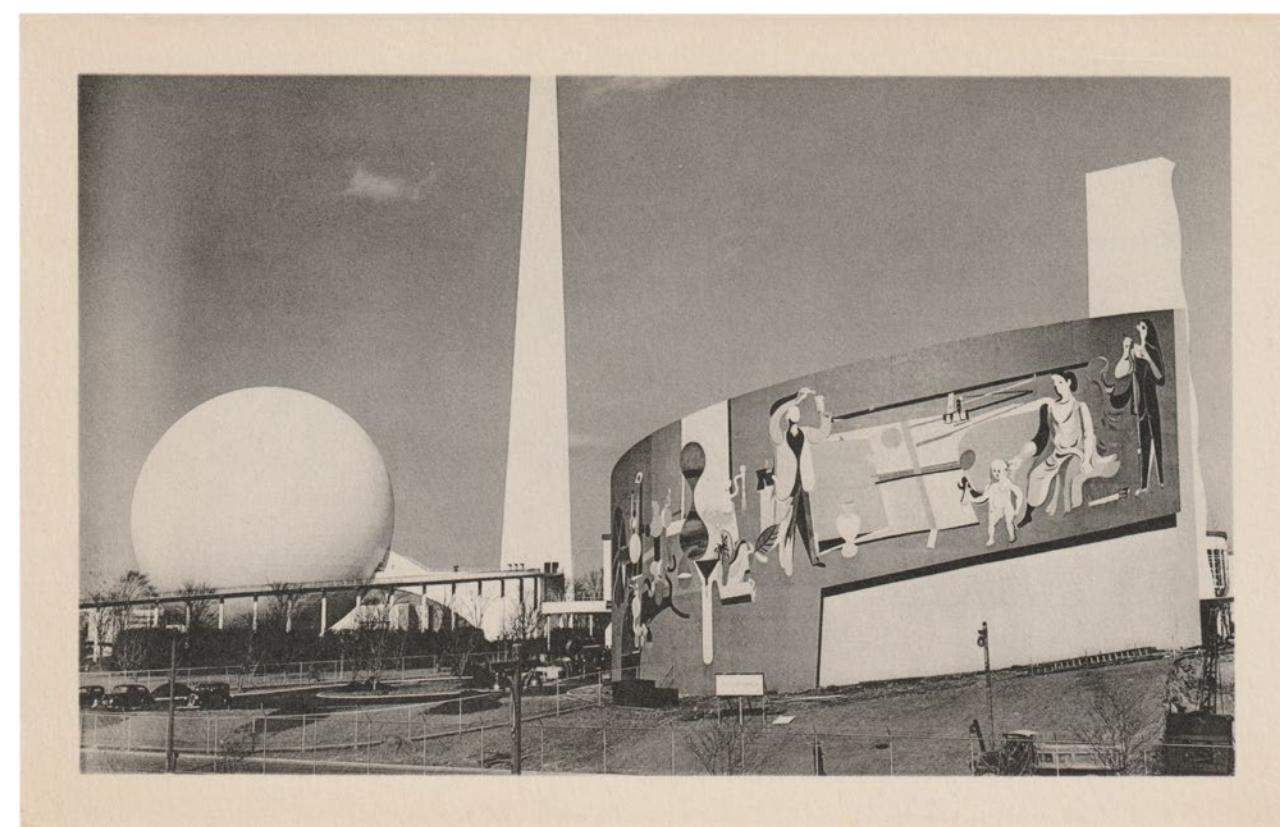
Sally Yard. *Willem de Kooning: Works, Writings, and Interviews*. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2007, p. 16, ill. in color

William Agee, Irving Sandler, and Karen Wilkin. *American Vanguards: Graham, Davis, Gorky, de Kooning, and Their Circle, 1927–1942*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, cat. no. 20, p. 87, ill. in color

Judith Zilczer. *A Way of Living: The Art of Willem de Kooning*. London: Phaidon, 2014, cat. no. 11, p. 21, ill. in color

In 1935 de Kooning joined the mural division of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a federal jobs program established during the Great Depression. Two years later he received a commission to make a ninety-foot mural for the facade of the Hall of Pharmacy at the 1939 New York World's Fair. This is the most complete of the surviving drawings related to this seminal project.

De Kooning's composition includes a biomorphic figure surrounded by geometric forms. As art historian Philip Larson has written, "It was an effort to reconcile his conflicting commitments to the human figure and to abstract form," adding that it "yields a virtual catalogue of images that would pervade his later work."



A postcard from the 1939 New York World's Fair showing the Hall of Pharmacy with de Kooning's mural *Medicine*



2.
Seated Man, 1938
 Graphite on paper
 14 × 10⁷/₈ inches; 36 × 28 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning
 Inscribed in graphite (upper left recto): 64 in a circle

Provenance
 Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York
 Private collection, acquired from the above in 1982

Exhibited
 Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*, March 10 – April 21, 1974. Traveled to Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, June 7 – July 21, 1974; Washington, DC, Phillips Collection, September 14 – October 27, 1974; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, December 3, 1974 – January 19, 1975; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, February 21 – April 6, 1975; and Saint Louis, Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, May 30 – June 20, 1975

New York, School of Visual Arts, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings*, November 15 – December 9, 1977

Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, *2 Jahrzehnte amerikanische Malerei 1920–1940*, June 10 – August 12, 1979. Traveled to Kunsthalle Zürich, August 23 – October 28, 1979

Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, *Willem de Kooning: Pittsburgh International Series*, October 26, 1979 – January 6, 1980

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984

Literature
 Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1972, pl. 15, p. 83, ill.

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 7, p. 30, ill.

Sally Yard. *Willem de Kooning: The First Twenty-Six Years in New York*. New York: Garland, 1986, no. 61, ill.

This is a study for the painting *Seated Man* (c. 1939) (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC). Art historian Sally Yard has described the figure in the drawing as “a rather sweet and optimistic looking man, his hands held before his chest demurely.” A related drawing is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



Study for Seated Man (Self-Portrait), c. 1939. Graphite on paper. 14¹/₄ × 11¹/₄ inches; 36 × 30 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from the Collection of Thomas B. Hess, gift of the heirs of Thomas B. Hess



Seated Man, c. 1939. Oil and charcoal on canvas. 38³/₄ × 34³/₄ inches; 97 × 87 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, gift of the artist through the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation



3.
Three Studies of Men, 1938
 Graphite on paper
 7⁷/₈ × 10 inches; 20 × 25 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning
 Inscribed in graphite (upper left recto): 73 in a circle

Provenance
 Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York
 Private collection, acquired from the above in 1982

Exhibited
 Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*, March 10 – April 21, 1974. Traveled to Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, June 7 – July 21, 1974; Washington, DC, Phillips Collection, September 14 – October 27, 1974; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, December 3, 1974 – January 19, 1975; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, February 21 – April 6, 1975; and Saint Louis, Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, May 30 – June 20, 1975

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984

Literature
 Philip Larson and Peter Schjeldahl. *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974, cat. no. 9, fig. 4, n.p., ill.

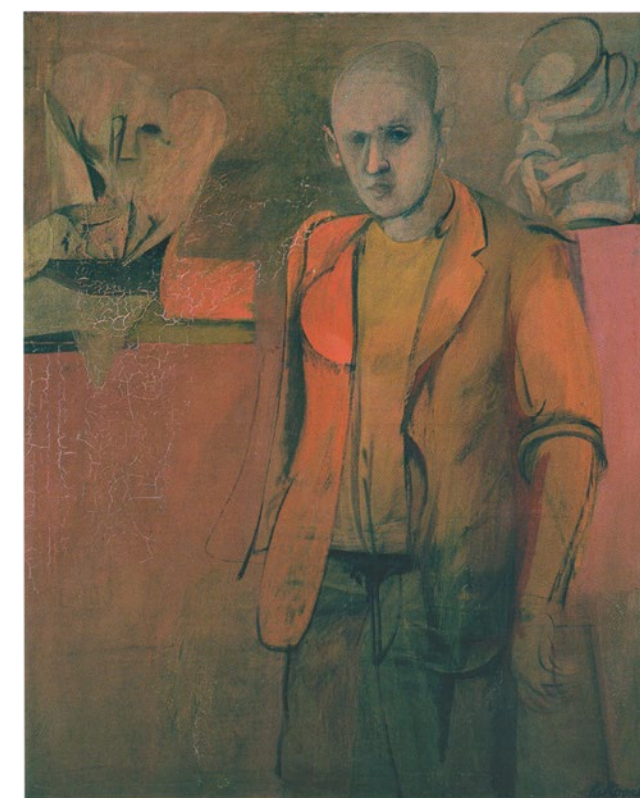
Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 13, p. 34, ill.

Sally Yard. *Willem de Kooning: The First Twenty-Six Years in New York*. New York: Garland, 1986, cat. no. 62, ill.

Having entered the United States illegally in 1926, de Kooning remained fearful of deportation, and in 1937, when the government began a crackdown on political radicals in the WPA, he left the organization. He focused his work increasingly on the male figure, as Diane Waldman writes: “Along with his abstract compositions, de Kooning produced a series of paintings and drawings of somber, rather remote looking men. Some of these elusive images are self-portraits; others resemble de Kooning’s friends [Arshile] Gorky and Edwin Denby. They suggest the sorrow and hardship of the Depression years.”



Two Standing Men, 1938. Oil and charcoal on canvas. 61 × 45 inches; 156 × 114 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from the Collection of Thomas B. Hess, purchase, Rogers, Louis V. Bell, and Harris Brisbane Dick Funds and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest



Standing Man, c. 1942. Oil on canvas. 41¹/₈ × 34¹/₈ inches; 105 × 87 cm. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, the Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund



4.
Portrait of a Man (Harold Rosenberg), c. 1938
Graphite on paper
9 × 7¼ inches; 23 × 18 cm

Provenance

Saul Steinberg, New York
Estate of Saul Steinberg
Private collection, New York, acquired from the above in 2002

Exhibited

New York, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, *The Artist's Hand: Willem de Kooning Drawings, 1937 to 1954*, January 17 – March 2, 2002. Traveled to Youngstown, OH, The Butler Institute of American Art, March 24 – June 2, 2002

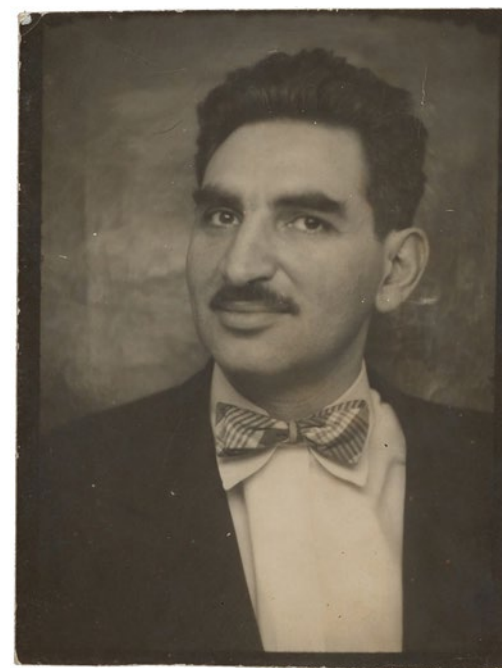
Literature

Harold Rosenberg. *The Tradition of the New*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960, front cover, ill.

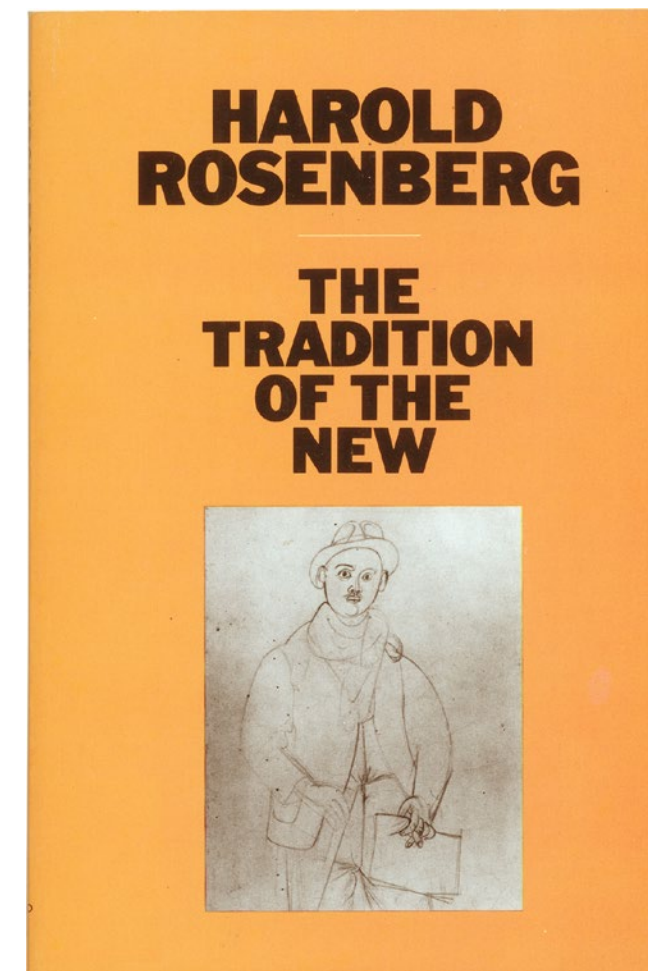
Amy Schichtel. *The Artist's Hand: Willem de Kooning Drawings, 1937 to 1954*. New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 2002, pl. 3, ill. in color

De Kooning met Harold Rosenberg in the mid-1930s, when both were working on the WPA. This portrait depicts the art historian and critic at age thirty, holding crumpled papers and a cigar. Rosenberg later became a staunch supporter of de Kooning's work, and his seminal essay "The American Action Painters" in the December 1952 issue of *ARTnews* helped define the new Abstract Expressionist movement. In a 1978 interview, de Kooning likened his old friend to Moses. "Harold knows the art scene, what is going on. He has a generous way of looking at things."

This drawing was originally owned by the artist and illustrator Saul Steinberg, a friend of both Rosenberg and de Kooning.



Harold Rosenberg, c. 1930



Portrait of a Man (Harold Rosenberg) (cat. no. 4) on the cover of Rosenberg's 1959 book *The Tradition of the New*



5.

Reclining Nude (Juliet Browner), c. 1938

Graphite on paper

10½ × 13⅞ inches; 27 × 33 cm

Signed in graphite (lower recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York

Private collection, acquired from the above in 1982

Exhibited

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Willem de Kooning*, September 19 – November 17, 1968. Traveled to London, Tate Gallery, December 5, 1968 – January 26, 1969; New York, The Museum of Modern Art, March 6 – April 27, 1969; The Art Institute of Chicago, May 17 – July 6, 1969; and Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 29 – September 14, 1969

Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*, March 10 – April 21, 1974. Traveled to Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, June 7 – July 21, 1974; Washington, DC, Phillips Collection, September 14 – October 27, 1974; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, December 3, 1974 – January 19, 1975; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, February 21 – April 6, 1975; and Saint Louis, Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, May 30 – June 20, 1975

New York, School of Visual Arts, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings*, November 15 – December 9, 1977

Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, *2 Jahrzehnte amerikanische Malerei 1920–1940*, June 10 – August 12, 1979. Traveled to Kunsthalle Zürich, August 23 – October 28, 1979

Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, *Willem de Kooning: Pittsburgh International Series*, October 26, 1979 – January 6, 1980

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984

Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Willem de Kooning: Tracing the Figure*, February 10 – April 28, 2002. Traveled to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, June 27 – September 8, 2002; and Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art, September 29, 2002 – January 5, 2003

Literature

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: G. Braziller, 1959, pl. 44, pp. 19, 56, ill.

Gabriella Drudi. *Willem de Kooning*. Milan: Fratelli Fabbri Editori, 1972, pl. 5, ill.

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1972, cat. nos. 2 (verso) and 3 (recto), pp. 19, 62, 64 (verso), 65 (recto), ill.

Harold Rosenberg. *De Kooning*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1973, pl. 8, ill. (as *Reclining Nude*)



Study for "Reclining Nude" (c. 1938) on the verso of Reclining Nude (Juliet Browner) (cat. no. 5)

Diane Waldman. *Willem de Kooning in East Hampton*. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1978, p. 18, ill.

Melvin Lader. "Graham, Gorky, de Kooning and the 'Ingres Revival' in America." *Arts Magazine* 52, March 1978, p. 98, ill.

Willem de Kooning. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, 1979, cat. no. 65, pp. 98, 169, ill.

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 5, p. 29, ill.

Harry F. Gaugh. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1983, cat. no. 3, p. 12, ill.

Philippe Sollers. *De Kooning, Vite II (Oeuvres)*. Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1988, cat. no. 1, ill.

Diane Waldman. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: Abrams, 1988, cat. no. 36, pp. 50, 52, ill.

Stephen Polcari. *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1991, cat. no. 211, ill.

Sally Yard. "The Angel and the Demoiselle: Willem de Kooning's Black Friday." *Princeton Record* 50, no. 2, 1991, fig. 7, pp. 7, 9, ill.

De Kooning: The Women Works on Paper, 1947–1954. New York: C & M Arts, 1995, fig. 1, ill.

Catherine Morris. *The Essential Willem de Kooning*. New York: Wonderland Press, 1999, p. 27, ill.

Cornelia H. Butler, Paul Schimmel, Richard Schiff, and Anne M. Wagner. *Willem de Kooning: Tracing the Figure*. Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002, pl. 1, p. 194, ill. in color

Barbara Hess. *Willem de Kooning, 1904–1997*. Cologne and Los Angeles: Taschen, 2004, p. 13, ill. in color

Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan. *De Kooning: An American Master*. New York: Knopf, 2004, p. 152, ill.

Ingrid Brugger, Florian Steininger, Stefan Neuner, and Gabriel Ramin Schor. *Willem de Kooning*. Vienna: Kunstforum Wien, 2005, fig. 1, p. 106, ill.

Diane Waldman, Jill Weinberg Adams, and Tom Ferrara. *Willem de Kooning: Figure and Light*. New York: L&M Arts, 2010, fig. 1, p. 10, ill.

John Elderfield, Jennifer Field, and Lauren Mahony. *De Kooning: A Retrospective*. Edited by David Frankel. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011, fig. 4, p. 89, ill. in color

Judith Zilzer. *A Way of Living: The Art of Willem de Kooning*. London: Phaidon, 2014, fig. 41, p. 40, ill. in color

This drawing depicts de Kooning's girlfriend, the model and dancer Juliet Browner, who he met in 1934. De Kooning's biographers, Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan, wrote of this drawing that Browner "could almost be an odalisque by Ingres, her head lying on one arm and her long and lean torso curving gently down to her legs. At the same time, de Kooning's emphasis upon the geometric structure of her body reflects his interest in cubism. Her face even seems presented from two different perspectives, as if midway through the drawing the artist, having begun in a fairly academic style, changed his point of view and adopted more openly cubist ideas. Despite the analytical detachment, both the drawing and the figure herself appear suffused in melancholy reverie. [...] Years later, Juliet described how he worked during this period, as he tried to puzzle out the figure: 'He would take a long time to finish a drawing. He would think a lot. It took him more than a week to draw my eyes. He wanted to draw them in the style of Leonardo, showing the outside of the eye as the inside.'"

The drawing "had a particularly personal meaning for de Kooning," they wrote. Soon after it was completed, Browner left him and moved to Los Angeles, where she met and eventually married the artist Man Ray.



Man Ray. *Juliet*, c.1945. Gelatin silver print



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and workshop. *Odalisque in Grisaille*, c. 1824–34. Oil on canvas. 32¼ × 43 inches; 83 × 109 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund



6.
Study for Glazier (Self-Portrait), c. 1940
 Graphite on paper
 14 × 11 inches; 36 × 28 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance
 Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York
 Private collection, acquired from the above in 1982

Exhibited

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Willem de Kooning*, September 19 – November 17, 1968. Traveled to London, Tate Gallery, December 5, 1968 – January 26, 1969; New York, The Museum of Modern Art, March 6 – April 27, 1969; The Art Institute of Chicago, May 17 – July 6, 1969; and Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 29 – September 14, 1969

Cambridge, MA, Haden Gallery at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *Drawings by Five Abstract Expressionist Painters: Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Philip Guston*, February 21 – March 26, 1975

New York, School of Visual Arts, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings*, November 15 – December 9, 1977

Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, *Willem de Kooning: Pittsburgh International Series*, October 26, 1979 – January 6, 1980

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984

Literature

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: G. Braziller, 1959, pl. 29 (recto) and pl. 31 (verso), pp. 19, 22, ill.

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968, cat. no. 108, pp. 20, 165, ill.

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning Drawings*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1972, cat. no. 8, pp. 72, 74, ill.

Drawings by Five Abstract Expressionist Painters: Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, and Philip Guston. Cambridge, MA: MIT Committee on the Visual Arts, 1975, cat. no. 19, p. 14 (as *Study for Glazier*)

Willem de Kooning. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, 1979, cat. no. 71, pp. 104, 169, ill.

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 8, pp. 30, ill.

This drawing is a study for de Kooning's 1940 painting *The Glazier* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). The male figure was the artist's predominant subject in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when he labored in what Thomas B. Hess called a "stubborn pursuit" to capture it in exacting detail. As Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan wrote, "Many of his male figures were based either upon photographs of himself or sketches he made while standing in front of a mirror. [...] Although some of the figures bore a resemblance to de Kooning, the pictures are not 'self-portraits' as the genre is usually understood."

Study for Glazier (Self-Portrait) depicts a detail of de Kooning's profile and upper body, with emphasis placed on his shoulder, an anatomical feature that continually vexed the artist. The shoulder was a "ridiculously planned part of the body," according to de Kooning,

whose annoyance was memorialized in a poem written by his friend, Edwin Denby, the first two lines of which read: "The shoulder of a man is shaped like a baby pig/ It terrifies and it bores the observer, the shoulder."

The verso of this drawing includes a study of the trousers of a seated man that is closely related to *The Glazier* painting. This is probably a depiction of a mannequin de Kooning made and kept in his studio for years. "I took my trousers, my work clothes," he later recalled. "I made a mixture of glue and water, dipped the pants in and dried in front of the heater." Notoriously obsessive, he also took one more try at the shoulder here on the verso, sketching its musculature below the figure's knee.



Verso of *Study for Glazier (Self-Portrait)* (cat. no. 6)



The Glazier, 1940. Oil on canvas. 54 × 44 inches; 137 × 112 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from the Collection of Thomas B. Hess, gift of the heirs of Thomas B. Hess



7.
Studies of a Woman's Head (Elaine de Kooning), c. 1942
 Graphite on prepared paper
 17½ × 22½ inches; 45 × 57 cm

Provenance:
 Joseph Costa, New York, acquired directly from the artist in 1942
 Private collection, by descent from the above, until 2001

Exhibited

New York, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, *The Artist's Hand: Willem de Kooning Drawings, 1937 to 1954*, January 17 – March 2, 2002. Traveled to Youngstown, OH, The Butler Institute of American Art, March 24 – June 2, 2002

Literature

Edvard Lieber. *Willem de Kooning: Reflections in the Studio*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2000, pp. 18–19

Amy Schichtel. *The Artist's Hand: Willem de Kooning Drawings, 1937 to 1954*. New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 2002, pl. 5, ill. in color

Judith Zilzer. *A Way of Living: The Art of Willem de Kooning*. London: Phaidon, 2014, fig. 64, pp. 50, 55, ill. in color

In the early 1940s, with war looming and his art sales slow, de Kooning tried supporting himself as a commercial artist. Unlike many of his peers, he was proud of his commercial work and saw it as an opportunity to use the traditional draughtsman's skills he had learned at Rotterdam's Art Academy.

In his book *Willem de Kooning: Reflections in the Studio*, Elaine de Kooning's former assistant Edvard Lieber writes, "[de Kooning] got a *Harper's Bazaar* assignment to make pencil drawings of women's faces with assorted hairstyles. Elaine went to a five-and-ten, bought cheap hairpieces, and integrated them into her own hair, creating a variety of hairdos. When Bill delivered the drawings, the magazine editor was disappointed. [...] As he paid Bill, he informed him that it would take at least five years before he would be good enough to make a living as a commercial artist. Bill was flabbergasted and thanked the editor, deciding at that moment to abandon the idea of pursuing a career as a commercial artist."

This drawing was originally owned by Joseph Costa, a newspaper photographer who was a neighbor of the de Koonings on West 22nd Street. A closely related drawing is owned by the artist Chuck Close.



Willem and Elaine de Kooning in Provincetown, MA, 1940



Study of Woman's Head, c. 1938–42. Graphite on paper.
 9¼ × 7 inches; 24 × 18 cm. Collection Chuck Close



8.
Abstraction, 1945
 Graphite on paper
 8¾ × 11⅝ inches; 22 × 30 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning
 Inscribed in graphite (upper left recto): 50 in a circle

Provenance
 Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York
 Private collection, acquired from the above in 1982

Exhibited

Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*, March 10 – April 21, 1974. Traveled to Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, June 7 – July 21, 1974; Washington, DC, Phillips Collection, September 14 – October 27, 1974; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, December 3, 1974 – January 19, 1975; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, February 21 – April 6, 1975; and Saint Louis, Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, May 30 – June 20, 1975

Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, *Willem de Kooning: Pittsburgh International Series*, October 26, 1979 – January 6, 1980

Literature

Philip Larson and Peter Schjeldahl. *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1974, cat. no. 25, n.p.

Willem de Kooning. Pittsburgh: Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, 1979, cat. no. 75, p. 106, ill.

Budd Hopkins. "The Drawings of Willem de Kooning." *Drawing: The International Review Published by the Drawing Society* 5, no. 6, March/April 1984, p. 122, ill.

Composed of hurtling lines, smudged vestiges, and dark bulbous masses of graphite with vaguely anatomical forms, *Abstraction* conjures the immediacy, corporeality, and fluent lines of de Kooning's celebrated abstract paintings of the late-1940s, like *Attic* (1949) (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).



Attic, 1949. Oil, enamel, and newspaper transfer on canvas. 61⅞ × 81 inches; 157 × 206 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection, gift of Muriel Kallis Newman in honor of her son, Glenn David Steinberg



9.
Two Women, c. 1950
 Graphite and oil on paper
 9⁷/₈ × 7⁷/₈ inches; 25 × 20 cm
 Signed in graphite (left recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York
 Private collection, acquired from the above in 1982

Exhibited

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Willem de Kooning*, September 19 – November 17, 1968. Traveled to London, Tate Gallery, December 5, 1968 – January 26, 1969; New York, The Museum of Modern Art, March 6 – April 27, 1969; The Art Institute of Chicago, May 17 – July 6, 1969; and Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 29 – September 14, 1969

Chicago, Richard Gray Gallery, *Willem de Kooning, 1941–1959*, October 4 – November 16, 1974

Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, *Surrealität, Bildrealität, 1924–1974: In den unzähligen Bildern des Lebens*, December 8, 1974 – February 2, 1975. Traveled to Baden-Baden, Germany, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, February 14 – April 13, 1975

London, Gimpel Fils, *Willem de Kooning*, June 29 – August 12, 1976. Traveled to Zurich, Gimpel & Hanover, August 27 – October 3, 1976

New York, Xavier Fourcade, Inc., *Works on Paper, Small Format, Objects: Duchamp to Heizer*, February 15 – March 19, 1977

In the summer of 1950, de Kooning pinned two large sheets of paper to the wall of his studio and drew two standing female figures. Those figures led the way to the painting *Woman I* (1950–52), his best-known work and a landmark of twentieth-century American painting. During the two years he developed *Woman I* and its successors, he worked out many of his ideas in smaller drawings, including this sheet, in which the figure on the right displays a toothy grin and both women wear vestiges of hats, similar to those seen in a photograph of an early state of *Woman I* originally published in *ARTnews* in 1952.

Writing about the drawings of the early 1950s, Paul Cummings notes that de Kooning’s “line in these few years underwent its greatest changes. This is recognized in the increasing velocity of application, the varying graphic weights achieved by the reiteration of the gesture in building a reinforced line, and his innovative use of the eraser as a stylus of light.”



The artist working on a two-part drawing for *Woman I* in June 1950 (photograph by Rudolph Burckhardt)



State four of the painting *Woman I* (1950–52)



10.

Woman, c. 1950

Graphite and wax crayon on paperboard, double sided

13 1/8 × 10 inches; 33 × 25 cm

Signed and inscribed in graphite (lower recto): to Edwin / with love from / Bill

Provenance

Edwin Denby, New York, gift of the artist

Private collection, by descent from the above

Exhibited

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984. Traveled to Berlin, Akademie der Kunst, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*, March 11 – April 29, 1984; and Paris, Centre Pompidou, June 26 – September 24, 1984

Newport Beach, CA, Newport Harbor Art Museum, *The Figurative Fifties: New York Figurative Expressionism*, July 19 – September 18, 1988. Traveled to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, October 14 – December 31, 1988; and San Antonio, McNay Art Museum, February 15 – April 30, 1989

New York, Grey Art Gallery at New York University, *Rudy Burckhardt and Friends: New York Artists of the 1950s and '60s*, May 9 – July 15, 2000

Literature

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning Drawings*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1972, pl. 50, pp. 138–39, ill.

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 40, p. 48, ill. (as *Woman*, c. 1951–52)

Paul Schimmel and Judith E. Stein. *The Figurative Fifties: New York Figurative Expressionism*. Newport Beach, CA: 1988, cat. no. 15, n.p., ill.

Rudy Burckhardt and Friends: New York Artists of the 1950s. New York: New York University Grey Art Gallery, 2000, p. 11, ill.

Thomas B. Hess dates this drawing to early in the evolution of *Woman I*, writing that “the freely moving, fast line acts like a plumb to the subconscious and brings up unexpected shapes. [...] The torso doubles as a grinning face (an archetypal form found in many primitive societies).”

De Kooning gave this drawing to Edwin Denby, who he first met in 1935, when Denby lived next door on West 21st Street with the photographer Rudy Burckhardt. As de Kooning’s biographers Stevens and Swan write, Denby and Burckhardt “came to play significant roles in his life over the next few decades – not the least in being two of his earliest champions and collectors.” As Burckhardt described it, “Edwin and I would help him out with twenty dollars now and then, and he’d give us a small painting or a drawing, or we’d buy a bigger one for maybe \$200. [...] But Bill worried about us, too: ‘What are these two college kids going to do when their money runs out?’”



Edwin Denby on the roof of 145 West 21st Street, next door to de Kooning’s studio, 1937 (photograph by Rudolph Burckhardt)



11.
Untitled (Woman), c. 1950
 Graphite and traces of oil on paper
 12⁷/₈ × 11¹/₈ inches; 33 × 28 cm
 Signed and inscribed in graphite (lower recto): de Kooning /
 Happy Birthday 28-3-1956 / to Grace / Bill

Provenance
 Grace Hartigan, gift of the artist, March 28, 1956
 Allan Stone, New York
 Estate of Allan Stone

Exhibited

New York, Allan Stone Gallery, *Willem de Kooning Drawings: 1920s–1970s*, October 30, 2007 – January 19, 2008

New York, Washburn Gallery, *The Cedar Bar*, January 15 – March 14, 2009

New York, Allan Stone Gallery, *Fall Selections*, September 6 – October 31, 2013

New York, Allan Stone Projects, *Artists of the New York School*, October 27 – December 23, 2016

East Hampton, NY, Eric Firestone Gallery, *Montauk Highway: Postwar Abstraction in the Hamptons*, August 4 – September 17, 2017

Literature

Donald Kuspit. *Willem de Kooning Drawings: 1920s–1970s*. New York: Allan Stone Gallery, 2007, pp. 7, 42–43, ill. in color

In 1948 Grace Hartigan visited Jackson Pollock at his studio in the Springs, East Hampton. Hartigan, who was twenty-six at the time, asked him without any trepidation, “Who’s good but you?” Pollock’s reply was equally straightforward: “Everyone is shit, except for de Kooning and me.”

Within days the young artist was at de Kooning’s studio. “Meeting with and seeing the work of de Kooning changed my life,” Hartigan recounted. “I understood what it meant to totally identify oneself with one’s art.” She visited his studio many times in the next few years, and in March 1956 he gave her this drawing on her thirty-fourth birthday.



Grace Hartigan with a self-portrait in 1953



12.
Dog, c. 1949–53
 Graphite on paper
 9 × 6 inches; 23 × 15 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning
 Inscribed in graphite (upper left recto): 49 in a circle

Provenance
 Conrad Fried, gift of the artist

Exhibited

Valencia, Spain, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, *Willem De Kooning*, September 6 – December 2, 2001. Traveled to Madrid, Fundación “la Caixa”, December 20, 2001 – March 25, 2002

Dublin, Irish Museum of Modern Art, *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts*, March 31 – June 27, 2010

Literature

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning Drawings*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1972, pl. 103, pp. 53, 236, 238, ill. (dated c. 1958)

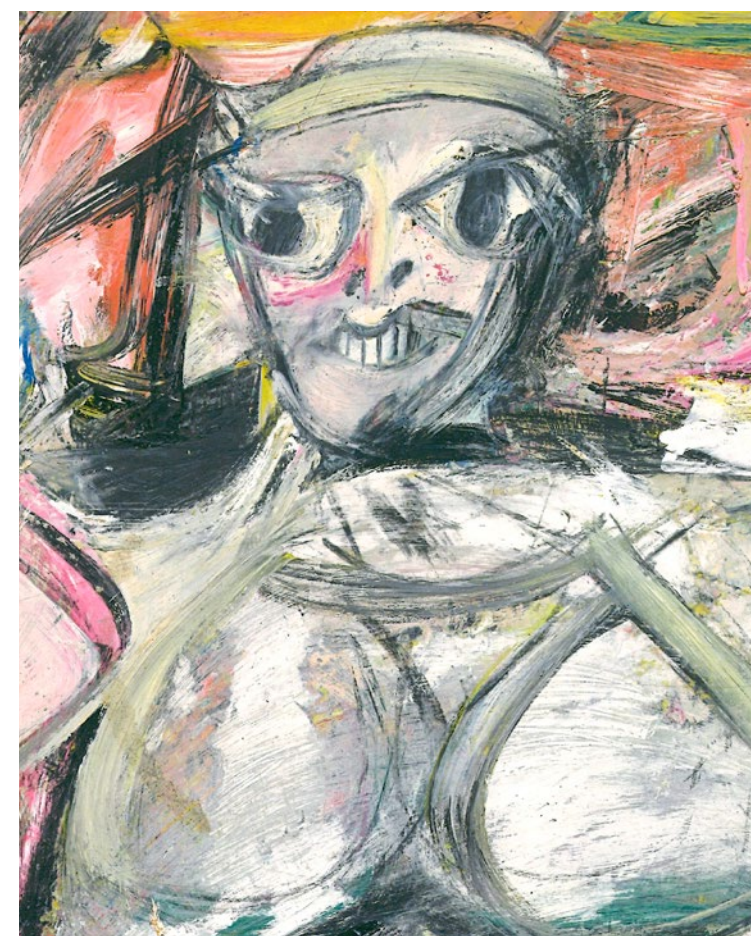
Enrique Juncosa, ed. *Willem de Kooning*. Valencia, Spain: Institut Valencià d'Art Modern; Madrid: Fundación “la Caixa”, 2001, p. 100, ill. in color

David Anfam. “Willem de Kooning: Valencia and Madrid.” *The Burlington Magazine* 143, no. 1185, December 2001, p. 784, ill.

Seán Kissane, ed. *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts*. Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2010, pp. 42, 312, ill. in color

This drawing of a dog, with its toothy grin and vigorous lines, probably dates from the period de Kooning was working on *Woman I* (1950–52) and shares many characteristics with his drawings for the celebrated painting.

Dog was originally owned by Elaine de Kooning’s brother, Conrad Fried, who was de Kooning’s assistant in the late 1930s. As Fried told de Kooning’s biographers, “I owed Bill a lot, because he helped me not in a physical way, but a psychological way. He became a mentor. He helped me to know what I was doing.”



Woman I (detail), 1950–52. Oil, enamel, and charcoal on canvas. 75¼ × 58 inches; 193 × 147 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase



13.
Two Women, 1955
 Ink on paper
 24 × 18¾ inches; 61 × 48 cm

Provenance
 Elaine de Kooning, East Hampton, NY, gift of the artist
 Private collection, New York, by descent

Exhibited

Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*, March 10 – April 21, 1974. Traveled to Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, June 7 – July 21, 1974; Washington, DC, Phillips Collection, September 14 – October 27, 1974; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, December 3, 1974 – January 19, 1975; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, February 21 – April 6, 1975; and Saint Louis, Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, May 30 – June 20, 1975

East Hampton, NY, Guild Hall Museum, *Willem de Kooning: Works from 1951–1981*, May 23 – July 19, 1981

Literature

Jerry Mason, ed. *Creative America*. New York: Ridge Press, 1962, pp. 22–23 (studio view), 68–69 (studio view), ill. in color

Philip Larson and Peter Schjeldahl. *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974, cat. no. 80., n.p.

Judith Wolfe. *Willem de Kooning: Works from 1951–1981*. East Hampton, NY: Guild Hall Museum, 1981, cat. no. 45, pp. 21, 24, ill.

Catherine Bompuis and Claire Stoullig, eds. *Willem de Kooning*. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1984, p. 229 (studio view), ill.

Lanier Graham. *Willem de Kooning: Printer's Proofs from the Collection of Irwin Hollander, Master Printer*. New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries and Canal Arts Corporation, 1991, p. 143 (studio view), ill.

Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan. *De Kooning: An American Master*. New York: Knopf, 2004, p. 413 (studio view), ill.

De Kooning would occasionally revisit his earlier work when he began a new painting. *Two Women* can be seen pinned horizontally on the wall behind the artist in a 1962 photograph of his 831 Broadway studio.

As the curator Judith Wolfe has noted, “In de Kooning’s work of the mid-1950s, the figure of *Woman* yields to more abstract, entangled compositions. [...] We can see this occurring in the painting entitled *The Springs* of 1955, which could very well have as its progenitor a work like the ink drawing *Two Women*.”



The artist in his studio, 831 Broadway, New York, 1962, with *Two Women* (cat. no. 13) installed horizontally at far right



The Springs, 1955. Masking tape and oil on board and paper. 21¼ × 24¾ inches; 56 × 62 cm. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, gift of Edwin Janss



14.
Leaves, 1958
 Ink on paper
 17 × 13⁷/₈ inches; 43 × 35 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance
 Lisa de Kooning, gift of the artist
 Private collection, acquired from the above in 1997

In the mid-1950s de Kooning moved away from the subject of women, which had preoccupied him for the past five years, finding inspiration instead in the landscape he observed driving back and forth between his home in Long Island and New York City. This new interest developed into a series of paintings with titles that allude to nature, including *Forest of Zogbaum* (1958), *Leaves in Weehawken* (1958), and *A Tree in Naples* (1960) (The Museum of Modern Art, New York).

To make the drawing *Leaves*, de Kooning used a liner brush, a narrow brush with very long bristles often used by sign painters, which he liked for its ability to produce dynamic lines that appear to glide effortlessly across the paper. Referring to the works of this period, he told David Sylvester that he sought to “grab a piece of nature and make it as real as it actually is.”



A Tree in Naples, 1960. Oil on canvas. 80³/₄ × 70¹/₂ inches; 204 × 178 cm.
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection



15.
Man, 1964
 Ink on paper
 23³/₄ × 18³/₄ inches; 60 × 48 cm

Provenance
 Elaine de Kooning, gift of the artist
 Estate of Elaine de Kooning
 Private collection, acquired from the above in 1994

Exhibited
 New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984. Traveled to Berlin, Akademie der Künste, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*, March 11 – April 29, 1984; and Paris, Centre Pompidou, June 26 – September 24, 1984

Literature
 Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning Drawings*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1972, pl. 99, pp. 51, 230–31, ill.

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 83, pp. 20, 83, ill.

With its undulating marks and rippling brushwork, this ink drawing reveals a shift in de Kooning’s work toward a looser, more sensual handling of materials. “In the summer of 1963,” writes Thomas B. Hess, de Kooning “began to paint and make drawings of the figure with an increasing fluency and brilliance. [...] It was, in a sense, the opening of a new period for him, and thus it was fitting and also characteristic that in the moments of expectancy attendant on such beginnings, he would return to one of his earliest themes, the drawing of men. Nothing could make a more dramatic contrast with these elegant, swift, assured drawings of men than the careful, tight pencil studies the artist had done of himself, posed in front of two mirrors, some twenty-five years earlier.”

Paul Cummings adds that the 1964 drawings of men “harken back to the figures of the 1930s and 1940s but are now expressed in a new construction of flowing lines which had developed in recent abstractions.”



16.
Woman Study, 1964
 Pastel and charcoal on paper
 23¾ × 19 inches; 60 × 48 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower left recto): de Kooning

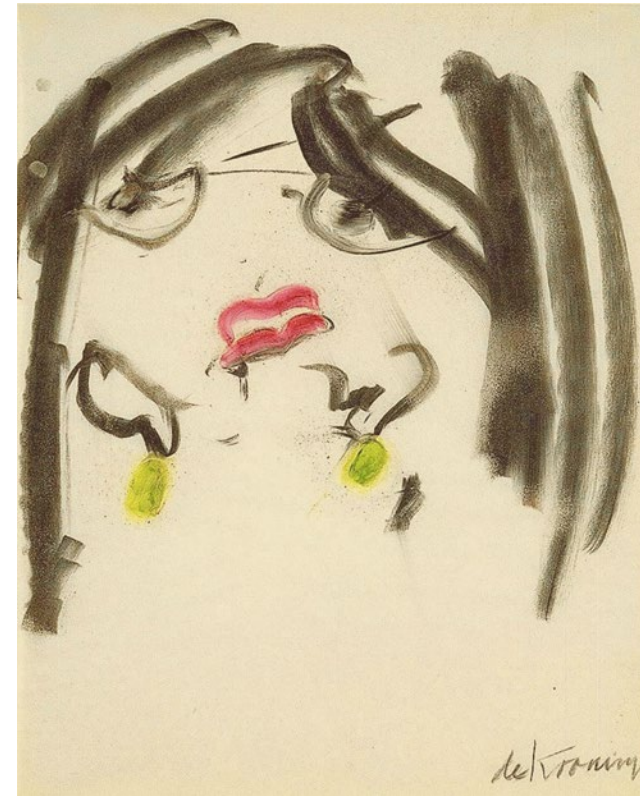
Provenance
 Allan Stone, New York, acquired directly from the artist before 1966
 Estate of Allan Stone

Exhibited
 New York, Allan Stone Gallery, *De Kooning's Women*, March 14 – April 2, 1966

Literature
Willem de Kooning. New York: Allan Stone Gallery, 1966, p. 8, ill.

Gabriella Drudi. *Willem de Kooning*. Milan: Fratelli Fabbri Editori, 1972, pl. 166, ill.

Woman Study is one of a small group of charcoal and pastel drawings from 1964 depicting a woman's head with red lips. Thomas B. Hess wrote about these works, "These drawings of heads are among the very few in de Kooning's oeuvre where the image is presented in a close up, where in order to achieve a certain scale and intimacy, the artist brings his subject close to the viewer's face, so to speak, filling the picture plane with it. [...] The reason why he chose to move in on the faces seems to relate to the very free nature of the drawing, the aleatory gestures that are transformed into a head with the addition merely of a red circle and a few oblique angles. He emphasizes the power of 'hieroglyphs' (mouth, nose) in a fluid mass of blacks that seem to objectify nothing so much as the artist's subjective gestures, released by the motion of charcoal."



Untitled, 1964. Pastel and charcoal on tracing paper. 23¾ × 19 inches; 60 × 48 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest



Untitled, 1964. Charcoal and pastel on vellum. 23¾ × 19 inches; 60 × 48 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest

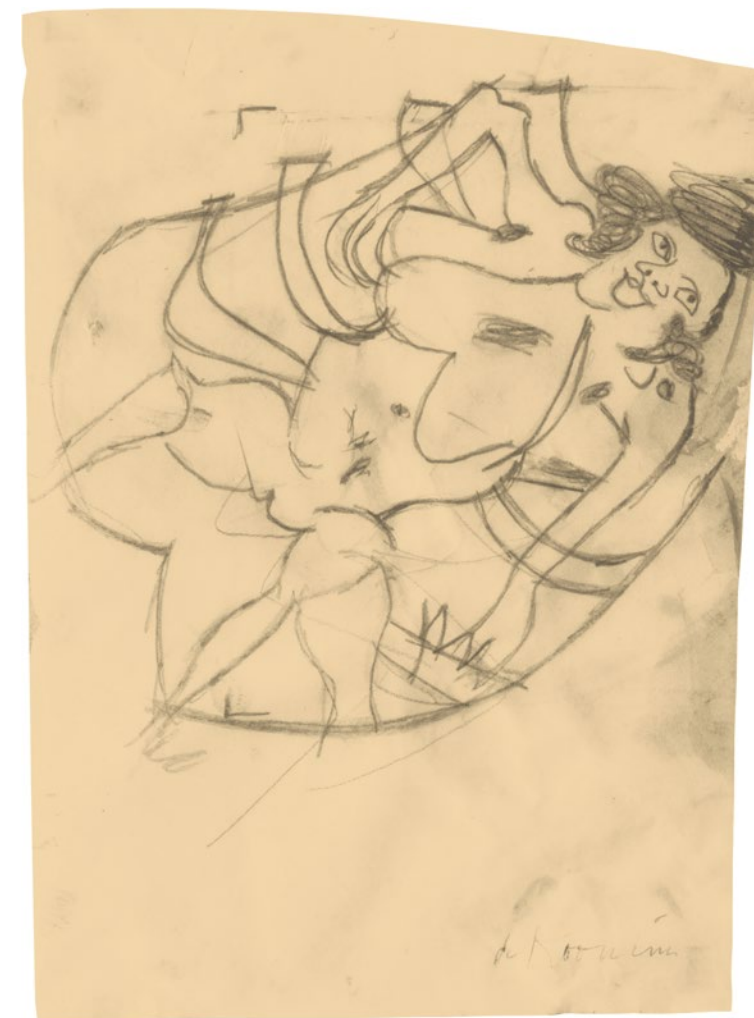


17.
Woman in a Rowboat, c. 1964
 Graphite on vellum
 8 × 9¼ inches; 20 × 24 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance
 Harold Diamond, New York, acquired directly from the artist
 Private collection, Baltimore
 Private collection, by descent from the above

In 1963 de Kooning moved from Manhattan to the Springs in East Hampton. In the spring of 1964, according to Susan Brockman, his girlfriend at the time, he saw a woman in a rowboat at Louse Point, a shoreline he would ride his bike to on most days, and the sight consumed him. His friends noted that the encounter “obsessed the artist more than any other of the moment.”

Woman in a Rowboat depicts a woman reclining in a small wooden vessel. With her knees bent and legs splayed, her body intertwines with the anatomy of the boat. In some works in the series, the figure’s limbs are contained within the vessel, while in others they are slung over its side in a more aggressive stance. Paul Cummings notes that “by tilting the boat upward, eschewing the perspective one might generally consider such a view to employ, [de Kooning] instills a sense of confined space.”



Girl in Boat, 1964. Graphite on tracing paper. 9¾ × 7 inches; 40 × 18 cm (irregular).
 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn



18.
Untitled (Woman), c. 1966
Charcoal on paper
10 × 8 inches; 25 × 20 cm

Provenance
Estate of Willem de Kooning

Exhibited

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *De Kooning: A Retrospective*, September 18, 2011 – January 9, 2012

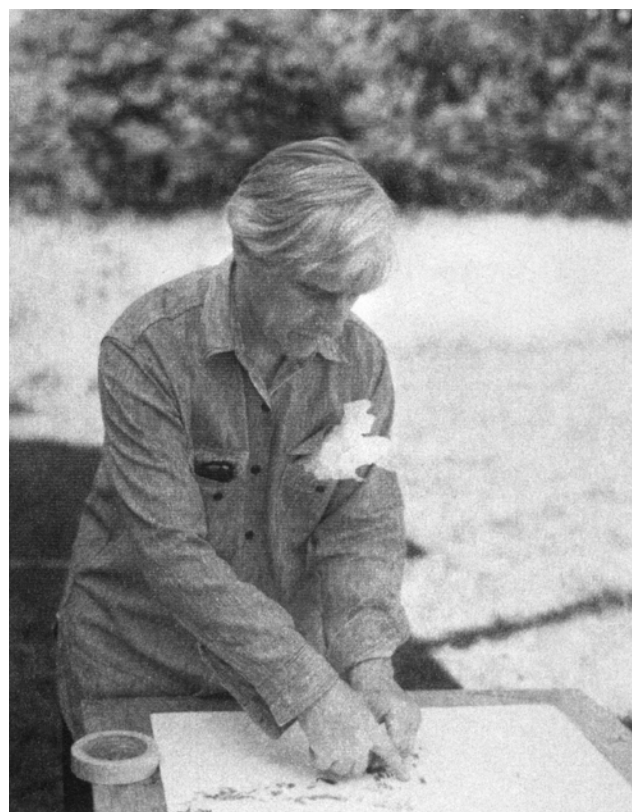
Literature

John Elderfield, Jennifer Field, and Lauren Mahony. *De Kooning: A Retrospective*. Edited by David Frankel. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011, pl. 149, pp. 369–71, ill. in color

“The drawings that interest me most are made with closed eyes. With eyes closed, I feel my hand slide down on the paper. I have an image in mind, but the results always surprise me.”

–Willem de Kooning

Drawing with his eyes closed was a way for de Kooning to break old habits and discover unfamiliar new forms. Peter Schjeldahl has described this technique as “part of an attempt to free his stroke from those pathways his eye had gotten used to telling him were ‘right.’” In 1966 de Kooning executed a large group of these drawings on eight-by-ten-inch paper, holding each sheet sideways with one hand in the center to orient himself. The following year he collected twenty-four of these drawings in a book, including two that bear a striking resemblance to *Untitled (Woman)*, particularly in the figure’s posture and masses of dark hair.



The artist drawing with his eyes closed in the Springs, NY, July 1963



Untitled, 1966. Charcoal on paper. 10 × 8 inches; 25 × 20 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Jan Christiaan Braun in honor of Rudi Fuchs



19.
Floating Females, 1966
 Graphite and pastel on paper
 9¾ × 7¼ inches; 25 × 18 cm
 Signed in graphite (lower left recto): de Kooning

Provenance
 Allan Stone Gallery, New York
 Private collection, New York, acquired from the above in 1966

In *Floating Females*, a rare color drawing from the mid-1960s, the figures tumble over one another. Their bodies – rendered in graphite and highlighted by delicate touches of red, green, yellow, and white pastel – dangle and intertwine. The upper figure bends over backward, letting her blond hair cascade down as she flutters her long eyelashes and reaches her arms out to her companion below.



20.
Untitled (Crucifixion), 1966–67
 Charcoal on paper
 17 × 14 inches; 43 × 36 cm
 Signed in charcoal (lower center recto): de Kooning

Provenance
 Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York
 Private collection, NY, acquired from the above in 1987

Exhibited
 New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984. Traveled to Berlin, Akademie der Künste, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*, March 11 – April 29, 1984; and Paris, Centre Pompidou, June 26 – September 24, 1984

New York, The Drawing Center, *Willem de Kooning: Drawing Seeing/Seeing Drawing*, October 31 – December 19, 1998. Traveled to Andover, MA, The Addison Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy, January 16 – March 28, 1999; and Columbus, OH, Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, May 15 – August 15, 1999

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Willem de Kooning*, November 6, 1999 – January 9, 2000

Literature
 Thomas B. Hess. *De Kooning: Recent Paintings*. New York: Walker and Company, 1967, p. 27, ill.

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning Drawings*. New York: Walker and Company, 1972, pl. 44, pp. 129–30, ill.

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 89, p. 87, ill.

Harry F. Gaugh. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1983, cat. no. 77, pp. 88–89, ill. in color

Klaus Kertess. *Willem de Kooning: Drawing Seeing/Seeing Drawing*. New York: The Drawing Center, 1998, pl. 46, pp. 95, 125, ill. in color

De Kooning had a lifelong fascination with the theme of the crucifix, and in the mid-1960s the subject began to appear regularly in his drawings. “De Kooning responded to the Crucifixion in physical, not spiritual, terms,” wrote Stevens and Swann in his biography.

For a 1967 book of twenty-four charcoal drawings made with his eyes closed, he chose seven crucifix drawings. The figures in all the other drawings were women, often frolicking in a sexually suggestive manner, which made for a striking combination.



21.

Untitled (Figures in Landscape), 1966–67

Charcoal on paper

18¾ × 24 inches; 48 × 61 cm

Signed in charcoal (lower left recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Estate of Willem de Kooning

Exhibited

New York, M. Knoedler & Co., *De Kooning: Paintings and Drawings Since 1963*, November 14 – December 2, 1967

Paris, M. Knoedler & Cie, *De Kooning: Peintures Récentes*, June 4 – June 29, 1968

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Willem de Kooning*, September 19 – November 19, 1968. Traveled to London, Tate Gallery, December 5, 1968 – January 26, 1969; New York, The Museum of Modern Art, March 5 – April 27, 1969; The Art Institute of Chicago, May 17 – July 6, 1969; and Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 29 – September 14, 1969

Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *De Kooning: Drawing and Sculpture*, March 10 – April 21, 1974. Traveled to Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, June 7 – July 21, 1974; Washington, DC, Phillips Collection, September 14 – October 27, 1974; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, December 3, 1974 – January 19, 1975; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, February 21 – April 6, 1975; and Saint Louis, Kemper Art Museum at Washington University, May 30 – June 20, 1975

West Palm Beach, FL, Norton Gallery of Art, *De Kooning: Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture, 1967–1975*, December 10, 1975 – February 15, 1976

East Hampton, NY, Guild Hall, *Artists and East Hampton: A 100 Year Perspective*, August 14 – October 3, 1976

Edinburgh, Fruitmarket Gallery, *The Sculptures of de Kooning with Related Paintings, Drawings and Lithographs*. Traveled to London, Serpentine Gallery, November 26, 1977 – January 8, 1978

Cologne, Josef Haubrich Kunsthalle, *Willem de Kooning: Skulpturen*, September 9 – October 30, 1983

Fort Collins, Colorado State University Museum of Art, *Willem de Kooning: Recent Works*, March 6 – March 30, 1984

New York, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings and Sculpture*, October 31 – December 19, 1998

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *De Kooning: A Retrospective*, September 18, 2011 – January 9, 2012

Literature

Gregory Battcock. “Willem de Kooning.” *Arts Magazine* 42, November 1967, p. 37

Louis Finkelstein. “The Light of de Kooning.” *ARTnews* 66, November 1967, p. 30, ill.

Thomas B. Hess. *De Kooning: Peintures Récentes*. Paris: M. Knoedler & Cie, 1968, cat. no. 54, p. 38 (as *Figures dans un Paysage*, 1967)

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968, p. 146

Willem de Kooning. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1968, cat. no. 133, n.p., ill.

Gabriella Drudi. *Willem de Kooning*. Milan: Fratelli Fabbri Editori, 1972, pl. 170, ill.

Thomas B. Hess. *Willem de Kooning Drawings*. New York: Walker and Company, 1972, pl. 111, pp. 53, 248, 250, ill.

Philip Larson and Peter Schjeldahl. *De Kooning: Drawings and Sculptures*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974

De Kooning: Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture. West Palm Beach, FL: Norton Gallery of Art, 1976, cat. no. 12, pp. 10, 23, ill.

The Sculptures of de Kooning with Related Paintings, Drawings, and Lithographs. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1977

Siegfried Gohr and Mia Storch. *Willem de Kooning: Skulpturen*. Cologne: Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle, 1983, cat. no. 28, pp. 90, 123, ill.

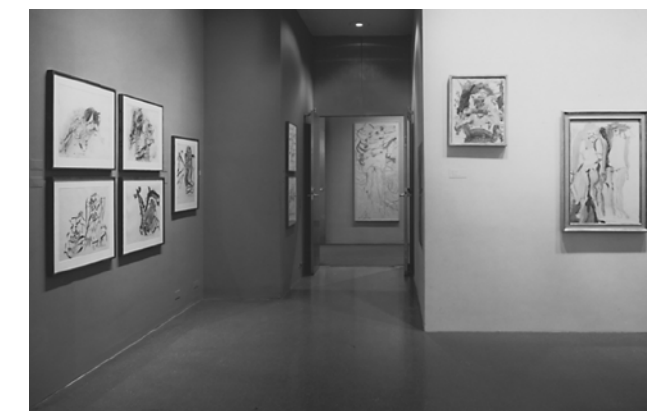
Willem de Kooning: Recent Works. Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, 1984

Peter Schjeldahl. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings and Sculpture*. New York: Matthew Marks Gallery; New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1998, pl. 20, pp. 36, 116, ill. in color

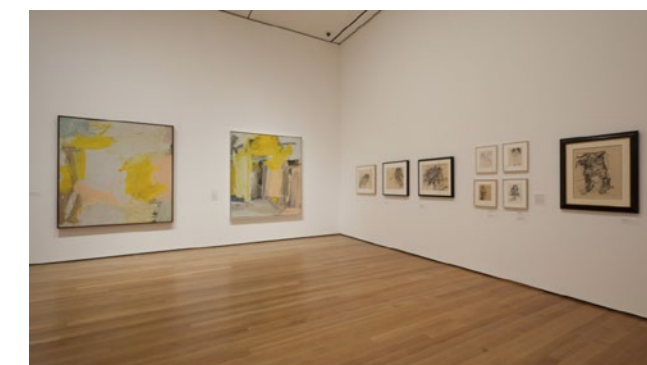
John Elderfield, Jennifer Field, and Lauren Mahony. *De Kooning: A Retrospective*. Edited by David Frankel. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011, pl. 136, pp. 375–76, ill. in color

In the mid-1960s de Kooning created a series of charcoal drawings of female figures in close relation to the landscape. In the catalog for the Museum of Modern Art’s 2011–12 de Kooning retrospective, Lauren Mahony describes this drawing: “*Untitled (Figures in Landscape)* (1966–67) shows two figures, blades of grass placed centrally between them. The figure on the left reclines diagonally, arms clasped together, clutching what could be a magazine or newspaper. The figure on the right exuberantly kicks her right leg high over her left, like a dancer; her actions have made her sunglasses fall to her chest, where they double as the delineation of her breasts, or an untied bikini top. Her voluminous dark hair, created with a few strokes of charcoal, becomes the composition’s focal point.”

In a review of de Kooning’s 1967 Knoedler exhibition, where this drawing was first shown, Gregory Battcock wrote that the figures “possess a disarming reserve that contradicts their boldness. They are entirely without sentimentality.”



Willem de Kooning at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1969, with *Untitled (Figures in Landscape)* (cat. no. 21) at upper left



De Kooning: A Retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2011–12, with *Untitled (Figures in Landscape)* (cat. no. 21) on right wall, far left



22.

Untitled (Figure in Landscape), 1968

Charcoal on paper

19½ × 24¾ inches; 50 × 63 cm

Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Estate of Willem de Kooning

Exhibited

Cologne, Josef Haubrich Kunsthalle, *Willem de Kooning: Skulpturen*, September 9 – October 30, 1983

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984. Traveled to Berlin, Akademie der Künste, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*, March 11 – April 29, 1984; and Paris, Centre Pompidou, June 26 – September 24, 1984

Literature

Thomas B. Hess. *De Kooning: January 1968 – March 1969*. New York: M. Knoedler & Co., Inc., 1969, p. 13 (studio view), ill.

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 112, p. 100, ill.

Siegfried Gohr and Mia Storch. *Willem de Kooning: Skulpturen*. Cologne: Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle, 1983, cat. no. 46, pp. 101, 124, ill.

Peter Schjeldahl. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings and Sculpture*. New York: Matthew Marks Gallery; New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1998, pl. 72, ill. in color.

Susan F. Lake. *Willem de Kooning: The Artist's Materials*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2010, frontispiece (studio view), p. 59 (studio view), ill.

Richard Shiff. *Willem de Kooning, The Figure: Movement and Gesture*. New York: Pace Gallery, 2011, p. 51 (studio view), ill.

In this drawing a reclining woman appears subsumed by the landscape, with only her bent legs discernable in the thicket of vegetation. In a studio photograph taken in October 1968, this drawing can be seen casually lying on the floor behind the artist.

Writing about de Kooning's drawings of the time, Paul Cummings noted that "charcoal became his preferred material because it offered a wide range of tonal and textural possibilities, and the drawings of the mid-to-late 1960s illustrate his mastery of the medium and his pleasure in working in it."



Two Figures in a Landscape, 1967. Oil on canvas. 70 × 80 inches; 178 × 203 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



23.

Untitled, 1969

Graphite and oil on paper

17¾ × 24 inches; 45 × 61 cm

Signed in graphite (lower left recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York

Private collection, New York, acquired from the above in 1987

Exhibited

Cologne, Josef Haubrich Kunsthalle, *Willem de Kooning: Skulpturen*, September 9 – October 30, 1983

Literature

Harold Rosenberg. *De Kooning*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1973, pl. 186, ill.

Siegfried Gohr and Mia Storch. *Willem de Kooning: Skulpturen*. Cologne: Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle, 1983, cat. no. 31, pp. 92, 131, ill.

De Kooning's women of the 1960s were sourced from the artist's immediate environment as well as popular culture, often reflecting a sense of levity that was a departure from his ferocious females of the previous decade. Dore Ashton noted the "deliberate theatrical atmosphere" in the drawings of the 1960s, which she compared to a stage. In this sheet, de Kooning's energized line depicts six shimmering figures with pouting lips and spike heels dancing across the page.



Charleston Pose, 1969. Graphite on paper. 18 × 24 inches; 46 × 61 cm. Collection Jasper Johns



24.
Untitled (Clamdigger), c. 1970
Charcoal on paper
11 × 8½ inches; 28 × 22 cm
Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance
Estate of Willem de Kooning

Exhibited

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *De Kooning: A Retrospective*, September 18, 2011 – January 9, 2012

Waltham, MA, Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, *Painting Blind*, February 11 – June 7, 2015

Literature

John Elderfield, Jennifer Field, and Lauren Mahony. *De Kooning: A Retrospective*. Edited by David Frankel. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011, pl. 134, pp. 372, 374, ill. in color

This drawing is closely related to de Kooning's nearly life-size sculpture *Clamdigger* (1972). Both works have an agitated surface, frenetic contours, and a palpable energy. The artist was captivated by the undulating outlines of men he saw clamming in the shallow waters near his home in the Springs, and he returned to the motif repeatedly in the late 1960s and early 1970s.



Clamdigger, 1972. Bronze. 59½ × 29⅞ × 23¾ inches; 151 × 76 × 60 cm.
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest



25.

Untitled, c. 1970–75

Charcoal on paper

10⁷/₈ × 8¹/₂ inches; 28 × 22 cm

Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Estate of Willem de Kooning

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

Private collection, acquired from the above in 1998

Exhibited

New York, Mitchell-Innes & Nash, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings and Sculpture*, October 31 – December 19, 1998

De Kooning first began making sculpture on a trip to Rome in 1969. Later in East Hampton he began a series of larger sculptures, working in clay and then casting them in bronze. This drawing of a figure floating in space with twisted legs and outstretched arms shares similarities with his 1972 sculpture *Cross-Legged Figure*.



Cross-Legged Figure, 1972. Bronze. 24 × 17 × 16 inches;
61 × 43 × 41 cm. Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago,
Gift of Lindy Bergman



26.
Head of a Man, c. 1975
Ink on paper
23¾ × 18¾ inches; 60 × 48 cm
Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Estate of Willem de Kooning
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
Private collection, acquired from the above in 1999

Exhibited

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Willem de Kooning: The North Atlantic Light, 1960–1983*, May 11 – July 3, 1983. Traveled to Humlebaek, Denmark, Louisiana Museum of Art, July 15 – September 4, 1983; and Stockholm, Moderna Museet, September 17, 1983 – October 30, 1983

New York, Matthew Marks Gallery, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings and Sculpture*, October 31 – December 19, 1998

Literature

Willem de Kooning: The North Atlantic Light, 1960–1983. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1983, cat. no. 57, p. 88, ill.

“Katalog.” *Louisiana Revy* 23, no. 3, June 1983, p. 29

Margareta Nilsson. “Det Haftiga Maleriets Vagga.” *Kunsthantverk*, July 1983

Peter Schjeldahl. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings and Sculpture*. New York: Matthew Marks Gallery; New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1998, pl. 85, ill.

De Kooning was “a prolific inventor of form, charged with a driving energy, and perennially changed his mark-making methods,” in the words of Paul Cummings. In this drawing the artist uses only a few short strokes of an ink-filled brush to portray the head of a man with great expression. De Kooning’s deft use of drips falling from the man’s chin give the drawing an urgency and sense of movement.



Head #4, 1973. Bronze. 10½ × 9½ × 11 inches; 27 × 24 × 28 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



27.
Head of a Man, 1975
Ink on paper
19 × 24 inches; 48 × 61 cm
Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance
Estate of Willem de Kooning
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
Private collection, acquired from the above in 2003

Exhibited
New York, Xavier Fourcade, Inc., *Drawings*, January 1 – February 7, 1987

Literature
Philippe Sollers. *De Kooning, Vite II (Oeuvres)*. Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1988, cat. no. 116, ill. in color (as *Untitled*, 1984)

The mid-1970s, when this ink drawing was made, were years of great contradiction in de Kooning's life. The paintings he made between 1975 and 1978 are justly considered among his best, and his work was the subject of more exhibitions around the world than ever before. Yet this period was also a low point in his battle with alcoholism, a disease he struggled with most of his adult life. De Kooning repeatedly went on alcoholic binges, often ending up in the hospital, and it was not until 1980 that he was finally able to quit drinking.



28.
Untitled (Figure), c. 1975
Graphite on paper
8½ × 11 inches; 22 × 28 cm

Provenance
Estate of Willem de Kooning

In the mid-1970s, while his paintings grew more abstract, de Kooning continued to produce drawings with clear figurative references. Drawing was a respite from the intense concentration that painting demanded, and he often turned to it when a painting was slow to evolve. It was an arena of automatic activity for the artist, a place where his brain gave way to his hand. Thomas B. Hess remarked that, while drawing, de Kooning's hand "will criticize, invent, erase – think new thoughts."



30.
Untitled (Two Figures), c. 1975–80
Charcoal on paper
8½ × 11 inches; 22 × 28 cm
Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance
Xavier Fourcade, Inc., New York
Private collection, New York, acquired from the above in 1987

Exhibited

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Drawings of Willem de Kooning*, December 7, 1983 – February 19, 1984. Traveled to Berlin, Akademie der Künste, *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*, March 11 – April 29, 1984; and Paris, Centre Pompidou, June 26 – September 24, 1984

Literature

Paul Cummings, Jörn Merkert, and Claire Stoullig. *Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture*. Munich: Prestel; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1983, cat. no. 120, p. 104, ill.

The majority of de Kooning's drawings from the second half of the 1970s are made with charcoal or ink on sheets of typing paper. As Paul Cummings wrote in the catalogue for the artist's 1984 retrospective at the Whitney Museum, "An increasing compositional complexity appears in drawings towards the end of the 1970s. [...] Among these small pages are some of the most splendid and difficult of his drawings. In contrast to the light-filled paintings, his use of modest materials – bits of charcoal and small sheets of paper – is like Shakespeare's use of everyday words, and they have proved to be the best demonstration in his synthesis of decades of exploration. A myriad of lines in the turmoil of discovery."



Untitled XI, 1975. Oil on linen. 77 × 88 inches; 196 × 224 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, through prior bequests of John J. Ireland and Joseph Winterbotham; Walter Aitken Endowment



In this drawing de Kooning rubbed the charcoal into the paper with his fingers, engulfing the female figure in a cloud of gray that gives her a sense of weightlessness.

31.

Untitled (Woman), c. 1975–80

Charcoal on paper

11 × 8½ inches; 28 × 22 cm

Signed in graphite (lower right recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Estate of Willem de Kooning



This drawing, in which swirling ribbons of charcoal teeter on the edge of recognition, shares compositional elements with several later paintings, including *Untitled VI* (1982). “That’s what fascinates me,” de Kooning once commented, “to make something I can never be sure of, and no one else can either. I will never know and no one else will ever know.”

32.

Untitled, c. 1975–80

Charcoal on paper

11 × 8½ inches; 28 × 22 cm

Signed in graphite (lower recto): de Kooning

Provenance

Estate of Willem de Kooning

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

Private collection, acquired from the above in 1998



Untitled VI, 1982. Oil on canvas. 80 × 70 inches; 203 × 178 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of Vivian and David Campbell

Willem de Kooning Drawings is published on the occasion of an exhibition at Matthew Marks Gallery, 526 West 22nd Street, New York, from May 7 to June 26, 2021.

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page 105 (top): Dan Budnik
page 113 (left): Hans Namuth
pages 123, 127: Tom Powel

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Cover:
Two Women (detail), c. 1950 (cat. no. 9)
Graphite and oil on paper
9⁷/₈ × 7⁷/₈ inches; 25 × 20 cm