

LEE KRASNER

1908 – 1984

A pioneering Abstract Expressionist who forged her own powerful voice

“I didn’t want to be the woman painter. I wanted to be a painter.”

– Lee Krasner



Lee Krasner in her studio, c.1950s
Photo: Hans Namuth

AT A GLANCE

Nationality: American 
Movement: Abstract Expressionism
Speciality: Painting (abstract)
Active: 1930s – 1980s
Career: Over 50 years
Patrons: Private collectors and foundations
Reputation: Recognised today as one of the most important women artists of the 20th century

HER CONTEMPORARIES

Jackson Pollock 1912–1956
Willem de Kooning 1904–1997
Mark Rothko 1903–1970
Helen Frankenthaler 1928–2011
Joan Mitchell 1925–1992

Krasner was part of a vibrant community of artists who revolutionised painting in the mid-20th century.

TIMELINE

- 1908** Born in Brooklyn, New York, USA
- 1928–1932** Studies at the Women’s Art School (Cooper Union)
- 1930s** Active in left-wing politics and artists’ groups in New York
- 1940** Meets Jackson Pollock
- 1945** Marries Jackson Pollock
- 1950s–1960s** Develops her own distinctive abstract style
- 1965** Represents the USA at the Venice Biennale
- 1984** Dies in New York

THE ARTIST

Lee Krasner was a bold, independent artist and a major figure in Abstract Expressionism. She was at the heart of “The Irascibles”, the group of artists who protested the Metropolitan Museum’s conservative exhibition policies in 1950.

Although she was often introduced as Jackson Pollock’s wife, Krasner built a remarkable career in her own right. She experimented fearlessly with colour, form and texture, creating large-scale paintings full of energy and emotion.

Her work evolved from early figurative paintings to innovative abstractions that are celebrated today in museums around the world.

A SUCCESSFUL CAREER

-  Respected by peers including Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko
-  Represented the USA at the 1965 Venice Biennale
-  Solo exhibitions in New York and Europe
-  Her work is in major museum collections worldwide
-  Paved the way for future generations of women artists

HER ART

Krasner’s paintings are known for their dynamic composition, rich layers and vibrant colours. She used techniques such as palette knife, scraping, collage and glazing.

Her “Little Images”—small, intense works on paper—show her extraordinary creativity and range.

Her art is powerful, personal and completely her own.

LOOKING BEYOND THE MYTH

For many years, Krasner’s achievements were overshadowed by her marriage to Jackson Pollock. Critics often viewed her work through the lens of that relationship rather than on its own merits.

Today we recognise that she was a brilliant artist in her own right who made vital contributions to modern art.

We should remember her because she had the courage to be herself and the talent to back it up.

MASTERPIECES: SIX WORKS THAT SHOW HER GENIUS

Milkweed 1955
Oil on canvas
179 × 229 cm



Polar Stampede 1960
Oil on canvas
193 × 208 cm



Gaea 1966
Oil on canvas
195 × 210 cm



Imperative 1976
Oil on canvas
200 × 260 cm



WHY HISTORY OVERLOOKED HER

- She was married to the more famous Jackson Pollock.
- Many critics viewed her work through that relationship rather than on its own merits.
- Art history was written largely by men who favoured male ‘geniuses’.
- Women’s contributions to Abstract Expressionism were minimised.
- Her bold, individual style did not fit the narrative of the time.

History did not deliberately erase her. Shifting priorities and gender bias pushed her into the background.

★ WHY HER WORK MATTERS

- She was a trailblazer in Abstract Expressionism.
- Her paintings are vibrant, original and emotionally powerful.
- She broke boundaries in a male-dominated art world.
- She created new possibilities for women in art.
- Her legacy continues to inspire artists today.



DID YOU KNOW?

Krasner continued painting after Pollock’s death in 1956 and produced some of her most powerful work during the last three decades of her life.



WHERE TO SEE HER WORK

- Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York
- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- Tate Modern, London
- Centre Pompidou, Paris
- Private collections worldwide



CONTEMPORARIES FOR CONTEXT

Jackson Pollock 1912–1956
Willem de Kooning 1904–1997
Mark Rothko 1903–1970
Helen Frankenthaler 1928–2011
Joan Mitchell 1925–1992

Krasner was a leading figure among the first generation of Abstract Expressionists.



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FORGOTTEN WOMEN ARTISTS IS NOT ABOUT REWRITING HISTORY. IT IS ABOUT COMPLETING IT.

