

# SPARKLING AMAZONS

## Abstract Expressionist Women of the 9<sup>th</sup> St. Show

At the Katonah Museum of Art October 6, 2019 – January 26, 2020

Dear educators,

We are thrilled to welcome you and your students to this groundbreaking exhibition, *Sparkling Amazons: Abstract Expressionist Women of the 9<sup>th</sup> St. Show*. This exhibition will consider the often-overlooked contribution by female artists to Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s and 50s in New York. Through the presentation of some 30 works of art alongside documentary photography, the exhibition will share the stories of 11 women artists whose work was included in the groundbreaking 9<sup>th</sup> St. show of 1951.

Tours of this exhibition will approach the artwork on view in these important ways:

- Through inquiry-based discussions, students will respond to the artwork using descriptive vocabulary and detailed observations. Building on each other's ideas in a group conversation, we will gain a deeper understanding and interpretation of artworks on view. Students will be encouraged to think about how different feelings, both emotional and physical, are evoked by these abstract expressionist artworks.
- Students will be brought back in time to New York in the 1950s to consider how the role of women differed from today, and how important historical events such as World War II affected the art movements of the time.
- Students will reflect on the unique artistic practices of the abstract expressionist artists – the kinds of materials, techniques, and strategies that were used – and consider how innovative and groundbreaking they were at the time.
- Younger students will also respond to the artwork through different forms of expression, including movement, touching materials and tools similar to those used by the artists, comparing artworks to music and sound, and closely observing elements of art within the artworks: color, shape, line, texture.

The information and activities enclosed in this packet will help introduce you and your students to these main concepts. Included you will find:

- Historical context: New York in the 1950s
- 2 images from the exhibition with questions for discussion
- Pre-visit activities: *Connecting Art and Feelings* and *Abstract Thinking*
- Glossary and Connections to Common Core Standards



Please look for the lightbulb to indicate activities for older students.

Let us know how you will be using your visit so that we may best serve you. Please call 914-232-9555, ext. 2969 to discuss the specifics of your tour. Thank you for choosing the KMA for your class visit.

Margaret Adasko  
Curator of Education

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS TO NOTE ON YOUR CALENDAR:

- **Lecture - *Lee and Me*:** Thursday, October 24, 6 - 8 pm  
Ruth Appelhof, former CEO of Guild Hall, East Hampton, talks about her relationship with Lee Krasner.
- **Scholars Panel:** Thursday, November 21, 6 - 8 pm  
Curator Michele Wije in conversation with authors of *Sparkling Amazons* catalogue discuss the downtown scene in the 1950s.
- **Family Day - *Express Yourself*.** Sunday, November 24, 12:00 – 4:00 pm

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

By Marijane Hamren

*Sparkling Amazons: Abstract Expressionist Women of the 9<sup>th</sup> St. Show* focuses on 11 female artists and their work during a tumultuous and exciting time in American history. The 1950s saw tremendous growth after the Second World War. Science and technology advanced at speeds never before experienced: the Atomic Age had begun and work was being done to harness nuclear power, rockets were invented that would ultimately take us into space, advances in medicine treated many deadly diseases, and there was progress in creating the first commercial computers. Musicians were challenging boundaries with bebop, cool jazz, and the beginnings of rock and roll. A new group of writers, the Beat Generation, rejected standard narratives as well as materialism and explored the inner spiritual quest. Many of their works have become classics that we still read today.

In post-WWII America, New York City became the major art hub, surpassing the influence of Paris. American artists, in what would be known as the New York School, had already been attempting something new and original, changing the nature of painting to emphasize emotions, feelings, and energy. Subject matter was no longer the focus. The combination of emotional intensity and non-representational art became known as Abstract Expressionism, and it took over the art world.

The 1950s were also a decade of change for women. Although they had won the right to vote in the US in 1921, their lives were still quite restricted. Women were discouraged from work outside the home. Female artists were relegated to painting small, domestic pictures. During WWII, however, women had taken up jobs that were traditionally men's and after the war ended, many wanted to retain that freedom. Now it was possible, but still rare, for women artists to have studios where they could paint in the scale of their male counterparts. Still fighting against gender bias, they were an essential, innovative parts of this new art movement. When the *ARTnews* editor called them "Sparkling Amazons," he was highlighting their indefatigable spirit and strength.

### LIST OF ARTISTS:

Perle Fine

Guitou Knoop

Sonia Sekula

Elaine de Kooning

Lee Krasner

Day Schnabel

Helen Frankenthaler

Joan Mitchell

Jean Steubing

Grace Hartigan

Anne Ryan



**Pick one or more artists to research before coming to see the exhibition.**

Questions to consider:

- How was the work produced by this artist groundbreaking at the time?
- In terms of their roles as women in the 1950s, what challenges did this artist face?



## Take a closer look...

Take a quiet moment to look closely at this artwork.

- Consider the **shapes** and **lines** that you see in the artwork. How would you describe them?
- Imagine that you were making those marks yourself, what kind of **gestures** would you use? How fast would you move your arm and how much would you press?
- Is there a particular spot in the artwork to which your eye gravitates? Why do you think that happens? Where does it move afterward? How do you think the artist created this sense of **movement**?
- How would you describe the **colors** used in this artwork? How many different hues do you see? Look at the way the magenta paint is applied – what is the effect of having some sections be very saturated with color and others be lighter/sketchier?
- Notice the dripping of brown paint along the contours. What could that tell us about the **artist's process**?
- Do any components of this artwork remind you of things you've seen in your own life? What makes you say that? What is the overall feeling that you get from this artwork?



In addition to the principal of movement as mentioned above, discuss the design principles of balance and harmony as seen in this artwork. How has Krasner achieved this?

### **Lee Krasner (1908–1984), *The Seasons*, 1957**

Oil and house paint on canvas

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

In 1956, after her husband Jackson Pollock's untimely death, Lee Krasner moved into Pollock's studio and created her first cycle of large abstract expressionist paintings. The images were rhythmic and almost figurative in their reference to nature. *The Seasons*, one of her largest works, is painted with a reduced palette of greens, reds and the off-white bare canvas, boldly outlined in black. It is rendered with the energetic brushstrokes and sweeping gestures that both deplete and nourish the eye.



## Thinking about Abstraction

Read the following quote from Helen Frankenthaler

*“My pictures are full of climates, abstract climates...They’re not nature per se, but a feeling.”*

- Write down a list of words that come to mind when you look at this artwork.
- Consider the colors used in this painting. Do the colors in this make you feel a certain way?
- Consider the shapes/lines in this artwork. What do they look like to you?
- This type of art is called **abstract**. It doesn’t try to copy real life but instead gives an impression of something without all the little details. Looking at the whole artwork, does it remind you of anything you’ve seen in real life?
- Now, compare this artwork with a photo taken of Cape Cod sand dunes, where the artist used to spend many of her summers with her family. Do you see any similarities/differences between the photo and the artwork?

Helen Frankenthaler was known for creating “stain” paintings. First, she thinned paint and then poured it onto a canvas. The color seeped into the cloth, creating fields of diluted color. Using rollers, squeegees and towels she controlled the flow of the paint, creating images that rest somewhere between the artist ‘making a picture’ and ‘letting it happen.’ When you visit the Museum, you can look up close to see evidence of this unique technique.



### **Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011), *Seascape with Dunes*, 1962**

Oil on canvas, Grey Art Gallery. New York University Art Collection.

From 1961 to 1969, Frankenthaler spent summers in Provincetown, Massachusetts. The experience of summer light, sea and the distinctive landscape of Cape Cod had a marked effect on her. *Seascape with Dunes*, 1962 with its expansive horizontal format and its fluid but self-contained shapes of muted reds, blues, and ochre, evokes the sun, seawater and sandy dunes. However, even though the title may give us clues as to what we are meant to see, Frankenthaler tells us that it is misleading: “It is actually a play of reds and of rhythms and of the ambiguities of symmetry.” She reminds us that the title, often ascribed to the painting once it is finished, is just a means for the viewer to orient themselves to the work, emphasizing our desire to see pictorial representation in abstract forms, in keeping with our “disposition to see faces in clouds” as described by the philosopher Arthur Danto.



Thinking about the tendency to see pictorial representation in abstract forms, discuss why might someone choose to paint in an abstract way.

## Pre-Visit: Connecting Art and Feelings

Artists often create works of art that evoke feelings, emotions, physical sensations and different kinds of energy. Select one of the words below that describes a feeling or brainstorm your own feeling word. Then, pick an artwork that connects to that feeling. Discuss why you made a connection between that image and word. Use the concepts in the “Idea Box” to help you explain.

Calm

Joyful

Nervous

Confused

Cheerful

Grumpy

Lonely

Warm

Powerful

Chaotic

Flowing

Exhausted

Lively

Excited

Frantic



### Idea Box

Use these concepts to help explain the connection you made between the feeling words and art image.

Color

Line

Texture

Composition

Gesture

Value

Try this as a group activity!

## Pre-Visit: Abstract Thinking

“A painting to me is primarily a verb, not a noun, an event first and only secondarily an image.” - Elaine de Kooning

Some artists create work that looks like things we recognize in the real world. This is called **representational**. Others create artwork that is more **abstract**, which may not look like a realistic image, but rather explores lines, shapes and colors to make an interesting **composition** and may suggest a feeling or idea or give the impression of something without all the little details.

### Think about the idea of “Sunday Afternoon.”

First think of it in a **representational** or realistic way: What do you do on a typical Sunday afternoon? What do you see around you? Who are you with? Where are you? Draw a picture that shows a “Sunday Afternoon” on the left.

Now think of “Sunday Afternoon” as an **abstract** idea. What does it feel like on a Sunday afternoon? What energy, sensations, or emotions do you relate to a Sunday? Create an artwork on the right that expresses that feeling using **elements of art** such as **line, shape, color, value, and texture**.

When you visit the Museum, you will see artist Elaine De Kooning’s version of a “Sunday Afternoon.”

REPRESENTATIONAL: recognizable images	ABSTRACT: doesn't look like things you find in the real world



Research other artworks that depict or are titled *Sunday Afternoon* and discuss the relevance of this subject and how they differ.

## GLOSSARY:

### Your Museum Visit:

**Museum:** An institution or building where works of art, scientific specimens, or other objects of value are cared for, studied, and displayed.

**Collection:** An accumulation of objects gathered for study, comparison, or exhibition or as a hobby.

**Docent:** A person who is a knowledgeable guide, especially one who conducts visitors through a museum and leads a discussion on the exhibitions.

### Art Terms and ideas:

**Abstract Art:** A trend in painting and sculpture in the twentieth century. Abstract Art does not try to represent realistic images but rather explores lines, shapes and colors to make an interesting **composition** and may suggest a feeling or idea or give the impression of something without all the little details.

**Abstraction:** The process of taking away or removing details from something in order to reduce it to a set of essential characteristics.

**Abstract Expressionism:** A school of painting that flourished in the 1940s and 1950s, sometimes interchanged with 'The New York School.' Applied to new forms of abstract art developed by American painters in the 1940s, it is characterized by gestural brushstrokes or mark-making, and the impression of spontaneity. The art form began as a reaction to the devastation of World War II wherein artists sought to express their emotions and allow the viewer to react to color and form. Abstract Expressionist artists used bold paint strokes, splashes, colors, and marks to convey strong emotions without the need to represent recognizable forms. The name evokes artists' aim to make art that while abstract was also expressive or emotional in its effect.

**The Art Students League:** Founded in 1875 by Artists and Supporting Artists. Artists who have studied and taught at the Art Students League have set the course of American art for 140 years. Most prominent artist-instructor was Hans Hofmann who provided a hands-on education to many of the abstract expressionist artists.

**Composition:** The plan, placement or arrangement of individual elements in a work of art.

**Collage:** Artwork made using a combination of different materials, usually two-dimensional, adhered to a background surface.

**Elements of Art:** The basic components used by the artist when producing works of art



**Line:** A continuous mark between points. Line defines space, and may create an outline or contour, define a silhouette, create patterns, or movement, and the illusion of mass or volume. Lines can be horizontal, vertical, diagonal, straight, curved, jagged, thick, thin, etc.

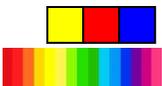
**Shape:** A flat, two-dimensional area enclosed by line.



**Geometric** shapes such as circle, square, or triangle that can be measured with a ruler or compass.



**Organic** shapes do not have specific names; they are free-form and often resemble forms found in nature.



**Color:** The hue produced when light reflects off a surface. Color is an important element of art that can affect mood, feeling, balance, energy, and memory.



**Texture:** The characteristic surface of a material; how it feels to the touch, or the visual appearance of texture on a 2D surface.



**Value:** The relative lightness or darkness.

**Gesture:** The movement used to apply paint to canvas. Describing a painting as more or less gestural refers to the extent to which the artist's hand is apparent.

**Mark:** A visible trace or impression on a surface, such as a line, dot, spot, stain, scratch, blemish, mar, bruise, crack, dent, or pleat.

**Monochromatic:** A color scheme based on only one, single color tint. It uses only variations (shades) of a single hue, made by altering the saturation and brightness of the base color.

**Movement:** The path the viewer's eye takes through the artwork, often to focal areas. Such movement can be directed along lines, shape, and color within the artwork.

**Negative Space:** The space around and between the subject(s) of an image.

**Pattern:** A series of lines, shapes, or pictures that create a repeated design.

**Principals of Design:** The ways that artists use and organize the elements of art in a work of art.

**Balance:** The distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, texture, and space.

**Emphasis:** The part of the design that catches the viewer's attention.

**Movement:** The path the viewer's eye takes through the work of art, often to focal areas.

**Pattern:** The repeating of an object or symbol all over the work of art.

**Proportion/scale:** Refers to the size relationship between part and the whole of the image. It is the feeling of unity created when all parts (sizes, amounts, or number) relate well with each other.

**Rhythm:** Is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement.

**Unity:** The feeling of harmony between all parts of the work of art, which creates a sense of completeness.

**Representational Art:** Refers to a painting sculpture or other image that is clearly recognizable for what it claims to be.

**Rhythm:** This principle is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement. Variety is essential to keep rhythm exciting and alive, and moving the viewer through the artwork.

**Scale:** The size of an object relative to something else, or the relative size of an object in a work of art in relation to the whole work of art.

**Sculpture:** A three-dimensional work of art; can be seen from multiple sides.

**Space:** The term defining the area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called negative space; negative space has shape. Space can also refer to the feeling of depth. Real space is three-dimensional; in visual arts, when we can create the feeling or illusion of depth, we call it space.

**Stain Painting:** Developed by Helen Frankenthaler, the process involves thinning out paint and applying to unprimed canvas so that it seeps into the fabric.

**WPA (1935-1943):** The Work Projects Administration was an American New Deal agency established by Franklin Delano Roosevelt that employed millions of job-seekers to carry out public works projects, including the construction of public buildings and roads. WPA's Federal Arts Project employed a number of abstract and experimental artists including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem and Elaine de Kooning and Lee Krasner.

## KMA Museum Visits and the Common Core standards

Class visits to the KMA enable you and your students to expand on the critical skills emphasized in your classroom learning. Museums provide an alternative environment for students to strengthen skills supported by the Common Core Standards. Using art objects and installations as **visual text**, we lead students in inquiry-driven discussions requiring close observation, integrating content, and analyzing what they see (CCRA.R.1, 6, 7, 9). These conversations encourage students to make connections, communicate, and support their ideas using evidence and acquired vocabulary (CCRA.SL.1, 2, 3, L.4, 6). Tours also include an opportunity for your students to create their own artistic work based on the ideas and concepts of the exhibition. (CCVA.Cr.1)

**Some of the Common Core standards addressed on a school tour include:**

### **English Language Arts Standards:**

#### **Key Ideas and Details:**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#): Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#): Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#): Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

#### **Comprehension and Collaboration:**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#): Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#): Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3](#): Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

#### **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4](#): Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### **Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:**

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4](#): Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5](#): Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6](#): Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

#### **Visual Arts Standards:**

**CCVA.Cr.1:** Generate and Conceptualize artistic ideas and artwork

**CCVA.Re.7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work

**CCVA.Re.8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work

**CCVA.Re.9:** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work



## SPARKLING AMAZONS: Abstract Expressionist Women of the 9th St. Show

At the Katonah Museum of Art October 6, 2019 – January 26, 2020

### Post-Visit:

#### Pick one style of writing to create a written work in response to your visit

- **PERSUASIVE WRITING:** Write a short essay that convinces the reader to visit this exhibition. Include reasons for why one should attend that are based on facts and information from your experience. Include descriptions, details, and personal opinions.
- **INFORMATIONAL TEXT:** Write a journalistic report on the visit to the museum. Include facts and information as well as descriptions of the experience.
- **REALISTIC FICTION:** A genre consisting of stories that could have actually occurred to people, animals, or objects in a believable setting. These stories resemble real life, and fictional characters within these stories react similarly to real people. The writer may include actual details, surroundings and circumstances to help their story feel believable.

Write a realistic fiction piece from one of the following points of view: (or multiple viewpoints!)

1. **Take on the role of the artist.** What does it feel like to create this image? Where does the artist begin? What choices and actions are taking place? What challenges do they face along the way?
  2. **Take on the role of the paint brush.** What does it feel like to dip into the paint and begin a new stroke on the canvas? What happens next? How does it end?
  3. **Take on the role of the painting.** What did it feel like to sit in the artist's studio having the artist mark up the surface? How did the painting travel to the KMA? What is it like now, to hang on the wall having all these visitors and school children staring it? What comments does the painting hear?
  4. **Take on the role of the visitor.** Imagine your character walking up to the painting for the first time. What do they observe, feel and remember? Who are they with? What happens next?
- **EXHIBITION REVIEW:** Provides a description and critical analysis of an art exhibit. This helps visitors know what to expect from the exhibition.

#### Some examples:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/29/arts/design/review-helen-frankenthaler-abstract-climates-provincetown.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/20/arts/design/epic-abstraction-metropolitan-museum-of-art.html>

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/07/the-inflation-of-abstraction>



### Post-Visit: Writing a Review of an Exhibition

A good review offers readers an overview of the exhibition and what they will get out of viewing the exhibition.

What did you see in the gallery?

Describe the artwork specifically. Include artists' names, titles, and techniques used.

Which were the strongest and weakest images? Why?

What was the highlight for you?

What was the experience of the exhibition like?

Describe the curatorial themes, ideas or point of view.

Describe the installation: How did you like the layout, sequence of pictures, wall text, graphics, and the atmosphere?

Was the exhibition good? Evaluate what you saw.

Was the exhibition interesting? How well did it expand your understanding of the subject?

Was the exhibition worth seeing? Why should viewers come to the exhibition? What will they get out of it?

How does it connect to other exhibitions or issues in art?

Read reviews of other exhibitions. Notice how writers develop a lead—something to catch the reader's attention. Sometimes this is a description of an artwork on view or a question or issue presented by the exhibition. Review your answers to the questions above to discover a good lead for your review. Make sure the information you present is accurate and clearly written. Try to answer the question: Why should viewers visit the exhibition?

Credit: *Focus on Photography: A Curriculum Guide*, written by Cynthia Way for the International Center of Photography

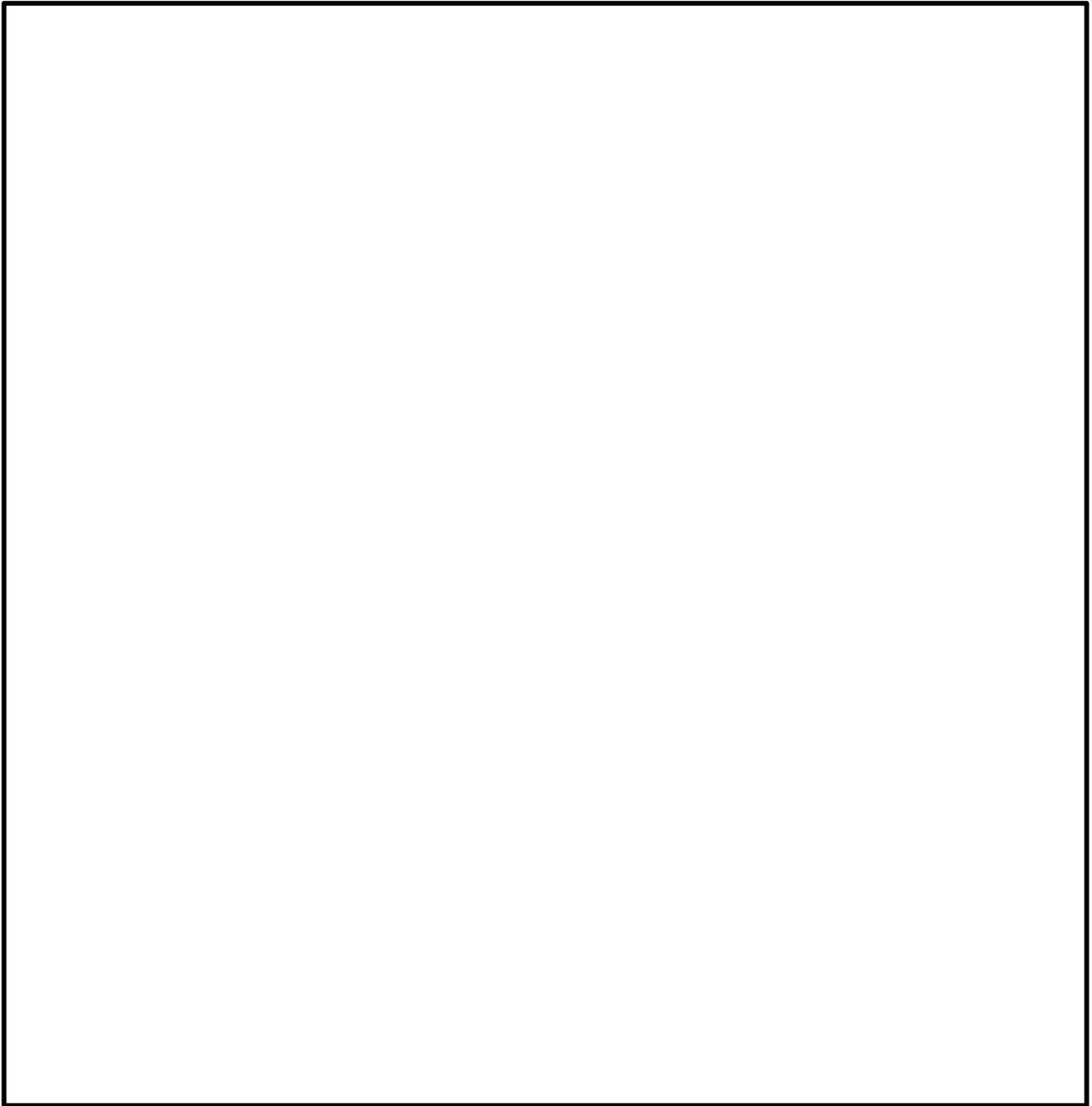
## SPARKLING AMAZONS

### Abstract Expressionist Women of the 9th St. Show

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#### Post-Visit: Reflecting on your experience

Draw a memorable moment from your visit to the exhibition, *Sparkling Amazons: Abstract Expressionist Women of the 9th St. Show*. Consider a favorite artwork, a special detail, something you learned, or a drawing of what you and your classmates experienced on your visit.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_