



Charmion von Wiegand, *Untitled*, 1942. Collaged paper, opaque watercolor, pen, and ink on paper, 8 1/2 x 8 1/16 in. (21.6 x 20.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Alice and Leo Yamin 91.84.5. © Estate of Charmion von Wiegand; courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York

## **LABYRINTH OF FORMS, AN EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTING EARLY-TWENTIETH-CENTURY ABSTRACT ART BY GROUNDBREAKING WOMEN ARTISTS, OPENS AT THE WHITNEY ON OCTOBER 9**

NEW YORK, NY, October 4, 2021 – The Whitney Museum of American Art will present *Labyrinth of Forms: Women and Abstraction, 1930–1950*, an exhibition of works drawn primarily from the Museum’s collection that celebrates the innovative abstract art made by women in the first half of the twentieth century. The exhibition will feature over thirty works by twenty-seven artists. *Labyrinth of Forms* seeks to highlight the achievements of these groundbreaking artists and explores how works on paper, in particular, were important sites for experimentation and innovation. The exhibition is curated by Sarah Humphreville, Senior Curatorial Assistant, and will be on view in the Museum’s third-floor Susan and John Hess Family Gallery from October 9, 2021 to March 2022.

*Labyrinth of Forms*, a title drawn from an Alice Trumbull Mason work in the exhibition, alludes to the sense of discovery that drove these artists to establish a visual language reflecting the advances of the twentieth century. Women played important roles in propelling the formal, technical, and conceptual evolution of abstract art in the United States. While a few of these

artists, including Lee Krasner and Louise Nevelson, have been duly recognized, most remain overlooked despite their prominence within this burgeoning movement.

“*Labyrinth of Forms* is an exciting opportunity to reevaluate the history of abstraction in the United States. The exhibition sheds light on the vital impact artists of the 1930s and 1940s had on the evolution and reception of abstract art in this country, the integral role of drawings and prints in its development, and, of course, the essential contributions that women made. It also gives the Whitney’s audiences the chance to see works from the collection that have rarely, if ever, been exhibited before,” said Humphreville.

Abstraction flourished in the U.S. during this period in part because of increased exposure to European avant-garde art through modern art courses and new exhibition venues. Nevertheless, abstract artists were vastly outnumbered by realist practitioners, maligned by critics, and largely ignored by museums and galleries. In the face of these obstacles, American abstractionists forged a network of overlapping communities, organizations, and creative spaces, which allowed them to support one another, exchange ideas, and exhibit their work. Women were key figures in these groups and often took on leadership and organizational roles, wrote and gave lectures, and advanced methods of making, particularly in print media.

*Labyrinth of Forms* reveals the striking variety of interests, styles, and media that these artists embraced. The exhibition includes drawings, woodcuts, intaglios, lithographs, and collages. In a number of cases, artists combined approaches, as Katherine Dreier did in her *Variation #4*, from *40 Variations* (1934). In this joyful, geometric work inspired by sailing and Beethoven’s music, Dreier applied bright watercolor hues over a lithograph base. Charmion von Wiegand similarly applied brilliant tones and collaged passages to her drawing *Untitled* (1942). The work originated as an automatic drawing, a technique introduced by the European Surrealists. Lee Krasner is represented in *Labyrinth of Forms* with *Still Life* (1938), an oil-on-paper drawing that uses ordinary, real-world objects as a springboard for an abstract composition. Krasner studied with Hans Hofmann from 1937-38; this drawing is informed by his lessons on the importance of negative space but is decidedly more radically abstract than the work her teacher created at the time. Like Krasner, the other women in this exhibition were innovators. In showcasing their works and reinvigorating their histories, *Labyrinth of Forms* challenges the dominant narrative of abstraction and brings to light the contributions of these previously excluded voices.

### **Exhibition Support**

*Labyrinth of Forms* is accompanied by a related online essay by Sarah Humphreville and is supported by David Bolger and Mark Lancaster.

### **About the Whitney**

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has

been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

### **Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art**

The Whitney's Collection: Selections from 1900 to 1965	Through May 2022
Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950–2019	Through February 2022
David Hammons: Day's End	On Permanent View
Dawoud Bey: An American Project	Through October 3, 2021
Dave McKenzie: The Story I Tell Myself	Through October 4, 2021
Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror	Through February 13, 2022
Labyrinth of Forms: Women and Abstraction, 1930–1950	October 9, 2021–March 2022
My Barbarian	October 29, 2021–February 27, 2022
Jennifer Packer: The Eye is Not Satisfied With Seeing	October 30, 2021–April 2022
Whitney Biennial 2022	April–August 2022

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 11 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Member-only hours are: Saturday and Sunday, 10:30–11 am. Visitors eighteen years and under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm.

As of August 17, 2021, all visitors twelve years of age and older must be vaccinated against COVID-19 for admission to the Whitney, in accordance with New York City requirements. Face coverings are required, even if you are vaccinated. For complete visitor guidelines, visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org). For general information please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).

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