Elaine de Kooning: Portraits

Elaine de Kooning (1918–1989) began her career in New York City at the center of the Abstract Expressionist movement in the 1940s and 1950s. She painted abstractly, like her husband, Willem de Kooning, and other artists of that generation. However, she was best known for her painterly, gestural portraits, often of friends—particularly men—who were at the center of the city’s avant-garde culture. Elaine’s intense focus on her subjects resulted in paintings and drawings that were “virtually instant summaries—the unconscious summing up that one friend makes of another.” She was constantly looking for what she saw “in a glimpse,” and for the special pose, gesture, and even light that she saw in each of her subjects. Elaine understood the fluidity and contingency of modern identity; she often worked concurrently on multiple depictions of the same subject, recognizing the impossibility of capturing someone in one essential image. Later in her life, she stated: “I want the image to be simultaneously still and in motion like a flag in the wind. I don’t want it to feel at home—to settle quietly and politely on a wall; I want it to be uneasy, yet exuberant.”

After her marriage to artist Willem de Kooning in December 1943, Elaine Fried de Kooning began signing her portraits “E de K” to avoid confusion. While we initially resisted calling the artist by her first name—scholars have referred to her many different ways—we ultimately decided on “Elaine,” primarily because friends and colleagues believe she would prefer to be referred to as she was in life.
Unless otherwise noted, all works are by Elaine de Kooning.
This exhibition has been made possible through the generous support of Elaine’s List

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In 1984, Elaine de Kooning reflected on her early years in New York City and the talented people she and Willem de Kooning encountered: “I didn’t know then that I had somehow made my way to the red-hot center.” Elaine loved to be with people, often other artists, and spent many evenings at the Cedar Bar in lower Manhattan. This photograph depicts her in conversation with two good friends, the poet Frank O’Hara (1926–1966) and the painter Franz Kline (1910–1962).

Arthur Swoger (1912–2000)

Gelatin silver print, 1957

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Joop Sanders  born 1921

Elaine Fried met the young Dutch artist Joop Sanders in 1939 at a concert she attended with her fiancé, Willem de Kooning. They became friendly, and after Elaine’s marriage to Willem in 1943, Joop and Elaine drew and painted each other for an extended period of time. Elaine had studied painting and drawing with Willem, in addition to her training at the Leonardo de Vinci Art School and the American Artists School, both in Manhattan. But this period of intensive study with Joop Sanders allowed her to experiment boldly with portraiture. This drawing captures her subject’s long face and sculpted features, as well as his elegant clasped fingers. She later declared that it was her favorite rendering of Sanders.

Graphite on paper, c. 1946

Collection of Clay Fried
Ek03

Joop Sanders  born 1921

Between 1944 and 1946, Elaine created at least twelve painted portraits of Joop Sanders. He was also making portraits of her in each of their New York studios. Elaine recalled that she would make a drawing from life and then work on a painting derived from the sketch for the next week. This painting is quite dramatic and dark, as Sanders gazes into the distance. Other portraits in her series are more loosely painted and reveal her developing gestural style. In the late 1940s, Sanders would study with Willem de Kooning, who had a great influence on his paintings, which at that time were mainly abstractions. Sanders was included in the seminal Ninth Street Show in the spring of 1951, with Willem and Elaine de Kooning as well as Jackson Pollock and other Abstract Expressionist artists.

Oil on board, c. 1946

Michael and Susan Luyckx
This intimate drawing depicts Charles Egan, who gave Willem de Kooning his first show at Egan’s self-named gallery on Fifty-Seventh Street in April 1948. This was just a few months before the de Koonings traveled to Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where Willem taught during the summer. Elaine’s drawing delineates the gallery owner’s wistful expression as well as the softness of his features. She made a painting of Egan around the same time. Egan also represented photographer Aaron Siskind, painter Robert De Niro, and sculptors Isamu Noguchi and Reuben Nakian. He maintained his gallery in New York City until the early 1970s.

Pencil on paper, c. 1948

Dr. and Mrs. Guy Fried
Elaine Fried de Kooning was raised in Brooklyn, the oldest of four children. She was close to her siblings, Peter, Conrad, and especially her sister, Marjorie. During the later 1940s and early 1950s, she made many drawings and paintings of her brothers, who were convenient and willing subjects. As she recalled in 1977, “I became fascinated by the way men’s clothes divide them in half—the shirt, the jackets, the tie, the trousers.” In this ink drawing of Peter, Elaine reveals her assured abilities in that medium; the drawing captures her organic process of portraying subjects in a state of becoming, with ink used freely to indicate movement and life.

Ink on paper, 1952

Dr. and Mrs. Guy Fried
Willem de Kooning was making precise, romantic drawings of Elaine, like the image below, in the early 1940s, before their marriage. But this ghostly self-portrait, approximating the look of silverpoint drawing in its faint markings, gives us a close look at Elaine’s own vision of herself at this time. What we see is a stronger personality and more assertive features than the fragile, pretty woman depicted by her fiancé. This determined persona may have been expressed by Elaine’s choice in 1942 to work at the Liquidometer factory in Long Island City, painting dials for airplane dashboards. In a 1987 interview she recalled the experience of working in a factory, shared by many women during World War II, as a positive one.

Pencil on board, c. 1942

Private collection
Elaine’s self-portraits from the 1940s are not securely dated, but her family believes this to be from around 1942. She had been studying still-life drawing and painting with Willem as her guide, and she worked to hone her skills at portraiture by painting and drawing friends, relatives—and herself. In this small head-and-shoulders image, she presents herself with a serious, intense demeanor, in the simplest of settings. The severity of her image stands in contrast to the charismatic, warm person described by friends and gives us a sense of her drive and determination as a young artist.

Oil on Masonite, c. 1942

Michael and Susan Luyckx
This painting and one similar to it in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City are the most fully realized of Elaine’s self-portraits of the 1940s. Its coloring is similar to Willem’s work from around the same time, but it fully asserts Elaine’s own presence as an artist and a portraitist. She has presented herself in what may be a studio setting, but she is holding a sketchbook rather than painting materials. Clad in trousers, turtleneck, and smock, she confronts the viewer directly, the hallmark of a self-portrait. The painting includes a number of still-life objects that reflect her years of intense tutorials with Willem; he compelled her to look at objects and the spaces between them to develop her sense of pictorial organization. As she recalled: “Everything was a matter of tension between objects or edges and space.”

Oil on Masonite, 1946

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
In April 1956, Elaine opened her second solo exhibition at the Stable Gallery in New York City. Although she did not exhibit this large full-length portrait of her brother Peter Fried there, it represents the kind of fully assured work she was creating at the time: unique, yet responsive to painting by contemporaries such as Grace Hartigan, Larry Rivers, and Willem de Kooning.

Seated in a compact and wary pose, the powerful figure is surrounded with areas of both strong and subtle reds and greens. His suit and tie are outlined with confident strokes of paint and his head is delineated as though it is poised to turn. One reviewer of the exhibition described Elaine’s portraits, like this one, as being drawn first in thin paint and then “attacked by bold swipes of mixed color, the image in itself at times partially fulfilled, and at others left in its initial stage as drawing.”

Oil on canvas, 1956

Michael and Susan Luyckx
Elaine wrote about her portraits of seated men, “I’ve often thought of my paintings as having an axis around which everything revolves. . . . When I painted my seated men, I saw them as gyroscopes.” This portrait of her brother Conrad, a study in warm tones contrasted with highlights of blue and green, gives the viewer specific and yet only slightly detailed information about his appearance. Her subject sits calmly, with hands clasped and face downcast, all the while surrounded by swirling dynamic strokes of paint. Like many of Elaine’s other works from this time period, the portrait demonstrates what one critic called her “ability to find the meeting point between sheer dynamics and knowledgeable control . . . so that the paintings are at once complete and yet charged with immediacy.”

Oil on canvas, 1954

Private collection
During the early 1950s, Elaine was developing a great facility for both precise drawing and bold, gestural painting. As she recalled in a 1977 interview, “I began to make drawings of my brother, Conrad, and the paintings from them kept getting larger and larger until they were life-size. I worked on them for months. . . . I was interested in the gesture of the body—the expression of character through the structure of the clothing.” This drawing subtly evokes Conrad’s features, with special attention to his hands and contemplative gaze. She has also handled his slight figure and rumpled suit with sensitivity, alternating crisp lines with dark smudges to delineate his quietly tentative position on the chair.

Pencil on paper, 1951

Private collection
Elaine de Kooning sometimes made detailed pencil drawings during the 1950s as the starting point for one or more paintings of her subjects. This precise rendering of Willem de Kooning is related to at least one painting, now unlocated. Its casual pose, with Willem holding a glass or can and another container on the ground, is typical of Elaine’s candid, informal approach to portraiture. She has used the drawing to sketch out a compositional arrangement and to delineate Willem’s characteristic features with fluid pencil strokes.

Pencil on paper, 1954

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Frank Stanton
In this portrait of Willem de Kooning, whose career as an Abstract Expressionist painter was just taking off in the early 1950s, the seated pose is open and informal and Willem’s facial features are essentially missing. However, the outlines of the head and body define individual likeness through sharp, jagged strokes of paint and contrasts of dark and light within a field of warm color.

Elaine drew and painted her husband often during the early to mid-1950s. This painting makes clear her interest in individual bodies and their recognizability. As she wrote in 1959, “I love the particular gesture of a particular expression or stance. I’m enthralled by the gesture of the silhouette (for portraits or anything else), the instantaneous illumination that enables you to recognize your father or a friend three blocks away.”

Oil on panel, c. 1952

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
By 1950, Elaine was creating a series of paintings she called “faceless men.” This portrait, a study in greens, is built from wide, slashing strokes of color. It carries the name of her brother Conrad (1920–2009), but lacks his facial features. It was displayed in Elaine’s first solo show, held at the Stable Gallery in April 1954. Her friend and fellow artist Fairfield Porter reviewed the exhibition for *ARTnews*, and the magazine illustrated this painting with the review, indicating its importance. Porter praised her “incisive wit in the drawing and in the selection of details to show realistically or abstractly.” He commented that her portraits, “almost all of men, . . . are both sympathetic and frighteningly acute. . . . Her construction is rapid and blazing.”

Oil on canvas, 1950

Charles and Mary Anne Fried
Elaine and Willem were good friends with the influential art dealers Leo Castelli and his then-wife, Ileana Sonnabend. The Castellis invited the de Koonings to visit them in East Hampton, New York, during several summers in the early 1950s. Elaine wrote to her friend Ernestine Lassaw of one visit: “Am going back to East Hampton with Leo in half an hour to get me some more sun. My hair hasn’t been this light or my skin this brown for many a year.” Both artists were provided with space to paint and a haven from the city’s heat. In 1953 Elaine created this portrait of Castelli, which hints at summer shade and light through quick brushstrokes of grays, greens, dark reds, and yellows surrounding his quiet, contemplative visage. His dapper elegance is also conveyed through her unerring sense of gesture and pose.

Oil on linen, 1953

Estate of Nina Sundell
This loosely brushed, sketchlike painting depicts Elaine’s fellow artist Fairfield Porter and reveals much about her process. Like the smaller, more fully realized and detailed painting nearby, it is related to a precisely rendered pencil drawing. And yet her subject’s facial features, so clearly expressed in the drawing, are not highlighted in either painting. Elaine’s sister, Marjorie Luyckx, wrote about her way of working: “She seemed to apply the brushstrokes in a wildly random manner and yet, sometimes suddenly, a startling likeness of the figure would emerge. If it didn’t, she would set the canvas aside and begin on a second . . . (and often a third or even a fourth). At the next sitting she would return to the earlier canvases and work on them until the likenesses she wanted came through.”

Oil on canvas, 1954

Collection of Clay Fried
Fairfield Porter knew Elaine and Willem de Kooning from the beginning of Porter’s career until his death. He painted sometimes unsettling landscapes and figures (often portraits of family and friends) with an almost poetic discipline and clarity. He also encouraged Elaine to make portraits and on February 20, 1954, posed for this carefully detailed pencil drawing. She centered him on the page, looking directly at her, and us. He is wearing a suit and a casually skewed striped tie and poses with his legs apart. The drawing was the basis for at least two paintings, one loosely brushed and very sketchy, the other more finished.

Elaine often made more than one painting of her subjects. By viewing this drawing and the two related paintings in the exhibition, we can learn more about her process, including how she cropped the drawing to create a more confrontational composition for each painting.

Graphite on paper, 1954

The Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan; Founders Society Purchase, Elizabeth P. Kirby Fund, John S. Newberry Fund, Lee and Tina Hills Graphic Arts Fund and Josephine, and Ernest Kanzler Fund
Artist Fairfield Porter (1907–1975) encouraged Elaine’s work in portraiture for decades, painted her in 1957, and wrote reviews of her exhibitions that pinpointed her skills in that genre. She also painted several portraits of him, including two canvases based on a drawing dated February 20, 1954. Elaine took the details of the drawing as a starting point, but in this painting she has minimized the facial features. She has also pushed the figure to the front of the canvas, making the pose much more confrontational. Porter is seated with his legs apart, a casual pose rarely seen in more traditional portraiture. Unlike other paintings from the 1950s, in which Elaine often uses warm tones and green hues, this painting is a study in blues, grays, and golds, with the red tie providing a focus for the composition.

Oil on canvas, 1954

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri; Bebe and Crosby Kemper Collection, gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, 1995.22
Harold Rosenberg (1906–1978) was a poet and art critic; his most famous essay, “The American Action Painters” (1952), championed abstract painting, including that of Willem de Kooning. He affirmed the painter’s canvas “as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.”

The de Koonings had known Rosenberg and his wife, May Tabak, since the 1940s, and Elaine painted and drew him many times. This painting is the largest and most complex, depicting the critic stretched out in her studio, filling the canvas, and holding a beverage can in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Elaine combined fluid drawing with dark paint and broadly brushed areas of colorful pigment to create equilibrium between bodily likeness and pure abstraction.

Oil on canvas, 1956

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
This small drawing gives us clues to Elaine’s process in thinking through a portrait. On the left is a drawing of Willem de Kooning (1904–1997) with his body turned slightly to the side. Later she used this sheet to create a compositional study and precise drawing for her large painted portrait of the writer and critic Harold Rosenberg (1906–1978), also included in this exhibition. This drawing clearly delineates the studio window behind Rosenberg’s stretched-out figure, as well as the door in the right background, and captures the precise way in which he holds a cigarette in his left hand and a can in his right. These details remain in the larger painting, but they are surrounded by gestural strokes and dripping areas of pure color.

Pencil on paper, c. 1956

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Like her portrait of Fairfield Porter, this painting of art critic and editor Thomas B. Hess (1920–1978) was based on a precisely dated drawing, which served as the starting point for this free and gestural painting. Elaine wrote, “some men sit all closed up—legs crossed, arms folded across the chest. Others are wide open.” Her likeness of Hess, a mix of harsh yellows, greens, grays, and dark red lines, is an unusual example of her work from this time, in both the closed pose and the coloring. Hess described Elaine’s portraits as containing “meticulously observed and rendered faces [attached to] anatomies spun from bravura paint ribbons.” Hess was a close friend as well as a colleague, and he had hired Elaine in 1948 to write reviews and then feature articles for ARTnews. By 1956, when this painting was made, he was championing her work as well as that of Willem, which he had promoted since the early 1950s.
In her speech at the dedication of her portrait of John F. Kennedy, Elaine mentioned that after she returned to her New York City studio from Palm Beach, Florida, during the winter of 1963, she did not have a sketch of the president wearing a jacket. “To find the jacketed pose, I turned to friends who had similar builds to the President, and had them assume the pose I wanted.” This painting of Tom Hess emerged from her efforts to capture the characteristic pose she had seen, “the President leaning on his left hand with his shoulder twisted forward.” And yet this telling portrait captures Hess as one might an actor, taking on another role and yet retaining his own facial features and relaxed, calm demeanor.

Oil on canvas, 1963

Private collection
EK24

_The Loft Dwellers_

Eddie Johnson (1938–2012) and Robert Corless (1939–1979) assisted Elaine in her New York City studio in the early 1960s. They are the subjects of this important double portrait, which she called _The Loft Dwellers_, perhaps to highlight their youth and bohemian lifestyle. Corless (right), who was largely self-taught, was just beginning to exhibit his thoughtful, surrealist-inspired work. Johnson was also finding his way in New York as an artist. Fairfield Porter wrote about the painting, which was exhibited at the Roland de Aenlle Gallery in 1961 together with many of Elaine’s drawings. He noted, “It is the first time I have seen her handle, in a portrait, her abstract color so that is [sic] integrates with the drawing and the likeness. . . . The features are barely indicated, except for two pairs of intensely shining eyes, one pair gray under dark smooth hair, the other brown under a blonde flourish, looking out from under the brows.”

Oil on canvas, 1961

Collection of the Shatan family
Elaine met Eddie Johnson in Albuquerque, New Mexico, when she was teaching there in 1957 and 1958. After years in New York City, she was riveted by the colors and horizontality of the western landscape: “it was all overpowering, and my painting responded.” She also enjoyed teaching and would continue to accept teaching positions for the next twenty years. Johnson was one of many young people who responded to Elaine’s instruction and generosity. He went to New York City at her suggestion and later earned an MFA from Pratt Institute, where he became interested in early computer art. By 1962 he was helping her in the studio; this small, thinly painted portrait is one of at least two that she created of Johnson at this time.

Oil on Masonite, c. 1962

Private collection
Elaine employed Eddie Johnson in 1962 to help with carpentry and other tasks in the studio. When she was commissioned to paint President Kennedy, he traveled with her to Palm Beach to assist her and to photograph her sessions with the president. This striking charcoal drawing of the slim young man was created on December 26, 1962, just two days before Kennedy’s first sitting with Elaine. Johnson’s dark, deep-set eyes fill his otherwise nearly expressionless face, all defined with assured strokes of charcoal.

Charcoal on paper, 1962

Charles and Mary Anne Fried
George “Baby Dutch” Culbertson 1925–2002

Elaine knew many accomplished and important people who were often the subjects of her drawings and paintings. But she made portraits of many ordinary people: those she met on the streets of Manhattan, in the local bar, at concerts, and elsewhere. This is one of several drawings she made in 1962 of “Dutch Culbertson.” She inscribed some of the drawings with this name, but no other records survive. These portraits most likely depict George “Baby Dutch” Culbertson, a boxer who fought primarily in California until the mid-1950s. He then returned to his home in New York, where he worked as a policeman and in hospital security. Culbertson’s uniform in this strong, dramatic drawing and an accompanying large, full-length painting (now unlocated) appears to be that of a policeman.

Charcoal on paper, 1962

Charles and Mary Anne Fried
Portraits of President John F. Kennedy

The most consuming portrait project in Elaine’s career was the commission she received in 1962 to create a portrait of John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) for the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. Robert Graham, whose New York City gallery represented Elaine, arranged access for the artist while the president was in Palm Beach, Florida. Elaine first met with the president on December 28, 1962. Her sittings continued intermittently into January, and she remained in Florida for approximately three weeks before returning to her studio in Manhattan. She made some of the drawings with the president in front of her. She created others, in various sizes, as she worked out the seated pose for her subject, not in the casual clothing in which he had first posed for her but rather in a suit and tie. Elaine recalled that “on the patio at Palm Beach (where we often sat), he was enveloped by the green of the leaves and golden light of the sun. It was part of his character . . . even part of his likeness.” Elaine created dozens of paintings and drawings of Kennedy until the president’s assassination on November 22, 1963.

After Kennedy’s death, Elaine did not paint for almost a year, with a few exceptions, because of her grief. By the fall of 1964 a selection of her sketches and paintings were exhibited in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and Manhattan. The painting chosen for the Truman Library was dedicated on February 12, 1965, and an exhibition of her sketches and paintings was also on view at that time at the nearby Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design.
This sketch echoes something of the same facial expression found in the enormous full-length painting, on view in the adjacent bay, that conveys John F. Kennedy’s appearance on the first day Elaine met him. She created dozens of sketches in charcoal and commented in 1964 on his changeable countenance: “He had an extraordinary variety of expressions that had nothing to do with smiling or frowning . . . . One day his face would be thin, almost boyish, the next day it would appear to be very full.”

Charcoal on buff paper, 1963

Private collection
Many times Elaine de Kooning began talking about her portraits of Kennedy by saying that she arrived in Florida carrying “the world’s image” of him—an image derived from black-and-white television screens and newspapers. Throughout 1963, she refined her paintings and made numerous sketches, trying to find the elusive likeness that, for her, was always fluid and changeable. In 1964, she explained: “Everyone has his own private idea of President Kennedy. The men who worked with him had one impression, his family another, the crowds who saw him campaigning another; the rest of the world . . . saw him only in two dimensions.” Her challenge was to respect his public image and combine it with her own “intense, multiple impressions of him.”

Charcoal on paper, 1963

Private collection
Elaine recalled of Kennedy, “When I began the sketches, I found that he moved constantly—which drove me insane. It soon became clear (although he tried) that it was physically impossible for this man to sit still! He knew that the portrait (originally only one was planned) was commissioned for the Truman Library and, although it was intended that it reflect the freedom of the ‘New Frontier,’ it was supposed to be somewhat ‘official!’” Elaine captured the clarity of light, foliage, and the casualness of the first sitting in this watercolor, one of several she made at the time.

Watercolor on paper, 1963

Amarillo Museum of Art, Texas; gift of Mrs. Malcolm Shelton
On December 28, 1962, when Elaine began to sketch the president, she recalled that “he wore a sweatshirt, white sailing pants and sneakers. He perched one foot on the chair and said, ‘Is this all right?’” She realized “that he was not interested in a painting of a man seated behind a desk with folded hands, so I took his improvised pose as a cue and I began sketching. This was the only time I saw him dressed casually.” As she began to work, she used “pencil, pen and ink and charcoal. Charcoal’s great, because it enables you to go like lightening [sic] . . . . When he’d change his position, I’d switch drawings. . . . I kept jumping back and forth.”

Pencil on paper, 1963

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Elaine de Kooning with portraits of John F. Kennedy, 1964

In May 1964, *Life* magazine published a photograph of Elaine in her Manhattan studio, surrounded by paintings and sketches—including the largest of her paintings of Kennedy, which captured her initial response to the president.

Alfred Eisenstaedt (1898–1995)

Reproduced courtesy of *Life*

[Note that these photographs will now be projections on the title wall.]
When Elaine first saw President Kennedy in Palm Beach, he was talking to reporters in the distance. As she recalled, “he was not the grey sculptural newspaper image. He was incandescent, golden. And bigger than life. Not that he was taller than the men standing around; he just seemed to be in a different dimension. Also not revealed by the newspaper image were his incredible eyes with large violet irises half veiled by the jutting bone beneath the eyebrows.”

For most of the portrait sessions, the president wore a starched white shirt, dress pants, and often a tie. This is how she has presented him here—seated, with his left arm pushing down on the arm of his chair, as though changing position. Through gestural strokes of paint she has captured something of the golden glow and green freshness of the Florida coast as well as the vibrant energy of her subject. By leaving much of the painting unresolved (although she considered it to be finished), she allows us to see him as she did, “not a portrait of John F. Kennedy, but a glimpse.”

Oil on canvas, 1963

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Elaine made many small drawings of the president’s features throughout 1963. Some focus on the entire face, but others, like this one, focus primarily on his eyes. She recalled that many of her sketches combined her own observation with images that registered in her memory, partly because the president was always shifting and moving in front of her. Elaine was particularly concerned about capturing his expressions and his eyes. She noted, “you never know where ‘likeness’ will reside” and mentioned her struggles in her sketches of Kennedy with an “un-like” quality that “stemmed from a ridiculously little thing that curiously enough involved his key feature—his eyes.” She concluded, “It would be possible to portray the man by drawing or painting only his eyes, so that he would be recognized instantly.”

Charcoal on paper, 1963

Maud Fried-Goodnight
Elaine carried this charcoal drawing to a high degree of completion and then added collaged pieces of paper to it. The likeness seems to express what Elaine was looking for in her efforts to capture the president’s elusive image: “In succeeding sessions of sketching, I was struck by the curious faceted structure of light over his face and hair—a quality of transparent ruddiness. The play of light contributed to the extraordinary variety of expressions. His smile and frown both seemed to be built-in to the bone. Everyone is familiar with the quick sense of humor revealed in the corners of his mouth and the laugh lines around the eyes, but what impressed me most was a sense of compassion.”

Charcoal and collage on paper, 1963

Estate of Ernestine Lassaw, courtesy of Denise Lassaw
After returning to New York and working out a seated composition that fulfilled something of the formal qualities that the Truman Library required, Elaine made several paintings with this seated pose. As months passed, she recalled. “I attempted to re-approach the President’s portrait in terms of my original impression of him. That impression had been of a golden quality. I sloshed orange and yellow paint on a canvas . . . to attain this quality (in an abstract sense) . . . not only in terms of physical coloring (which, in any event, was not bright orange and yellow!) but to suggest, somehow, a spiritual quality. He had a kind of radiance.” This painting, which reflects her thinking, was chosen from among others to be the official portrait for the Truman Library.

Oil on canvas, 1963

Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri
This heroic canvas depicts Kennedy as Elaine first saw him on December 28, 1962, casually dressed in white cotton duck pants, sneakers, and a sweatshirt. She explained, in 1964, “that is how I first saw him. . . . He is bigger than life. . . . The shock of hair becomes an abstract sweep. Those eyes—they looked as if he could walk through a brick wall—were so shadowed by the overhanging eyebrows that even the whites were blue.” And much later in her life, she remembered, “I was determined to convey a sense of the Presidential office, but more important, the experience of a one-to-one contact with J.F.K., to communicate his warmth, sharp wit, appraising glance, and something of the outdoor figure I saw in the brilliant Florida sunlight that first morning.” Elaine kept this portrait throughout her lifetime, and it has remained with her family.

Oil on canvas, 1963

Michael and Susan Luyckx
This painting conveys writer Donald Barthelme’s charm and attractiveness to Elaine with minimal means and demonstrates her confidence with the horizontal format she had begun to use at this time for portraits. Barthelme had returned to New York City from Denmark with his third wife, Birgit Egelund-Peterson, for the birth of their daughter, Anne, in the fall of 1965. His first collection of stories, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*, had been published in 1964, and he continued to place stories in the *New Yorker*. Elaine has captured his large horn-rimmed eyeglasses with just a few strokes of her brush and has included a softly rendered image of his baby daughter under the enveloping reach of his arm. She and Barthelme continued to be friends for many years; he dedicated his 1986 novel, *Paradise*, to her.

Oil on canvas, 1965

E. Jane Vandecar
Elaine painted and drew Donald Barthelme several times in 1965, when he was beginning his distinguished career as a writer. Although she made his portraits in New York City, they first met in his hometown of Houston, Texas, in 1962. Barthelme had invited Elaine to teach classes at the Contemporary Arts Museum on the recommendation of Harold Rosenberg. She wrote to a friend, “Barthelme is a bright, personable young man—and quite spontaneous. He and his wife took me to a cocktail party last night . . . and the party ended when Barthelme, much to my delight, dived in the local swimming pool with all of his clothes on and then pulled in the host, who pulled in a couple of guests so a good time was had by all except the hostess, who took a dim view of damp guests dripping on her new antique rug while sipping dry Martinis.” Elaine’s ever-evolving approach to portraiture is evident in the reworking of this painterly sketch, so that an extra leg appears on the left.

Oil on canvas, 1965
Collection of Clay Fried
For a major show of her recent portraits at Graham Gallery in April 1963, Elaine created this enormous group portrait painted with thin washes and bold strokes of bright color. It depicts nine young men, sitting and standing in a variety of poses, each with a distinct expression—quizzical, contemplative, resigned. The painting references both Auguste Rodin’s bronze sculpture *The Burghers of Calais* (1884–89) and seventeenth-century Dutch group portraits; its title is a witty reference to the Netherlands and to Amsterdam Avenue in New York City. Elaine found her subjects through her friend Sherman Drexler, who was teaching art at a high school connected with Riverside Hospital on North Brother Island. Critics were fascinated with the portrayal of urban youth: “Nine gaze straight out at the viewer, a salvo from the quiet ones. . . . The row of faces is like a serial number on a giant, plastic affidavit.”

Oil on canvas, 1963

Private collection
Patia Rosenberg, the daughter of Harold Rosenberg and May Tabak Rosenberg, knew Elaine for many years. She most likely sat for Elaine in Springs, New York, near East Hampton, during the summer of 1967, before she began graduate school to study Japanese music. With its intense coloring and the sharp contrasts between the loose brushwork of the floral arrangement and the strong shading of the face, it is a powerful image. In 1991, two years after Elaine’s death, Patia recalled, “Elaine painted a portrait of me when my life was full of chaos and barriers. Somehow she found the order and peace that were hiding in my innermost soul and put them on the canvas. Only she could have coaxed them out into the open. She was trustworthy that way.”

Oil on canvas, 1967

Dr. and Mrs. Guy Fried
The subject of this painting is most likely the opera singer Bernice Sobel. If so, that may explain her voluminous, theatrical gown and dramatic jewelry, which Elaine depicted with broad swaths of multiple greens against a sofa painted in rich royal blues. Sobel is also the subject of the smaller painting to the right.

Elaine was living in and out of New York City at this time, for she continued to accept teaching positions until the mid-1970s. In 1967 she taught at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut; perhaps she met Sobel there, or in New York City. This portrait is one of Elaine’s most successful paintings of women.

Oil on canvas, 1967

Michael and Susan Luyckx
We don’t know precisely who the subject of this dramatic painting is, but the back of the canvas bears the label “Bernice Sobel, 1967.” The quick, sparkling brushstrokes used to define the background and the dress, as well as the sitter’s arched eyebrows, contrast with the softer treatment of her face and neck. The most likely identification for the sitter is the opera singer of that name who studied at the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia and performed in major East Coast cities during the 1960s. Elaine’s painting is quite fresh and sketchy and may have been one of several trials she made before she completed the larger portrait on the left..

Oil on canvas, 1967

Dr. and Mrs. Guy Fried
When Elaine painted her friend and mentor, the poet and critic Edwin Denby, she highlighted his elegant figure with a lavender wash of paint that seems to create an unearthly glow. Critic Lawrence Campbell called it “gleaming in his own ‘moon color.’” Denby had encouraged Elaine’s writing during the 1940s, taking her to dance performances he was reviewing and asking her to write her own reviews of other performances. Many of his poems were based on nighttime strolls through New York City with the de Koonings. Here, Elaine captures his dapper demeanor and dress as well as his thoughtful countenance. Much later, she said of Denby’s distinctive presence, “He was the only person we met who imposed his own time through the light he cast—pale, transparent, and bluish—strictly moonlight, even in noonday sun.”

Oil on canvas, 1960

Maud Fried-Goodnight
Frank O’Hara was a good friend to the de Koonings and posed for Elaine in 1962, when his poetry was beginning to achieve wide recognition. The result was an exuberantly painted work showing O’Hara’s slight, sylphlike body against a background full of dramatic washes of color but with the face obscured. Critics noted that Elaine had wiped away his painted features, leaving, said one, “only a purple cloud of color.” After O’Hara’s untimely death in July 1966, many artists and poets wrote tributes to him. Elaine wrote: “The thing about people one knows intimately is, you don’t even have to look. You just paint, let’s say Frank O’Hara, in pale blue or some kind of color, and he occurs within the painting. . . . When I painted [him], Frank was standing there. First I painted the whole structure of his face; then I wiped out the face, and when the face was gone, it was more Frank than when the face was there.”

Oil on canvas, 1962

The O’Hara family
Elaine had known dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham and his partner, the composer John Cage, since the mid-1940s. They had all spent the summer of 1948 at Black Mountain College in western North Carolina, where she, having studied dance as a child, took classes from Cunningham, two hours a day, six days a week. In the portrait, one of Elaine’s series of “standing men” from the early 1960s, Cunningham’s lean body, strong, slanting shoulders, and almost leonine head are captured in a dark silhouette surrounded by thin washes of color. One critic noted of her portraits from this time: “Even when she paints directly, she paints what she remembers of a person—walking, standing, scratching, yawning, thinking, sitting—all of these summed up in a pose. For her each person has his or her pose. The pose is the person. Before setting to work on a portrait, she first visualizes her sitter in their ‘right pose.’”

Oil on canvas, 1962

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, Inc.
On March 18, 1968, just six days after her fiftieth birthday, Elaine drew this severe and introspective portrait of herself in charcoal. Although she delineated the slight effects of age, her features and hair also approximate her appearance as captured in painted self-portraits from more than twenty years before. Around this time, Elaine purchased a small house on Sandra Drive in Springs, East Hampton, close to her friends Ibram and Ernestine Lassaw and to Willem de Kooning’s home and studio. Although over the years Willem was involved with other women in addition to Joan Ward (the mother of his daughter, Lisa), he and Elaine never divorced.

Charcoal on paper, 1968

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; the Ruth Bowman and Harry Kahn Twentieth-Century American Self-Portrait Collection

Conserved with funds from the Smithsonian Women’s Committee
Ethel Epstein 1900–1966

Elaine created this glamorous drawing of Ethel Epstein around the time that their mutual friend Mercedes Matter was founding the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, which opened in September 1964. Epstein, a collector of modern art and former advisor to Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, was forming the board of directors for the school at the time. Elaine created several such drawings as she painted a portrait of Epstein. Its assured lines define both the sharp features of the subject and the various textures of her jewelry and gown.

Charcoal on Strathmore paper, 1964

Private collection
At some point in the mid-1960s, Elaine, who had always been fond of jazz, made a series of drawings of Ornette Coleman (born 1930) with his saxophone. The album *Free Jazz* (1961) by the Ornette Coleman Double Quartet—with its lengthy track and freewheeling, atonal, and discordant sound—changed the shape of jazz.

Through erasure, stumping, and improvisational graphite lines, Elaine created drawings that capture Coleman’s likeness while giving a visual sense of jazz’s rhythm and movement. She made at least three likenesses: this improvisational sketch, a drawing focused entirely on Coleman’s disembodied head (displayed to the right), and a more finished image that includes Coleman’s hands and his saxophone (in a private collection).

Graphite with stumping on paper, c. 1965

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
This drawing of jazz musician Ornette Coleman (born 1930) is one of at least three Elaine made around 1965. As in some of her drawings of John F. Kennedy, Coleman’s head is disembodied. We see only his intense concentration, lowered gaze, and furrowed brow, drawn with a few well-placed, rhythmic strokes of her pencil.

Pencil on paper, c. 1965

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
In 1960 Elaine made a series of seven small portrait drawings in ink and gouache of the young poet Margaret Randall, whom she had befriended a few years earlier at the University of New Mexico and who was then living in New York City. Elaine contributed drawings to one of Randall’s early publications, *Ecstasy Is a Number* (1961). Randall later recalled Elaine’s determination to succeed: “Elaine didn’t care to be called a woman artist. She was an artist, no more no less, and good as any man. The language of feminism wasn’t something she ever adopted, yet whenever we talked about how women had to struggle for our rights, she was the first to admit the unfairness of society’s gender assignments.”

In the mid-1980s, Elaine signed and dated this drawing (erroneously to 1963) to serve as the basis for a poster that was used to raise funds for Randall’s struggle with an immigration issue.

Ink and gouache on paper, 1960

By 1967, when Elaine made this dramatic likeness, Harold Rosenberg’s reputation was secure. His major collections of critical essays, *The Tradition of the New* (1959) and *The Anxious Object* (1964), had been published, and he served as art critic for the *New Yorker*. Elaine had painted and drawn Rosenberg many times over the years. This unusual and bold ink drawing focuses on his deep-set eyes, prominent eyebrows, and full, dark mustache. The gestural brushwork, seemingly uncontrolled, creates mass and form from dark pools and strokes of ink.

Ink wash on paper, 1967

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Elaine created her portrait of poet Allen Ginsberg in the early 1970s, probably in 1973, during the taping of a television segment for WNET in New York City. Ginsberg won the National Book Award the next year for *The Fall of America: Poems of These States, 1965–1971*. He was not only well known at the time for his poetry and other writings but also for his opposition to the Vietnam War, a position Elaine shared. She painted him cross-legged, eyes closed while meditating, and without his trademark eyeglasses. A resident of the Lower East Side, Ginsberg had many friends in common with Elaine, and the two had known each other for many years. Ginsberg owned the portrait, and it hung in his office on Union Square.

Oil on canvas, 1973

Collection of Raymond Foye
Elaine often made both drawings and paintings of her subjects, sometimes as part of a concurrent portrait project, and sometimes serially. Some paintings and drawings of Kaldis echo each other, especially those made during the 1970s, but each has its unique features, whatever the size or medium. Three portraits of Kaldis are included in this exhibition to allow for comparison. This charcoal drawing, which captures Kaldis’ characteristic stance and costume, was chosen for an exhibition of Elaine’s portrait drawings at the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton, organized in the months after her death in February 1989.

Charcoal on paper, 1976

Maud Fried-Goodnight
One subject occupied Elaine on and off for nearly thirty years—her friend the artist Aristodemos Kaldis (1899–1979). She included a painting and a drawing of Kaldis in her first one-person show, held at Stable Gallery in 1954, and continued to paint and draw his scruffy, leonine features until his death. Elaine and Willem de Kooning first knew Kaldis from gatherings of artists at the Waldorf Cafeteria in New York City around 1943–44. The couple supported his work—whimsical and abstract landscapes and still-lifes evocative of the Aegean—and Elaine befriended him over the years. She saw him as the “incarnation of Rodin’s Balzac.” Another friend described him typically as “wearing his long orange scarf. . . . With the scarf flung loosely around his neck, Kaldis would make highly visible appearances” at museums or at gallery openings.

Oil on canvas, 1978

Private collection
In 1976, Betty Jean Thiebaud made the film *Elaine de Kooning Paints a Portrait* (on view in this exhibition) in which Elaine talked about portraiture at length while painting a portrait of Aristodemos Kaldis (1899–1979). She remarked: “I know Kaldis inside out; you know, I did say painting Kaldis is like painting an unmade bed. He’s so expressive, and his clothes seem to express what his hair expresses—he’s lavish and disorderly. And underneath the disorder there is a tremendous order and energy and vigor.”

Kaldis, born in Greece, was living in New York City by 1930. He was a fixture in the downtown art world for years and was described as a larger-than-life character who “talked about himself most of the time, because he was easily the most interesting person he knew.” Toward the end of his life, he received two Guggenheim grants to support his painting and had several solo exhibitions at the Kornblee Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 1978

Dr. and Mrs. Guy Fried
Alex Katz  born 1927

Elaine drew and painted artist Alex Katz multiple times during the 1960s and mid-1970s. She had known him in New York City at least since 1960, when she, Katz, and painter Jane Freilicher had an exhibition together at Tanager Gallery. Around that time Elaine bought a cut-out portrait of Frank O’Hara that Katz had made and kept it throughout her life.

This charcoal drawing from 1967 ably depicts Katz’s long, chiseled face and is related to a painting she made the same year. The broad strokes of charcoal create a dramatic image that her contemporaries admired. The artwork was included in an exhibition of Elaine’s portrait drawings organized in August 1989 by the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton.

Charcoal on paper, 1967

Collection of Clay Fried
Figurative artist Alex Katz is best known for his large paintings created with flattened but precise, color-filled images of his wife, Ada, family, friends, and landscapes. Elaine’s dramatic likeness of Katz was included in an important exhibition of her portraits held at Graham Gallery in 1975. Critic Peter Frank pointed out that “one of the best paintings in the show was that of Alex Katz’s spectacularly-sculpted head, which de Kooning rendered with powerful strokes of black.” Her old friend Tom Hess wrote an extended review, commenting that for Elaine, a portrait “depends on each element of its plastic structure—shapes, colors, their fit, the manipulation and velocity of pigments, how each motion can parse the syntax of the body, which in turn leads you to the face, where shapes are clearest, drawing sharpest, color most specific. The whole image . . . urges toward this climax.”

Oil on Masonite, 1975

Private collection
Betty Jean Thiebaud and her husband, painter Wayne Thiebaud, first met Elaine in the mid-1950s. In 1964, Elaine was teaching at the University of California at Davis, where Wayne Thiebaud was on the faculty. By 1976, when Betty Jean Thiebaud made this film—one of several she made about artists—she and Elaine were good friends. Filmed in her New York City studio, Elaine paints and talks about the work of other artists from the past, as well as her own work. Her voice and personality are front and center as she chats about her portraits of John F. Kennedy, self-portraits, and her friend and current subject, Aristodemos Kaldis.

Directed and produced by Betty Jean Thiebaud (born 1930)
Digitized from original 1976 16mm color film
Running time approximately 19 min.
Courtesy of Wayne Thiebaud/Matt Bult
Elaine de Kooning on the Joop Sanders portraits

In this clip, Elaine talks about her portraits of Joop Sanders, made during the mid-1940s. One of these may be seen in the first section of the exhibition.

Directed, produced, and filmed by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders (born 1952)
Digitized from original 1984 color VHS
Running time approximately 9 min.
Courtesy Timothy Greenfield-Sanders
Here, Elaine paints a portrait of Aladar Marberger, one of several likenesses of him that she completed in 1986. Two of them are in this exhibition.

Directed and produced by E. Deidre Pribram

Muriel Wiener, executive producer

Digitized from original 1986 color VHS tape

Running time approximately 9 min.

Muriel Wiener
Denise Lassaw born 1945

Elaine was devoted to her goddaughter, Denise, who is the child of her friends Ernestine and Ibram Lassaw. Ernestine met Elaine around 1938 when they lived together in a New York City loft. Over the years, the Lassaws were steady companions, and they lived near Elaine’s East Hampton home. Elaine sent Denise illustrated letters, small paintings, and drawings, and painted several portraits of her, including this evanescent likeness from 1973.

Oil on canvas, 1973

Collection of Denise Lassaw
Robert De Niro Sr. 1922–1993

Artist Robert De Niro was a contemporary of Elaine’s in New York City. Although their paths must have crossed many times, she appears not to have painted him until later in their careers. De Niro, whose son is the well-known actor, also painted the figure, but he was more inspired by Matisse and the School of Paris. He studied at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and he exhibited his works, as Elaine did, at the Stable Gallery in Manhattan during the 1950s. Within her horizontal portrait, paint and figure merge with fierce energy as the subject scowls from under unkempt hair and dark brows. Years later, gallery owner Tibor de Nagy called it Elaine’s greatest portrait, and commented that it “is a stunning resemblance that expresses so much character in a nearly abstract painting.”

Oil on canvas, 1973

Aramark
EK60

John Ashbery born 1927

Elaine’s painted portrait of poet John Ashbery from 1975—now in the Memorial Art Gallery, in Rochester, New York—depicted the poet with arms crossed and was shown in her one-person exhibition at the Graham Gallery that year. She looked back to that painting as she created the preliminary drawings for the lithograph, including this one, where she used mixed media to transform the original painted likeness into a strong graphic image in a circular format.

Crayon, pencil, and felt-tip pen on tracing vellum, 1983

Michael and Susan Luyckx
In 1984 Elaine contributed a portrait of John Ashbery to a limited edition of prints inspired by, and including, his well-known poem “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (1973). She joined seven other artists (including Willem de Kooning), who also created circular prints for the edition. Elaine had painted Ashbery in 1975, the year his collection featuring the poem was published. (The volume went on to win the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award that year and the Pulitzer Prize in 1976.) Ashbery commented in his introduction to the later limited edition that the illustrations were by “artists whose work I feel close to.” Each artist seems to have responded differently to the poem—some with self-portraits, others (including Richard Avedon and Larry Rivers) with portraits of Ashbery, and still others with personal images.

Lithograph, 1984

The Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; gift of Elaine Benson
Elaine used cross-hatching in the background of this charcoal study of John Ashbery as well as within the image itself. Scratches within the eyes create a sense of movement and confuse the space. One critic commented, “Ashbery faces the viewer directly but his stare is harsher, more intensely focused. Much of the figure is crosshatched in grays, as is the background. The fine mesh reminds one that a concern with the fluid borders of persons and their environments is one of Ashbery’s major themes.”

Charcoal on paper, 1983

Maud Fried-Goodnight
During the mid-1980s, Fischbach Gallery, directed by Aladar Marberger (1947–1988), represented Elaine in New York City. Marberger had been a student of Elaine’s when she taught at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh in 1969–70. Elaine had encouraged him, as she had other students, to move to New York; he did so at age twenty-two and went on to have a great impact in the art world.

Marberger’s partner for many years was Robert Joffrey, founder of the Joffrey Ballet. Unlike Joffrey, Marberger openly disclosed that he had AIDS when he was diagnosed with the disease in 1985. Elaine’s series of five large portrait drawings and paintings of him reveal the intensity of their friendship and the near-ferocity of Marberger’s claim to every moment of his life.

Oil on canvas, 1986

Donna Lynne Marberger and Dr. Jon L. Marberger
Marjorie Luyckx wrote about her sister’s creation of her two large charcoal drawings and three large paintings of Aladar Marberger (1947–1988) in 1986. Elaine made the portraits in the living room of her house in the Northwest Woods section of East Hampton, where she also had her studio. She depicts the woods outside her house in the background. As her sister recalled, “In her first charcoal sketch, she achieved so satisfying a likeness that in fear of losing it if she painted over it, she set it aside and began another, finally completing five canvases, each one an extraordinary resemblance.” These were among the last portraits Elaine created before her death on February 1, 1989. That day, her brother Peter wrote to her friends the Lassaws, recalling Elaine’s zest for life, “Heaven might no longer be as safe a place to walk about in as it once was, with Elaine there, but for that matter what place is?”

Charcoal on canvas, 1986

Charles and Mary Anne Fried
Artist Alice Baber (1928–1982) had lived in both New York City and Paris during the 1960s, while she was married to the artist Paul Jenkins. Baber’s work encompassed color-filled, lyrical abstract paintings—oils and watercolors as well as prints. Later she lectured and traveled widely and became involved in feminist causes. Baber and Elaine were both close to Ibram and Ernestine Lassaw in East Hampton, and Baber had a home in nearby Sag Harbor. She died of cancer in October of 1982, and Elaine made the painting in December of that year from memory. It is a softly dramatic, direct, almost ethereal image.

Oil on canvas, 1982

Private collection
Elaine’s sister, Marjorie Luyckx, was her closest friend. As Marjorie recounted in the preface to a volume of Elaine’s selected writings published after the artist’s death, they were so close as children that they “seemed to be hinged on a single pole with only minor differences.” In 1983 Elaine painted this colorful, foliage- and light-filled portrait of Marjorie, depicting her with a serious, forthright gaze.

Oil on canvas, 1983

Michael and Susan Luyckx
Megan Boyd  born 1956

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Elaine painted a number of portraits of close friends and family. This included several likenesses of the children of painter Connie Fox. She had known Fox since they met in New Mexico in the late 1950s. Many of these paintings, such as this portrait of Fox’s daughter, the young poet Megan Boyd, a young poet, were shown in a 1983 exhibition of Elaine’s portraits at the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton. Writer Rose Slivka noted in the exhibition’s catalogue that Elaine was painting multiple portraits of the same person serially. For Elaine, a “portrait is not only a painting, but it goes through the circular odyssey of becoming a picture, a fiction of color, a poem of reverie on the sitter, the artist’s relationship to the subject which again, ultimately, is painting.”

Oil on canvas, 1983

Charles and Mary Anne Fried
Brazilian soccer star Pelé, who had recently retired from the New York Cosmos, sat for Elaine in early September 1982. A reporter for the East Hampton Star documented the sittings, which were held on the deck outside Elaine’s studio. As Elaine explained, “Pelé is not a studio man. Obviously his action is outdoors.” She also noted, “The light is perfect today—as if it was washed by last night’s rain. And the sunlight filtering through the trees makes interesting patterns on the scene—sort of a gesture of nature.” Elaine drew comparisons between her methods and that of an athlete: “It’s not just applying the paint in a certain way but it’s how fast you apply it and that is tremendously important. . . . You have to keep disciplining yourself so that you can be accurate as well as fast—Pelé understands—that’s what he’s involved with. Speed and precision are important for an artist as well as an athlete.”

Oil on canvas, 1982

Private collection
Elaine de Kooning in her studio, 1960

Rudy Burckhardt (1914–1999)

Courtesy Estate of Rudy Burckhardt and Tibor de Nagy Gallery © 2014 Estate of Rudy Burckhardt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York