

The Long View: California Women of Abstract Expressionism 1945-1965

ARTISTS OF THE EXHIBITION



RUTH ARMER

Peterson and **Ruth Armer** (1896-1977) were two of the earliest women abstract artists on the west coast. Armer was born in San Francisco in 1896 and became a nascent accolade of abstraction as the first female artist to have a nonobjective exhibition in San Francisco (1931).¹ Armer studied at the California School of Fine Arts as well as the Arts Student League and the School of Fine and Applied Art in NYC under George Bellows and Robert Henri. Henri (1865-1929) taught more than four hundred women students over several decades and encouraged them to borrow from “all sources” as they explored artistic experimentation and individual style.² California modernist artists Margaret Bruton and Henrietta Shore were also students of Henri.

Armer had solo exhibitions at SFMOA (1936, 1939, 1950) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the exhibit titled *American Painting Today* in 1950. The exhibit ignited the New York School group of painters labeled “the Irascibles” as they protested the museum’s exclusion of their work. The famous group portrait of “the Irascibles” from Life magazine featured a single woman artist, Hedda Sterne.

Armer’s paintings were described by the Director of the CSFA, Ernest Mundt, as configurations that “move, dance, perform together in a joyous, graceful, forceful, and determined but subtly controlled manner.”³ Armer was deeply involved with San Francisco arts organizations and according to the artist and arts administrator Fred Martin “was one of the most important role models for artists that I have ever known.”⁴ Armer taught at CSFA from 1933 to 1940, and served on its board on three separate occasions. Susan Landauer notes that the “paintings of Ruth Armer ... were deeply autobiographical, anticipating the Abstract Expressionism that would sweep through the Bay Area after the war.”⁵

1. Susan Landauer, “The Advantages of Obscurity, Women Abstract Expressionists in San Francisco,” in Joan Marter, Editor, *Women of Abstract Expressionism* (Denver Art Museum and Yale University Press, 2016), pp.42-57

2. Marian Wardle, “Thoroughly Modern – The New Women Art Students of Robert Henri,” *American Women Modernists – The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945*, Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 4

3. *Ruth Armer*, SFIA, Ernest Mundt, Director of California School of Fine Arts (now SFIA), 1950-55

4. Ruth Armer, San Francisco Art Institute ,1977, quote by Fred Martin
5. Susan Landauer, "Searching for Selfhood, Women Artists of Northern California," *Independent Spirits, Women Painters of the American West, 1890-1945*, Autry Museum of Western Heritage with the University of California Press, Ed. Patricia Trenton, 37



KATHERINE BARRIEAU

Katherine Barieau (1917-2010) grew up in Cambridge MA and graduated from Wellesley College in 1938. She moved to the Bay Area where she studied at UC Berkeley with teachers that included Felix Ruvolo, James McCray and John Haley. She later also studied with New York artists Esteban Vicente and Kyle Morris. One of Barieau's paintings in the exhibition, *Up to the Watchtower*, revels in the line and vibrant colors reminiscent of the Hans Hofmann inspired paintings of the Berkeley School.



EMARIE BARTELME

Unlike Sonia Gechtoff after 1952, **Emmarie Bartelme** (1923-2010) often worked in a figurative style in the 1950s, but also in a heavily abstracted manner consistent with her canvas in this exhibition. Her work mirrored the earth tone heavy oils of the San Francisco School, and in this manner shared qualities with Joan Brown and other artists of the movement. Bartelme taught at the University of California Extension, Berkeley and the California College of Arts and Crafts.



BERNICE BING

A close friend of the artist Joan Brown, **Bernice Bing** (1936-1999) became a legendary figure in the underground Beat movement in San Francisco and exhibited at the hallmark Batman Gallery's *Gangbang* exhibit in 1960. Orphaned at an early age, Bing overcame an unusual amount of tragedy and obstacle in her life. Susan Landauer poses that she "represents Norman Mailer's ideal of the courageous creative individual withstanding the forces of conformity and oppression in post-World War II America."¹

Bing's work is chronologically at the distant end of the movement along with Joan Brown, but her integration of Chinese aesthetics and search for personal identity carved out a unique contribution. Bing related that she sought Asian art mentors to help "create a new synthesis with a very old world." This included Saburo Hasegawa at CCAC in Oakland in 1957, and modernist calligrapher Wang Donling at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou in 1984. Her "reputation as an Abstract Expressionist has only just begun to be resurrected."²

1. Susan Landauer, "The Dual Worlds of Bernice Bing," *Out of the Shadows – Beat Women are Not Beaten Women*, Ed. Frida Forsgren & Michael J. Prince, Portal Books, 214
2. Susan Landauer, "The Advantages of Obscurity, Women Abstract Expressionists in San Francisco," in Joan Marter, ed., *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, Denver Art Museum and Yale University Press 2016, 53



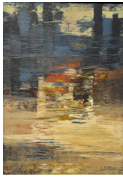
PAMELA BODEN

Pamela Boden (1905-1981) was born in England in 1905, and later studied art and music in Dresden and Paris. In the early 1930s she turned to design and then sculpture, and she helped organize the first exhibition of Surrealism in Lisbon, Portugal in 1940. Boden immigrated to NYC in 1945 and the following year shared an exhibition with Clyfford Still at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century (12 February – 7 March 1946). This was Still's solo debut in NYC as he presented twelve canvasses and 23 works on paper. Boden exhibited five wood sculptures that were arranged throughout the gallery space. With the success of the exhibition (Still sold five paintings), commercial attention was first

brought to Abstract Expressionism resulting in a “profound impact on the city’s artists.”¹ Robert Motherwell called it “a bolt out of the blue.”²

Boden’s wood sculptures from this period unfold like stacks of psychic scaffolding seeming to imply “Surrealism’s search for a language that gives form to inner life that can only be evoked, never described.”³ These works also seemed to predict some Bay Area abstract expressionist sculpture as well as the representational sculpture technique of Robert Cremean in the 1950s. In the late 1940s, Boden moved to Los Angeles where she exhibited regularly. In 1958, Boden, moved to Marin County, California where she continued her work in sculpture and other media. In San Francisco she exhibited at the David Cole Gallery and the San Francisco Museum of Art among other venues.⁴

1. Susan Davidson, “Feminism for the Most Masculine: How Two Women Launched an Art Market,” *Abstract Expressionism*, Ed. David Anfam, Royal Academy of Arts, 2017, 96
2. Susan Davidson, “Feminism for the Most Masculine: How Two Women Launched an Art Market,” *Abstract Expressionism*, Ed. David Anfam, Royal Academy of Arts, 2017, ‘Concerning the Beginnings of the New York School: 1939-1943. An interview with Robert Motherwell, Conducted by Sidney Simon in New York in January 1967’, *Art International*, 11, 6, Summer 1967, p.23
3. Whitney Chadwick, “The Female Earth,” *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Thames and Hudson Inc. 1985,153
4. Maurine St. Gaudens, *Emerging from the Shadows, A Survey of Women Artists Working in California 1860-1960*, Shiffer Publishing, 76



DORR BOTHWELL

Like Ruth Armer, **Dorr Bothwell** (1902-2000) hails from an earlier generation of women artists having attended CSFA from 1921-1923. Bothwell explored representational surrealism before her move to Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s. The move into Abstract Expressionism was an embrace of the subconscious by Bothwell and other artists “who were influenced by surrealism to explore spontaneous abstractions as the key to an art of greater social significance.”¹

Moving to San Diego in 1931 after several years of travel, Bothwell exhibited with the San Diego Moderns and San Diego Art Guild. She executed significant surrealist works before and during the war. Along with luminaries such as Still, Rothko, David Park, and Richard Diebenkorn, Bothwell was an instructor at CSFA during the heyday years of 1945 to 1949. She exhibited widely from the 1920s through the 1950s.

1. Daniel Belgrad, “The Emergence of an Avant-Garde,” *The Culture of Spontaneity – Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America*, University of Chicago Press, 21



JOAN BROWN

Joan Brown (1938-1990) was considered something of a prodigy when she entered the California School of Fine Arts as a teenager. Her teacher Elmer Bischoff became an early advocate for her work and her career, and in 1960 she became the youngest person to exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art. She also became associated with the “Painterland” group of artists and the Rat Bastard Protective Association that was a collective organized by Bruce Conner and other artists. Brown experimented with abstraction on the edge of non-objectivity during a brief period from around 1957 to 1959 that reflected the “dual aesthetics of abstraction and figuration that prevailed at CSFA.”¹ Her work *Brambles* 1957 (now at the Oakland Museum of California) employed “organized strokes of paint slashing across the surface,”² and was submitted to the annual juried exhibition at the Richmond Art Center, California. The painting received second place and fifty dollars while honorable mentions went to David Park and Richard Diebenkorn in the same exhibition.

Brown also received commercial attention in the 1960s by exhibiting at New York’s Staempfli Gallery (1960, 1961, 1964) and the David Stuart Galleries in Los Angeles (1961, 1962, 1964). The work of this period embodied the “germinating ideas of Clyfford Still as assimilated by Brown’s teacher Elmer Bischoff and Frank Lobdell.”³ However, she soon turned away from her acclaimed impasto driven figurative paintings and her gallery representation as well. Joan Brown and Jay DeFeo like other beat associated artists, were generally wary of the organized art market. In fact, as part of a community that often-chased ideals, these artists seemingly viewed “commerce as the face of anti-utopia.”⁴ For these artists and their friends, their community and personal freedoms were often prioritized. Even so, Candida Smith notes that the “contradictions of this imaginary society fell most acutely upon women....”⁵

1. Karen Tsujimoto and Jacquelyn Baas, *The Art of Joan Brown*, University of California Press, 1998, 12
2. Karen Tsujimoto and Jacquelyn Baas, *The Art of Joan Brown*, University of California Press, 1998, 20
3. Richard Candida Smith, “A Woman’s Path to Maturation,” *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California*, University of California Press, 173
4. Richard Candida Smith, “A Woman’s Path to Maturation,” *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California*, University of California Press, 199
5. Richard Candida Smith, “A Woman’s Path to Maturation,” *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California*, University of California Press, 257



SONIA GECHTOFF

Sonia Gechtoff (1926-2018) was another critical artist during the 1950s in San Francisco. Walter Hopps invited Gechtoff for the first solo exhibit at the legendary Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1957. Her large heroic canvases of the period offer powerful tectonic constructs from her imagination. Along with her artist husband James Kelly, she lived in the same “Painterland” building on Fillmore Street, San Francisco that was inhabited by Jay DeFeo (and Wally Hedrick) and later Joan Brown (and William H. Brown). The comparative work of Gechtoff and DeFeo from that period offers some insight into their close-knit creative network. Gechtoff received early attention in San Francisco with a style that incorporated a slashing style palette knife and heavy paint. Her work was shown at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum with William de Kooning, Robert Motherwell and Pollock in the 1954 exhibit *Younger American Painters*. With her artist husband James Kelly, Gechtoff moved permanently to New York in 1958.



NANCY GENN

As her mother the artist Ruth Wetmore Thompson Whitehouse, painter and sculptor **Nancy Genn** studied art at both UC Berkeley and CSFA. At Berkeley, she was a student of Margaret Peterson and also John Haley who was one of the earliest American students of Hans Hofmann along with Worth Ryder and Vaclav Vytlacil in the 1920s. Like a few rare women in this exhibition, Genn’s time at CSFA coincided with the earliest phase of Abstract Expressionism in what might even be described at or near its “source code.” She is represented in this exhibition with two early 1950s abstract paintings that seem to balance the pure nonobjective approach of Still’s “subtle play of balance and asymmetry”¹ with the more gestural Jazz influenced approach of Hassel Smith. Genn was equally influenced by Asian calligraphy and Hokusai’s sketchbooks that were owned by her mother in their East Bay home. She explained her choice to live and work in California because “there is a link between Western ideas and Asian thought here.”² Genn was also an early artist to use handmade paper in her practice.

1. David Anfam, “Of the Earth, the Damned, and of the Recreated: Aspects of Clyfford Still’s Earlier Work,” *Reading Abstract Expressionism Context and Critique*, Author/Editor Ellen G. Landau, 588

2. Art in the Embassies, U.S. Department of State, www.art.state.gov/personnel/nancy_genn/



LEAH RINNE HAMILTON

Leah Rinne Hamilton (1906-1960) was born in Finland and immigrated to California in 1921. She graduated from UC Berkeley with a fine arts degree and taught at Dominican College in San Rafael, California for ten years. In the summer of 1930, she along with Hans Hofmann and Margaret Peterson taught UC Berkeley art sessions. She exhibited widely in the Bay Area and elsewhere including the Art Institute of Chicago (1939, 1941, 1943) and the Whitney Museum of Art in 1948. She was adept at oil as well as watercolor showing work at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1939. Her earlier work was representational before moving into surrealist work and later abstraction. Paintings executed during WWII often featured the artist in the composition of a Bay Area landscape. Rinne Hamilton was active in the arts community and was President of the San Francisco Women Artists Association, and Vice President of the San Francisco Art Association. Involvement in arts organizations during those years was another way that women artists could be a part of broader “conversations” in the art world.



MARIE JOHNSON

Marie Johnson (Calloway) (1920-2018) was born Marie Edwards in Baltimore and worked as a public school teacher before moving to San Jose in 1954 where she continued to teach and pursue art. Later she would become an assistant professor California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, and an associate professor at San Francisco State University.

After moving to California Johnson became active in the civil rights movement. She participated in the 1965 march in Selma, Alabama with Dr. Martin Luther King, and became the president of the NAACP San Jose chapter. “In California Saar and Marie Johnson-Calloway from Oakland were alone in taking up mixed-media construction until a younger generation of women artists picked up the trail they blazed.”¹

1. Richard Candida Smith, *The Modern Moves West: California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 147



ADELIE LANDIS

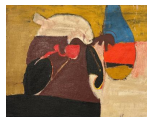
Adelle Landis (1926-2019) took up the abstract baton by producing some of the most remarkable works from the mid 1950s in San Francisco. Despite a lifetime career in art and NY representation she admitted to putting much effort in supporting her artist husband Elmer Bischoff after their marriage in 1962. She studied at the Arts Student League from 1949-1951 and the California School of Fine Art from 1951-1953. Landis joined Remington, Gechtoff, Lily Fenichel and other artists to study the more spontaneous abstraction of Hassel Smith at his Potrero Hill “atelier” beginning in 1952. Her work was exhibited in the early artist directed San Francisco galleries of King Ubu and Lucien Labaudt and she represented San Francisco women along with Jay DeFeo and Sonia Gechtoff in Walter Hopps’ important *Action 1* exhibition at the Merry-Go-Round Building on the Santa Monica Pier in 1955.



HILDA LEVEY

Hilda Levey (1908-2001) was born in Russia and immigrated to California in the 1920s. She studied at UCLA in 1947 and later Pasadena City College, Jepson Art Institute and UC Berkeley. The work in the exhibit is from a series of paintings that were reviewed in Artforum as “highly controlled visual elements” with “extraordinary lace-like patterned areas” and revealing a “virtuosity in working with spatial extension”.¹ The Pasadena Art Museum had a solo exhibit of her work in 1960.

1. *Hilda Levey*, Santa Art Monica Gallery, Artforum International January 1965, Betje Howell



ZOE LONGFIELD

Zoe Longfield (1924-2013) was one of three abstract women artists who were admitted to Clyfford Still’s cognoscenti of students at the cooperative Metart Galleries in San Francisco in 1949. Longfield gained early and important recognition for her abstract expressionist work that was among the most mature of the San Francisco artists in 1949

and 1950. Longfield attended the University of California, Berkeley from 1941 to 1944 where she studied with Margaret Peterson and John Haley. After the war she attended the CSFA from 1947 to 1949 where she was one of the few women alongside fellow students Edward Dugmore, Ernest Briggs, and Frank Lobdell. Writing of her solo exhibit at the Metart Galleries in 1949, San Francisco Chronicle art critic Alfred Frankenstein wrote “of all the numerous artists who have taken up the new credo of arbitrary (or spontaneous) expression in unrestrained colors and unrestrained shapes, Miss Longfield impresses me as one of the most successful.”¹ Longfield is represented with two paintings in this exhibition including a remarkable abstract expressionist canvas and a slightly earlier biomorphic abstraction painting.

1. Alfred Frankenstein, “Around the Galleries,” San Francisco Chronicle, December 11, 1949



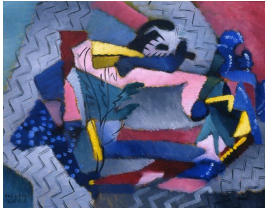
EMIKO NAKANO

Another artist of color, **Emiko Nakano** (1925-1990) represented the United States at the Sao Paulo Biennale in 1955 along with Ruth Asawa, and was one of the most exhibited Bay Area artists of the 1950s. Nakano is represented in this exhibit with a 1954 painting titled *Landscape in Green* that well represents her abstract landscapes from this period. In these works, Nakano maintains a Zen-like sensitivity to the Bay Area topography she called home. Scholar and curator, Susan M. Anderson, relates that much of “California art exhibits an obsession with the natural landscape, its light and space,”¹ and Nakano often utilized the color green to reflect the natural environment. Wassily Kandinsky and other early modernists theorized that the color green triggered a specific “spiritual vibration” in the viewer, and even the “divine power of sympathy.”²

Along with Zoe Longfield and Ruth Armer, Emiko Nakano is among the very rare first generation of women abstract expressionists on either coast. Nakano studied at CSFA from 1947 to 1951 under Still, Diebenkorn, Bischoff, and James Budd Dixon, and won art prizes at the San Francisco Museum of Art and exhibited at Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1952. The Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University recently acquired works by Nakano.

1. Susan M. Anderson, “California Artists and Surrealism,” *On the Edge of America, California Modernist Art 1900-1950*, Ed. Paul J. Karlstrom, 201

2. Ilene Susan Fort, “The Adventurousome, the Eccentrics, and the Dreamers – Women Modernists of Southern California,” *Independent Spirits – Women Painters of the American West*, Autry Museum of Western Heritage with the University of California Press, Ed. Patricia Trenton, 90



HELEN CLARK OLDFIELD

An early abstract work in the exhibition appears by **Helen Clark Oldfield** (1902-1981). The work points to a painterly bridge between modernism and Abstract Expressionism by transforming a seemingly banal kitchen table scene into dynamic color and form. In the 1920s she enrolled in the California School of Arts and Crafts in Oakland where she excelled in mechanical drawing and design. After taking classes with modernist Otis Oldfield at the CSFA the two were married in 1926. Clark Oldfield taught art at the Hamlin School in San Francisco for more than 25 years but spent much of her marriage prioritizing her husband's career.¹

1. Maurine St. Gaudens, *Emerging from the Shadows, A Survey of Women Artists Working in California 1860-1960*, Shiffer Publishing



IRENE PATTINSON

Irene Pattinson (1909-1999) is known for her heavy oil abstract expressionist oils from the 1950s that offered blocks of arranged color and occasional line. In the 1960s, she transitioned to washy color field paintings. Pattinson studied at the CSFA and was President of the San Francisco Woman Artists Association in 1955-1956. She had solo exhibitions at the Lucien Labaudt Gallery in 1955 and the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1961. She was awarded First Place in the San Francisco Woman Artists Association in 1957 and 1959. She exhibited regularly through the 1950s in San Francisco. Her painting *Spring Rain* from 1953 is arranged in fields of color seeming to reflect the feeling of the moment.



MARGARET PETERSON

Like Jackson Pollock and Clyfford Still, the UC Berkeley art professor **Margaret Peterson** (1902-1997) was intrigued by indigenous Pacific Northwest imagery. Building on the Primitivism manner of Picasso and Braque, she fused native imagery from the Pacific



Northwest with painterly abstraction in the 1940s and 1950s. Peterson was interested in a spiritual method that she described as a “communion with the universe.”¹ Her approach seemed to offer solutions to the transitional issues between modernism and Abstract Expressionism through the “sublime beauty of the mind and in natural formations – not in description but in reinterpretation of nature as a symbol of man.”²

Interest in native cultures through modernism took root in New York as well. NYMOMA mounted the influential 1941 *Indian Art of the United States* exhibition that had a broad impact on the future New York School and beyond. During the exhibition, Jackson Pollock took particular notice of a Navajo sand painting demonstration that he compared to his adopted drip-pour technique years later.³ This fascination with native imagery was later shared by Wolfgang Paalen with the *Dyn* publications (Amerindian issue) and the artists related to the ambitious Dynaton movement of the early 1950s in the Bay Area.

Peterson received her M.A. from UC Berkeley and later studied with Hans Hofmann and Vaclav Vytlacil. Her teaching overlapped with Hans Hofmann’s modernist UC Berkeley classes in 1930 and 1931, and her artistic approach produced a cubist style abstraction in the 1930s that she “seems to have understood Hofmann’s teachings best....”⁴ Peterson was later forced to resign her university position rather than sign a loyalty oath by the UC Berkeley board of regents during the McCarthy era. She declined an offer to return to the university in 1952.

Teaching at the university from 1928 to 1950, Peterson was one of the major early female role models in the Bay Area as “she provided an example for women of how to survive as a professional in a male-defined environment.”⁵ She was also a vital teacher to several artists in this exhibition as well as **Jay DeFeo**. DeFeo is a central person in the San Francisco Beat movement and the San Francisco School of Abstract Expressionism. She launched her abstract expressionist work while in Florence in the early 1950s. Her career has been expertly documented and exhibited through the energetic efforts of Leah Levy and other art experts.

1. *Margaret Peterson - On Influences*, Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 9

2. Paul Schimmel, *The Interpretive Link – Abstract Surrealism into Abstract Expressionism – Works on Paper 1938-1948*, Images of Metamorphosis, Newport Harbor Art Museum, 19

3. Daniel Belgrad, “The Avant-Garde and the American Indian,” *The Culture of Spontaneity, Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America*, University of Chicago Press, 67

4. Richard Candida Smith, *The Modern Moves West, California Artists and Democratic Culture in the Twentieth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 63

5. Susan Landauer, “Searching for Selfhood, Women Artists of Northern California,” *Independent Spirits, Women Painters of the American West*, Autry Museum of Western Heritage with the University of California Press, 32

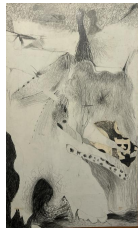


DEBORAH REMINGTON

Deborah Remington (1930-2010) like many of her beat cohorts found artistic inspiration in the spontaneity of the San Francisco poetry and jazz scene. Having previously befriended Wally Hedrick, David Simpson and John Allen Ryan in Pasadena, California, the group, along with Hayward King and Jack Spicer, cofounded the 6 or Six Gallery in 1954. The gallery featured many of the most avant-garde Bay Area artists and became a creative wellspring for the burgeoning Beat movement.

Independent filmmaker Mary Kerr was part of the mid 1950s scene with her artist husband Les Kerr and lived in the legendary “Painterland” building on Fillmore. She describes Remington and other artists as following their own path artistically and personally. “These women were artists not like the traditional, passive females idealized in the 50s. They were quite the opposite – outspoken and assertive. Both Deborah Remington and Joan Brown epitomized this attitude.”¹

1. Mary Kerr, “Women in the California Cultural Underground – 1950s/60s,” *Out of the Shadows – Beat Women are not Beaten*, Ed. Frida Forsgren & Michael J. Prince, Portal Books, 248



NELL SINTON

Like her 1950s contemporary Emiko Nakano, many of **Nell Sinton’s** (1910-1997) paintings riff off the unique landscape of the San Francisco Bay Area. Subtle seasonal shifts and pocket microclimates make for an unexpectedly varied geographical muse for Bay Area artists. Grace McCann Morley, the influential first director of the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMOMA), describes the power of the natural region upon its artists as “the fact that this area was still a countryside that wasn’t extremely densely populated ... and the scale of things was large.”¹

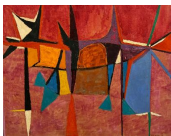
With dramatic brush strokes and splashes of impasto, Sinton’s February 1958 painting titled *Dark Landscape* deftly explores one of the infrequent, but dramatic meteorological disruptions in the region. One *Artforum* review described her nature-

based paintings as “delectable, candid, and markedly unhedged.”² A second work in the exhibition is a very large-scale drawing that seems to channel the abstract surrealist goal of direct expression from hand to surface. Like Sinton’s expansive drawing, the surrealist artworks of the 1940s often explored the subconscious and dream.

Sinton had two early solo exhibitions at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1949 and 1950 and was part of a two-person exhibition with William Theophilus Brown at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1957. She was included in a group exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 1952, and the travelling exhibition “Art USA” that was organized by the American Federation of Arts in 1958. In 1956, Sinton won an award along with Richard Diebenkorn and David Park as part of the San Francisco Art Association group exhibition at the M.H. de Young Museum. Sinton’s work was shown regularly in the 1960s and 1970s including a solo exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1970 and later a retrospective at the Mills College Art Gallery in 1981.

Sinton was highly active in the arts community as a board member of the San Francisco Art Institute and the San Francisco City and County Art Commission. Her practice evolved into collage work in the 1960s with the artist and writer Knute Stiles describing them as having a sense of “secrecy” and “surprising small closets of funk.”³

1. Nancy Boas, *Society of Six*, University of California Press, 1988, Morley quote, 187
2. Bill Berkson, *Artforum*, March 1987
3. *Nell Sinton*, *Artforum*, January 1967



FRANN SPENCER

Along with Longfield, **Frann Spencer** (Reynolds) (1926-2008) was also part of the small group of students who found themselves in Still’s inner circle at CSFA. She was a cofounder of the Clyfford Still inspired Metart Galleries near Chinatown in San Francisco and exhibited well from the late 1940s to 1950s. In the process of art making, the gallery earnestly sought to pursue Still’s admonition against “the corruption of the marketplace.”¹ Spencer like many other artists of this movement, matriculated through the monastic grey hallways of the CSFA where “the mood swung between an almost religious devotion to the idea of art, and a volatile, anything goes-abandon.”²

As was the case with many other women artists, Spencer studied under Margaret Peterson at UC Berkeley before pursuing additional studies at the CSFA. Through a San Francisco architectural firm she was hired to produce murals and screens for the

Ahwahnee Hotel and Yosemite Lodge in Yosemite Valley. Spencer won numerous awards for her abstract works in oil, and later in life created artwork that was signed under various nomenclature.

1. Susan Landauer, "The San Francisco School Revisited," *San Francisco and the Second Wave*, Crocker Art Museum, 2004, 13
2. Thomas Albright, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-1980*, University of California Press, 25



JULIETTE STEELE

Juliette Steele (1909-1980) was born Julia Eleanor Wilm in Union City, New Jersey. She married her second husband Edward Steele in 1939 and settled in San Francisco. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from San Francisco State College, and her Masters of Fine Arts from Stanford University. Steele studied at CSFA with Clay Spohn and later Stanley William Hayter. In 1949, she taught printmaking on the faculty of CSFA, and during this time, exhibited her prints at several venues including the Weyhe Gallery in NYC that was one of the first galleries to specialize in art prints. She is represented in the exhibition with a ceramic abstract sculpture dated to 1950.



RUTH WALL

Ruth Wall (1917-2009) was a painter and printmaker who studied at CSFA beginning in 1950 with Hassel Smith, Edward Corbett and David Park. She later studied with James Budd Dixon, and Nathan Oliveira. She is perhaps most well known for gestural Abstract Expressionist lithographs completed in 1952 at CSFA. That same year Wall de-camped to Paris where she showed at the Musee des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris in 1953 and the Salon des realites Nouvelles in Paris in 1954. Other noted American artists in France at that time included Shirley Jaffe, Sam Francis and Joan Mitchell (in the country before and after Wall's presence). Wall's Six Gallery cohort Hayward King arrived in Paris on a Fulbright Scholarship in 1955.

After returning to San Francisco and CSFA in 1955, Wall exhibited at the Six Gallery and East and West Gallery in 1956. During WWII she became a pilot and later an officer as a physical therapist. Her work is in the collections of the Monterey Museum of Art, The San Jose Museum of Art and the Crocker Art Museum. A 2007 book about Wall titled



Love of the Stone, Ruth A. Wall, *Abstract Expressionist Prints* was published by Claire Carlevaro.



KATHERINE WESTPHAL

Katherine Westphal (1919 -2018) was born in Los Angeles and became a pioneer in textile art among other art endeavors. She received undergraduate and master's degrees from UC Berkeley and met Diego Rivera during graduate studies in Mexico. She taught art at the University of Wyoming and at the University of Washington in the late 1940s. She became a professor of design at UC Davis where she taught from 1966 to 1979. She painted in a modernist method in the 1940s that developed into abstraction in the 1950s. Her work was highlighted in several books including the 2015 *Fiber Arts Pioneers: Pushing the Pliable Plane* by JoAnn C. Stab. According to her NY Times obituary from March 20, 2018 her work "demonstrated a restlessness and playfulness." Hyperallergic described her art production as "creative genius of astonishing eclecticism."¹ Of her own work Westphal stated "I have learned from many cultures and pay homage to them." Her work is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum among others.

1. *Katherine Westphal, Fiber Art Pioneer, Dies at 99*, Hyperallergic, Glenn Adamson, March 16, 2018