

South Fork Women

Female Abstract Expressionists at Kasmin

Long before it was colonized by mansions on postage stamps of land, the Hamptons were an artists' bohemia. While its most famous residents were the Pollock-Krasners (who took up residence in Springs in 1945), the community quickly blossomed with many of the most famous painters of the day, many of whom (at least of the female cohort) are in Kasmin's *Painters of the East End*. (It's worth mentioning, however, that Kasmin blessedly does not make a note of the gender of these painters in the title of the show, nor in the press release.) Many of the big names are here (Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell), as well as some of the ones who have faded from history (like Perle Fine, Mary Abbot, and Charlotte Park), and in light of Mary



Nell Blaine

prominent women painters, it is a pleasure to get to know some of the more minor characters who populate their stories.



Top: Lee Krasner, Charlotte Park. Middle: Joan Mitchell, Jane Freilicher, Elaine de Kooning, Lee Krasner. Bottom: Charlotte Park.

What the South Fork of Long Island meant to these painters, however, is varied, and so with it their styles, which range from the brushy rendering of a studio still life by Jane Wilson to the dense and dark blots of an Elaine de Kooning abstraction. Bridging these works is my personal favorite of the bunch, a Jane Freilicher abstracted landscape depicting a water mill. Beautifully hung with a group of

momentum (the best example of which is Lee Krasner's gray and mustard painting from 1979, which whips and crackles with released tension).

Not surprisingly, many of these paintings evoke the sea, though more often than not these artists trade depicting the ocean's expanse for its brackish waters and its vibrant blue for the more realistic green towards which northern seas tend. Both Joan Mitchell and Helen Frankenthaler find themselves knee deep in green, though Mitchell does so more successfully, saved by her keen eye for color and an added patch of coral. The Frankenthaler work (oddly titled *White Flight*), however, proved disappointing, as it shows little of the artist's talent for modulating emotion through color. Its swampy green field is confined and offers no place for release--looking at it I felt I was drowning in shallow water.



Joan Mitchell



Helen Frankenthaler's *White Flight*

Lest you think a trip out to the Hamptons in the 1950s meant turning your back to the city and descending into the backwater, sophistication prevails here not only in the large sizes of some of these canvases (no small, provincial plein air paintings in sight), but in their content as well. Nell Blaine's painting holds a likeness to Cezanne's figures and (though it was painted) the aforementioned Lee Krasner recalls the artist's earlier collaged pieces, which evoke a chapter of art history from early 20th century Paris.

But most interesting, perhaps, is the influential gallerist Betty Parson's work from 1965 in which float irregular geometries on a green-grey field. Set apart from the show's other paintings at the gallery entrance, it is removed, sophisticated, and a little mysterious—not unlike the bohemia which sprouted in rural Long Island those decades ago.



Betty Parsons,
Early Light, 1965