

# Action, Gesture, Paint: Women in Abstraction, A Global History (1940–1970)

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The exhibition *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women in Abstraction, A Global History (1940–1970)* brings together 85 artists from around the world who worked to define and expand gestural and expressive abstraction between 1940 and 1970. Inspired by avant-garde movements such as Art Informel and Surrealism, they considered their creative practice as a space in which to act, experiment, and develop self-awareness.

The selection of this particular historical moment calls attention to the intense upheaval experienced by these artists, who come from over 30 countries – global conflict, genocide, forced migration, exile... The works presented signal a collective sense of freedom led by a growing number of women who were becoming active protagonists in the art world. They show similarities (abstraction as well as a focus on materials and actions or events) and common influences (interpreted by each artist in her own way) but also a diverse range of cultural references. The language of modernity takes on a dimension that is at once cross-cultural and individual, with works shaped by both emotional states and specific creative contexts.

Whether originating from a simple gesture, or informed by dance or performance, the 132 paintings exhibited here reflect live art and its physical and expressive power. They chart a trajectory punctuated by filmed recordings of performances such as Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964) and Atsuko Tanaka's *Round on Sand* (1968), as well as five paintings by Vincent van Gogh.

The presence of Van Gogh, the only male artist in the exhibition, adds an extra dimension to the show; it allows us to consider abstraction from a new angle, and to situate it within a lineage that is based on materiality and an acknowledgement of the conditions under which works are created. Van Gogh immersed himself in nature so that his paintings would be in harmony with it and strove to achieve a direct and close relationship between gesture and expression in his brushwork. It is a line of inquiry shared by the artists in this exhibition.