

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY
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WILLEM DE KOONING: *THE LAST BEGINNING*

Tuesday, September 18 – Saturday, October 27, 2007

Opening reception: Tuesday, September 18th, from 6 to 8pm

I reflected upon the reflections on the water, like the fishermen do.

-Willem de Kooning

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings by Willem de Kooning. Curated by Klaus Kertess and presented in cooperation with the Johanna Liesbeth de Kooning Trust, twenty-three works attest to the final transformations in the artist's oeuvre during the 1980s.

During his long career, de Kooning made several radical stylistic shifts. In the 1940s, somber black-and-white abstractions ceded to powerful, sometimes ferocious women. These were followed by serene pastoral landscapes of the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1980s, he abandoned his luscious surfaces of thick impasto for luminous expanses of pastel-imbued whites, overlaid with ribbons of vivid color. This work may be understood as a logical refinement of, rather than a break with, the subjects and forms of his prior explorations, including body and landscape. Throughout, de Kooning's dexterous manipulations of paint yielded works that teemed with the energy of his surroundings, including a gritty 1940s Manhattan and the bucolic ocean vistas of eastern Long Island. Applying paint with a brush or a scraper's knife, he rendered the physical form either as a subtle body fragment or as a more raucous figure, declaring that "flesh was the reason oil paint was invented." Paintings from the eighties juxtaposed with works from preceding decades reveal many formal relationships, as well as trace an evolution from the densely layered surfaces of the late seventies and early eighties to the clean, crisp lines of the mid-eighties and the rich, ebullient compositions of the artist's final working years.

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Willem de Kooning was born in Rotterdam, the Netherlands in 1904. After training in the graphic and fine arts, he illegally emigrated to the United States in 1926, where he quickly became part of the evolving modernist art movement in New York. His first solo exhibition--which included the black-and-white abstractions--was held in 1948 at the Charles Egan Gallery, and was met with critical acclaim; a flurry of international exhibitions followed. In 1963, de Kooning moved from Manhattan to Long Island, New York, where he worked until his death in 1997. De Kooning's work has been the subject of numerous museum retrospectives, including the Museum of Modern Art (1968), the Whitney Museum of American Art (1983), and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1994). In 1995, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art organized the first major exhibition of paintings from the eighties, which traveled to international venues. Recent exhibitions of the 1980s works include *Willem de Kooning: Late Paintings*, which opened at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2006 and traveled to the Carlo Bilotti Museum, Rome.

A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition, with an essay by the curator Klaus Kertess. For more information on the exhibition please contact the gallery.