



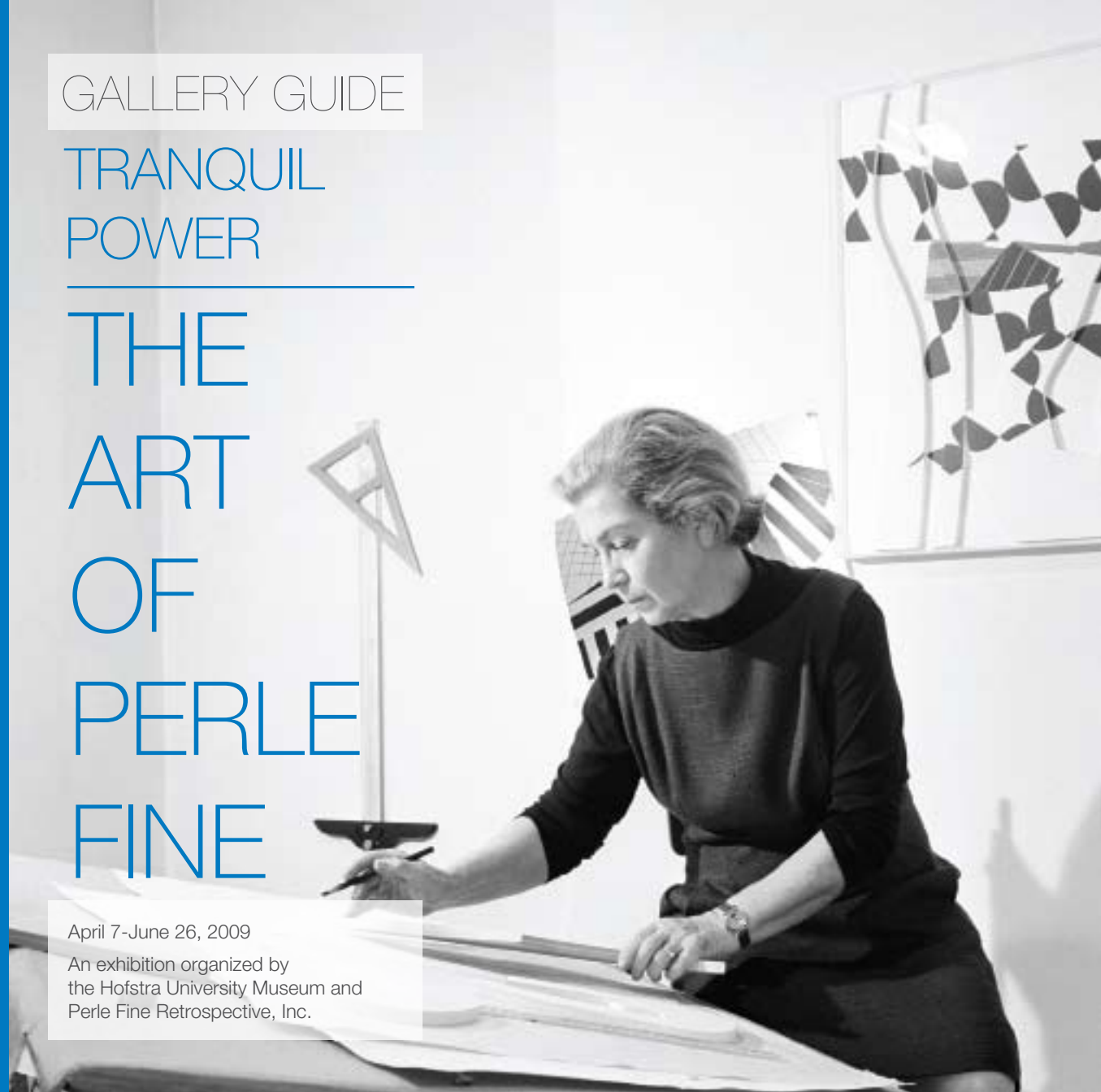
GALLERY GUIDE

TRANQUIL
POWER

THE ART OF PERLE FINE

April 7-June 26, 2009

An exhibition organized by
the Hofstra University Museum and
Perle Fine Retrospective, Inc.



“For me, true reality exists in the aura of the unknown... What we see with our eyes, on the canvas, is but a small portion of an audacious system of symbols and concepts and is truly incapable of rationalization.”

Perle Fine

(Tanager Gallery artist statement, 1961)



Tranquil Power: The Art of Perle Fine



Perle Fine, Summer Studio II, 1948-49, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Simcox Swensson. Photograph by John Schweikert



Perle Fine Painting 'The Wave, Roaring, Breaking' at Springs Studio, 1959. Photograph by Maurice Berezov © A.E. Artworks

Introduction

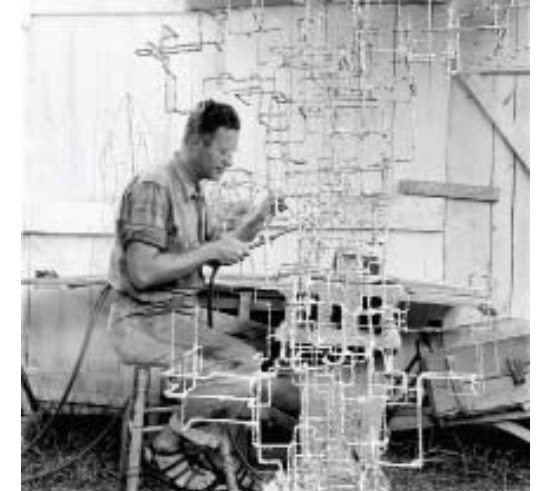
This exhibition opens the window into a fascinating period, America at mid-20th century, and offers an opportunity to reevaluate the art produced during that time. Through the work of Perle Fine, an abstract painter of the New York School, we can trace the trajectory of Abstract Expressionism—from Cubist-inspired geometry and symbol systems to the full-fledged action painting that characterizes the style.

During the early years of World War II, Fine and other early abstractionists engaged in breaking down the representation of objects into essential elements and creating an alternative visual language. The atmosphere of the post-war era of the late 1940s and early 1950s was an uneasy mixture of relief and optimism combined with psychological trauma, and a sense that the old order of European society had played itself out. Bebop and modern jazz were prominent in the post-war New York scene. Jungian psychology was popular in intellectual circles. There was a creative dynamism among artists, musicians, dancers, and poets—all attempting to find new forms and break apart established norms. By the early 1950s, Fine and most of her peers were developing large-scale abstract paintings and sculptures with gestural, highly energized surfaces.

Classical music also underwent radical changes that reflected the rebellious creativity of the period. Contemporary composers John Cage

and Morton Feldman became regulars at The Club (Eighth Street or Artists Club), which was founded in 1948 by Ibram Lassaw and other New York City downtown artists. According to Philip Pavia, The Club's unofficial chronicler, Perle Fine, who became a member in 1949 at the invitation of Willem de Kooning, was a frequent contributor at the weekly discussions. Seeking solace from the increasing artistic density and commercialism of the downtown art scene, Fine and her husband, Maurice Berezov, moved to the East End of Long Island in 1954, following her friend Lee Krasner (and Krasner's husband Jackson Pollock) who had purchased an isolated farm house in the town of Springs some years earlier.

When she began to teach at Hofstra University in 1962, Fine wrote John Cage that she was introducing his idea of pure sound to her painting students. During this period she experimented with undulating geometric patterns that seem to reference musical progression. Fine's late work: calmly ordered atmospheric systems that echo a search for order, can be compared to the compositions of minimalist musicians.



Ibram Lassaw Welding Outdoors, Provincetown, 1951. Photograph by Maurice Berezov © A.E. Artworks



Ruth Kligman, Willem de Kooning, and Perle Fine, Springs, 1958. Photograph by Maurice Berezov © A.E. Artworks



Perle Fine Standing in Front of 'Unequivocably Blue'
(now in the collection of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY) at *Spring Studio*, 1968. Photograph by Maurice Berezov © A.E. Artworks

“Every change in my work has always arisen from a deep-rooted need, a pictorial need, never any need to express or to limn or to define anything that I do...it's a need within the painting itself to express more.”

Perle Fine

(Irving Sandler interview, 1963)

Perle Fine and many of the artists we see reflected in Maurice Berezov's photographs appear in accounts written by those who were present in the New York City downtown gallery scene, at The Club, and out on the East End of Long Island. How fitting that this retrospective exhibition, which adds breadth and depth to one of the most exciting and dynamic periods of American art, has originated at Hofstra University, situated as it is between two of the most important artists communities of the period.

Insights

The titles Perle Fine gave to her paintings point to an ambitious search for universal meaning. The inspiration for her work came from a variety of sources, prominent among them were:

Nature and the Cosmos

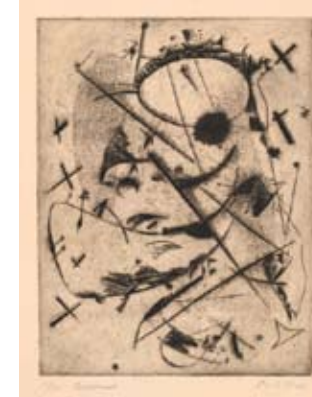
Undersea Encounter, Planet Meter, Wave and Undertow, Calm After Storm, Wide to the Wind, Deep of the Night, Into the Outer

Music and Dance

Polyphonic, Improvisation, Ineffable Silence, Vivacity, Scherzo, Rhythm of Form in Line, Dancing Forms, Ballet of Spring

States of Mind

Enigma, With Abandon, Wither-Within, Physiognomy of Fear, Impartial Ecstasy, Unattended Moment, Point of No Return



Enigma (left), 1944, oil on canvas, 10 1/8 x 10 1/2 inches. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY

Carrousel (above), 1944, etching, edition of 30, 7 3/4 x 6 inches. Courtesy Hirschl & Adler Gallery, NY

The jewel-like colors of *Enigma* catch a buoyant, upbeat mood that is carried over into *Carrousel* (the French spelling of carousel) where the artist imitates swirling motion with lines that flicker like fireworks. Created in the same year, 1944, these works contain similarly floating forms in space but they are based in two different kinds of experience: a circus ride and an unanswerable question.



Wide to the Wind, 1952, gouache and collage on paper, 10 x 24 inches. Collection of Thomas and Darlene Furst

This work was important to Fine, for from it she conceived a set of steps leading to a six-color woodcut that was printed in various states from 1955 to 1959. By printing light colors over dark, as if they were highlights, she could create a sense of depth and volume.

This small gouache and **collage** painting shows forms drifting in a horizontal space. Is this an abstract “landscape” without recognizable objects or an attempt to capture the wind’s invisible force?



Wave and Undertow, 1957, oil, charcoal/crayon, and collage on canvas, 40 1/2 x 68 3/16 inches. Collection of Charles and Kathleen Harper

The surface of this powerful painting is a thick **impasto** combining painted passages of energetic brush strokes embedded with foil and bits of cut-out canvas. The work seems at one with its subject of wave and undertow, as if the paint has been blown by wind and pulled by water.



Impact, 1961, oil on canvas, 34 x 67 7/8 inches. Gift of David T. Owsley via the Alconda Owsley Foundation, Ball State University Museum of Art, Muncie, IN

As in *Wide to the Wind* and *Wave and Undertow*, there is a progression from left to right. Here a sweeping diagonal black form seems to be moving down and in, like the trail of an orbiting spacecraft coming back to earth.

Typical of Fine’s boldest and largest compositions, this monumental painting is reminiscent of a torn paper collage.



Convolution, 1967, oil, ink, graphite on linen, 49 7/8 x 49 7/8 inches. Collection of the Hofstra University Museum, NY

Fine used a similar black and white ladder form in the years prior to 1967, perhaps as a way to diagram planes in space. Now those spatial planes have filled in with black stripes and begun to rotate, becoming three-dimensional as they twist in space like a detached piano keyboard. The result is a vibrating center that pulls the eye around to intersect with areas of bright blue and yellow that appear suspended, as if without gravity.



Blue Haze Autumn (Accordment Series # 18), 1977, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 18 x 18 inches. Collection of Ernestine Lassaw

Fine called her final paintings “accordments,” a word she apparently invented. These atmospheric screens of horizontal and vertical painted lines — floating webs that she often designated by number according to a system of repeated “threads” of color — are anchored to the grid by subtle pencil lines. Many of their titles summon images of contentment or a kind of sublime orderliness that continues on into infinity.

“My painting in the last couple of years is of a subjective nature. It is my answer to the violence, noise and strife rampant in our world today. It is non-gestural, it is a whisper in reply to a shout.”

Perle Fine

(Letter to Hofstra University Art Department, 1973)

The Photographs of Maurice Berezov

Maurice Berezov (1902-1989) and Perle Fine, who met at the Grand Central School of Art, married in 1930. Berezov’s photographs of the artistic circles in which they lived and worked allow us the rare privilege of seeing artists in their studios at the height of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Please visit the exhibition *Perle Fine and Friends: An Intimate Portrait by Maurice Berezov* in the David Filderman Gallery on the ninth floor of the Joan and Donald E. Axinn Library to view some of these photographs.

Glossary

Abstract Art - art that does not mirror real people or things but is primarily an arrangement of lines, shapes, and colors

Abstract Expressionism – This New York City-based art movement of the 1940s and 1950s that can perhaps best be explained...(use whole paragraph formerly positioned under Resources for further exploration)

Action Painting - term first used by critic Harold Rosenberg in 1952 to describe the work of art as a process of creation

Collage - pictorial technique in which paper and other objects are pasted onto a surface, often in combination with painted passages, made popular by European Dada and Surrealist painters

Impasto - thickly applied paint retaining the marks of the brush or palette knife

New York School – artists working in New York City in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s who were the creators of Abstract Expressionism and whose success was instrumental in positioning New York City, and replacing Paris, as the world center of avant-garde art

Resources for further exploration

Early chroniclers and critics described this new art as developing around a core group of American male artists who used energetic whole-body brushstrokes to express issues of alienation and human survival. Recent art historians have shown that women, artists of color, and expatriate Europeans living in close proximity in New York City also shared points of commonality — in artistic intention, in creative output, and in the modern existentialist belief in the authentic, individual artistic voice.

Research Centers

Archives of American Art — oral histories of many of the artists of the period

www.aaa.si.edu/collections/collection/fine68.htm
(Dorothy Seckler interview with Perle Fine, 1968)

Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center
<http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/CAS/pkhouse.nsf>

Recent Books

Geoffrey Dorfman, ed.
Out of the Picture: Milton Resnick and the New York School.
New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2002.

Natalie Edgar, ed.
Club Without Walls: Selections from the Journals of Philip Pavia.
New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2007.

Anne Eden Gibson.
Abstract Expressionism and other Politics.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Helen A. Harrison, ed.
Such Desperate Joy: Imagining Jackson Pollock.
New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000.

Helen A. Harrison and Constance Ayers Denne.
Hamptons Bohemia: Two Decades of Artists and Writers on the Beach. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2002.

Kathleen L. Housley.
Tranquil Power: The Art of Perle Fine. New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2005.

Alex Ross.
The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007.

Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan.
De Kooning: An American Master.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.

Films:

"Pollock"
(Director: Ed Harris, 2000)

"Jackson Pollock: A Biography"
(Atlas Media, New York, 2004)

"Hans Hofmann: Artist/Teacher, Teacher/Artist"
(Producer: Madeline Amgott, 2002) American Masters (PBS)

Perle Fine Chronology

1905 Born in Boston, Massachusetts, 30 April
Attends Malden High School, Malden, Massachusetts

1933 Hans Hofmann opens a school in his studio at 52 W. 8th Street, across the street from Fine and Berezov at 51 W. 8th Street.

1943 Included in *Spring Salon for Young Artists* at Art of This Century, 30 W. 57th Street. Since this exhibition was for artists under 35, Fine may have changed the birth year on her resume to 1908 at this time

1944 Prints with Stanley Hayter at Atelier 17; Exhibits etchings at Wittenborn Gallery in 1944 and 1946

1945 First solo at Willard Gallery, 14 E. 57th Street

1946 "Juxtaposition of Soft Black Forms" reproduced in Art Digest; Fine solo at Nierendorf Gallery, 53 E. 57th Street (April)

1947 Second solo at Nierendorf (January); group exhibition Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, Paris (Summer); Solo show at DeYoung Museum, San Francisco (August); "Perle Fine and the Latter Day Mystics" published in The New Iconograph (Fall); Fine begins work on copy of Mondrian's "Victory Boogie Woogie" for Emily and Burton Tremaine; Fine included in Abstract and Surrealist American Art, Art Institute of Chicago (November)

1949 Solo show at Betty Parsons Gallery, 11 E. 57th Street (June). Rents larger studio at 90 E. 10th Street

1950 Invited...solo exhibition instead; Group exhibition Post-Abstract Painting 1950: France,

America, Provincetown Art Association

1951 Solo show at Betty Parsons Gallery (February); Group exhibition New York Painting and Sculpture Annual, 50 E. Ninth Street

1954 Fine and Berezov build studio/house in Springs, New York

1955 Included in Brooklyn Museum exhibition; Brooklyn Museum purchase of *Wide to the Wind*

1958 Included in *Carnegie International*, Pittsburgh; Nature in Abstraction, Whitney Museum, New York

1961 Solo show at Graham Gallery (March); *Astraea* used for exhibition poster, *Carnegie International*; Visiting Artist at Cornell University; Included in *The Art of Assemblage*, Museum of Modern Art, New York

1962 Appointed associate professor of fine art at Hofstra University (1962-1973)

1963, 1964, 1967 Solo shows at Graham Gallery, NY

1972 Solo show at Washburn Gallery, NY

1973, 1976, 1977 Solo shows at André Zarre Gallery, NY

1974 Ten-year retrospective exhibition, Hofstra University Museum, NY (February); Inducted with Ibram Lassaw into American Academy of Fine Arts and National Academy of Arts and Letters

1978 *Perle Fine Major Works 1954-1978* (September 23-October 29), Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY

1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 Solo shows at Ingber Gallery, NY

1988 Died in Southampton, NY, 31 May

Credits

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Madelyn M. Berezov
President

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Gallery Guide written by
Susan W. Knowles

Cover: *Perle Fine at New York City Studio*, 1967.
photograph by Maurice Berezov © A.E. Artworks

Photo page 1: *Hans Hofmann Class*, Provincetown,
1944. Maurice Berezov photograph © A.E. Artworks

Photo page 2: *Perle Fine at Days Lumber Yard Studio*,
Provincetown, 1944. Maurice Berezov photograph ©
A.E. Artworks