



Grace Hartigan

1960-1965. THE PERRY COLLECTION

Published in conjunction with the exhibition

GRACE HARTIGAN 1960 – 1965, THE PERRY COLLECTION

Organized by the Mennello Museum of American Art and curated by

Michael Klein, *Independent Curator & Art Historian, New York*

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◀ Cover: Grace Hartigan, *Reisterstown Mall*, 1965, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.

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MENNELLO MUSEUM
OF AMERICAN ART

FOREWARD & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From Shannon Fitzgerald, Executive Director

The exhibition *Grace Hartigan 1960 – 1965, The Perry Collection* provides the Mennello Museum of American Art's audience an exceptional opportunity to view and experience Hartigan's incredible work created in a critical five year period in her artistic trajectory. This private collection presents a rare selection of paintings and collages that represent Hartigan's noted Abstract Expressionist style as it evolved in the early 1960s toward new levels of abstraction and representation. Long overlooked, Hartigan was a key innovator among the painters of the New York School.

I am thrilled by the opportunity to share such pivotal work by Grace Hartigan with our community. As one of the most important mid-century women painters whose practice, especially in the 1950s and 60s America, was always part of art history but often undervalued for her role, contribution, and the impact she had in contemporary art as both an artist and teacher. It is special to share the Perry Collection that reflects a seminal moment in Hartigan's exploration and innovation while also acknowledging the connoisseurship of a collector.

I am grateful for Michael Klein who curated this exhibition for the museum. I admire his ardent advocacy for Hartigan's place in art history and for the thoughtful insight he brings to her work here. It is rewarding to work with a curator whose passion and intellectual curiosities champion art and the artists who create, especially those

pioneering ahead of their time and against great obstacles. I also extend tremendous thanks to Hart Perry who has graciously loaned this special collection to us, providing our community an enormous opportunity to celebrate Hartigan's work and her many contributions to mid-century American art.

I am very thankful for the critical and generous support from our funders that made this exhibition and its catalog possible: the City of Orlando, the Friends of The Mennello Museum of American Art, Orange County Government through the Arts & Cultural Affairs Program, United Arts of Central Florida, and Division of Cultural Affairs, Florida Department of State.

I wish to express my gratitude to the City of Orlando, Friends of the Mennello Museum of American Art, and the Mennello Museum of American Art Board of Trustees for all they do in support of our mission and help in making innovative and timely exhibitions and education initiatives possible. I wish to extend my admiration and thanks to the entire staff for all they do every day delivering our mission and to our wonderful volunteers and docents.

Shannon Fitzgerald
Executive Director



GRACE HARTIGAN 1960-1965, THE PERRY COLLECTION

By Michael Klein, Curator

In the spring of 1957, Grace Hartigan (1922 - 2008) was posed in her downtown studio and photographed by Gordon Parks for a series in the pages of LIFE Magazine. Below the spread of color portraits taken in her studio, the caption read:

Most celebrated of the young American women painters, Grace Hartigan, who comes from Newark, N.J., has developed a brilliantly bold, semi-abstract style to capture the garish jumble of excitement of the market district of New York's Lower East Side where she lives.

— LIFE Magazine (May 13, 1957)

Later she would be photographed by the great Cecil Beaton and many times by her friend Walter Silver, often in the company of her circle of intimates that included the painters Helen Frankenthaler, Larry Rivers, and her great admirer and confidant—the poet and curator Frank O'Hara.

The press gave her their special attention because Hartigan was among a new generation of women artists coming of the age at a spirited time in New York. Hartigan was seen as a vibrant talent, striving to live and work in New York City as a successful artist. She



Photograph of Grace Hartigan working in her studio
on her *Salute* series of silk-screen prints, 1961. ▶

was elegant but tough. She was smart and inquisitive. Women were not meant to be opinionated or perceived as ambitious, yet she made new rules, carving out a life of her own as well as a style of her own picture making that moved between extremes of abstraction and figuration.

Hartigan recorded her ideas and thoughts in journals she kept from those early years in New York. In an entry from a recently published edition of those journals she noted, "Another thing I found through a talk with de Kooning is that what I am looking for in my painting is my 'world,' my content" (June, 1952), a world that for Hartigan changes and never remains static.

This exhibition focuses on the character and style of Hartigan's second decade—the paintings in this exhibition all date from between 1960 and 1965—having become a seasoned painter with a long list of exhibitions and collectors. These paintings and collages are part of a collection assembled by the late Beatrice Perry, a dealer in Washington D.C. who represented Hartigan in the 1960s.

The two women had a close personal relationship forged because of Perry's respect for Hartigan as an artist and Hartigan's respect for Perry as a dealer. In the gallery archives are numerous letters between the two addressing the business of making and selling art.

Over the years Hartigan was championed by several significant female dealers including Martha Jackson in New York City and Gertrude Kasle in Detroit, Michigan. But in 1960, she met a dealer whose Washington D.C. gallery, the Gres Gallery, was a home for avant-garde work of the day. Perry represented an international roster of artists long before it was fashionable for collectors to do so. The list included Fernando Botero, Yayoi Kusama, Antonio Tapies, and then Hartigan and Louise Nevelson, another American original.

Perry was interested in Hartigan's work, because a decade earlier, Hartigan had been an important contributor to one of the most significant art movements in American art.

Abstract Expressionism, as it came to be known, had a variety of practitioners. They were mostly men, with only a handful of women. All were innovators of sorts, and all questioned the role of the artist after WWII and the dual horrors of Auschwitz and the nuclear bomb. Together they argued for a new vocabulary in painting. Individually they strove for styles that would best represent their personal ideas and ideals, their passions, and dreams.

While the movement is still represented as a world dominated by male painters, Hartigan was as much of an innovator as her male counterparts. In fact in 1959 she was selected by the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) for an important traveling exhibition, *The New American Painting*, an exhibition that visited eight European countries and was seen by thousands. The exhibition presented what painting had become in American studios and in particular what had developed in New York in the postwar years.

Hartigan was the only woman in MOMA's exhibition, her work hanging alongside fifteen notable participating painters, including Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline, who was a close friend.

Ironically, but typical for the times, though she is lauded in many of the reviews that were published as the exhibition toured, Hartigan is not mentioned at all in the introduction to the catalogue written by the eminent Alfred Barr. Yet Barr, a friend and early supporter, purchased a painting by Hartigan for MOMA's collection six years before, in 1953.



Adding to this list of accomplishments, in 1956 Hartigan was invited by Dorothy Miller, then curator at MOMA, to be included in one of her landmark exhibition *12 Americans*, which introduced Hartigan and many of her peers such as Philip Guston, Larry Rivers, and Sam Francis to the art world.

Critics around the world responded very positively to Hartigan's work. Many had strong reactions, commenting on her "vivid color" and comparing the scale of her work to Pollock's. But the issues raised by the work, the nature of the ideas generating this new direction, and the serious character of its practitioners seemed to exclude women, even if included in such important and in many ways provocative exhibitions. Such was the fate and fact of life as a female artist six decades ago.

In this small exhibition representing Hartigan's achievements, one will see an evolution of style. As she continued to exhibit her works nearly everywhere, Hartigan refined and fine-tuned her approach. The pictures are grand, celebratory, rich, expansive fields of color and form marked by a muscular drawing over surface, suggesting a rugged terrain of paint.

The notion of landscape or place was underscored by such titles as *Ireland* (1958), a painting in the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation in Venice, Italy, or the Whitney Museum of American Art's *Sweden* (1959). When compared to de Kooning and Kline of the same period there is a remarkable dialogue between these painters, each responding somehow to landscape and then transforming that into an abstract ideal.

But Hartigan could be playful too, with such works as *Snow Angel* (1960) and *Saint Valentine* (1961) presented here. Each picture maintains the

◀ Grace Hartigan, *Snow Angel*, 1960, oil on canvas, 69 x 72 inches.
Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.

same power and robust linear qualities, but as the titles suggest the gritty reality of urban life transformed on each canvas into a kind of celebration of living.

For Hartigan there is always a successful balance between form and line, and between the tension of colors and the motion of mark making. In the end it is always an abstract ground, an imagined field in which passion and thoughtfulness interact. Even a smaller canvas like the *Ides of March* (1961) is equally successful representing such interaction. Add to this dialogue an ominous calendar date in which the everyday is turned upside down, and abstraction takes on a symbolic role. The white toga-like form in the foreground collapses and submerges in a sea of red.

The classical theme continued into a series of four pictures. *Grey Eyed Athena* (1961) is one of four on the theme of the Goddess Athena — paying tribute to and associating herself with a woman of classical mythology. Hartigan was a great student of art and history and also a champion of women as spirit and driver. Athena oversees wisdom, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice, mathematics, strength, war, strategy, the arts, crafts, and skill in ancient Greek religion and mythology. No doubt that the eye of this Goddess is hard to find, as if shrouded in her own draperies and mystery. Nonetheless it is a watchful eye, certainly and symbolically Hartigan's eye.

Similarly, Marilyn, the celebrated icon of Warhol's age, appears as a protagonist in a 1962 painting by Hartigan. Marilyn is not just a portrait of a screen legend, but the representation of a woman who has power, ambition, and charm. She is a 20th century Goddess. Western



Grace Hartigan, *Grey Eyed Athena*, 1961, oil on canvas, 64 x 49 inches. ►
Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.



Grace Hartigan, *Marilyn*, 1962, oil on canvas, 71 x 55 inches.
Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.



Grace Hartigan, *Untitled (Marilyn Study)*, 1962,
mixed media on paper, 22 x 33 1/4 inches.
Courtesy of the Perry Collection,
Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.



Grace Hartigan, *Untitled (Marilyn Study)*, 1962,
mixed media on paper, 22 x 33 1/4 inches.
Courtesy of the Perry Collection,
Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.

culture applauds that combination of traits in men, but in a woman they are less desirable. Why? Perhaps it is why Hartigan printed her name as George when she stepped out for her first time in a solo show in New York in 1952. It is because the system is, was, and remains so male driven.

For the next eight years or so she continued to paint, to show and to be very much part of the New York art world as she describes her life, worries and ideas in her journals. Eventually she left New York for Baltimore, Maryland to continue her life and career with her new husband, a scientist by the name of Dr. Winston Price. Now, after years of struggle, Hartigan had gained both emotional and financial stability because this new domestic life. She continued showing of course and took up teaching. Over time she explored more and more a method and process by which to synthesize figuration and abstraction.

If the work of her New York days is marked by a thick paint and robust energy, the move to Baltimore sees a shift to a lighter palette as well as a lighter touch. The mood, tonality, and atmosphere of these works soften. Her colors are applied more as transparencies. They are translucent, though the Hartigan energy and drawing is very much in play. There is a sense of ease, a self awareness, and the feeling of reflection. *Lily Pond* (1962) is just that, a handsome display of greens as if recalling a dream. And the titles of other works from the same year— *Phoenix*, *Requiem*, *Parson Brown* — suggest states of being and thinking.

At the dawn of the 1960s, Hartigan was busy with her own forms of abstraction, innovating all on her own while New York was witnessing a great sea change with the arrival of Pop art.



Grace Hartigan, *Parson Brown*, 1962, oil on canvas, 72 x 72 inches. ►
Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.



Pop art was a movement that Hartigan frankly had little patience for or overriding interest in. Its irony and use of advertising took painting in a direction she eschewed. Everything about Pop was antithetical to her own ideals and purposes. Though she explored the everyday in her own art, it was always integrated into a larger scheme where painting and subject matter came together. There was nothing mechanical or mass produced in her work – all of it hinged on her talent as a painter, a painter who could give life, vitality, and character to form.

When Hartigan lived on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, she regularly explored her neighborhood and turned her discoveries into the subject of her paintings, paintings with titles such as *Chinatown*, *Essex & Hester*, and *East River Drive*, reflecting the people and streets on her walk towards her studio.

Similarly, the neighborhoods around her Baltimore studio continued to inspire her as subject matter until her death in 2008. *Reisterstown Mall* (1965) is one such example, a true interlocking mosaic of colored forms and shapes. Color is once again brash and bold, loud like the noise of the mall. People, stores, and the endless motion of cars move in and out. This format of a large-scale canvas stacked with representational imagery and abstract forms carry through the next few decades.

Hartigan saw her world here as a structure built on symbols. Symbols of the everyday juxtapose with each other. They denote things though not in a linear fashion or a narrative of events, but a slice of life. Like her purely abstract works, the array of images set in this new direction can be seen as a refinement of her more expressionist drive and invention.

◀ Grace Hartigan, *Phoenix*, 1962, oil on canvas 80 x 88 inches.
Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.

With paintings like *Reisterstown Mall* and those that would follow, abstract shapes become recognizable subject matter. Color remains important as both an emotive and dramatic element. The picture is made up of many parts visually woven together and saturated in color like a grand tapestry.

Today we can say that through her paintings, Grace Hartigan sought to achieve a means by which to express ideas both about the world in which she lived and the history of the world she studied. Like her peers, she believed in the power and necessity of painting as an artistic endeavor, one with endless meaning and potential.



Grace Hartigan, *Requiem*, 1962, oil on canvas, 51 x 62 inches. ►
Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.

GRACE HARTIGAN 1960-1965, THE PERRY COLLECTION CHECKLIST

Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.

PAINTINGS

Grey Eyed Athena, 1961, oil on canvas, 64 x 49 inches.

Ides of March, 1961, oil on canvas, 27 x 33 inches.

Marilyn, 1962, oil on canvas, 71 x 55 inches.

Parson Brown, 1962, oil on canvas, 72 x 72 inches.

Phoenix, 1962, oil on canvas 80 x 88 inches.

Pigeon Calls, 1962, oil on canvas, 33 x 31 inches.

Pomegranate, 1961-62, oil on canvas, 62.75 x50 inches.

Reisterstown Mall, 1965, oil on canvas, 80 x 102 inches.

Requiem, 1962, oil on canvas, 51 x 62 inches.

Snow Angel, 1960, oil on canvas, 69 x 72 inches.

Saint Valentine, 1961, oil on canvas, 84 x 80 inches.

COLLAGES

Untitled, 1961, mixed media on paper, 22 x 28 1/4 inches.

Untitled, n.d., mixed media on paper, 10 3/4 x 17 inches.

Untitled, 1961, mixed media on paper, 22 3/8 x 25 1/4 inches.

Untitled (Marilyn Study), 1962, mixed media on paper, 22 x 33 1/4 inches.

Untitled (Marilyn Study), 1962, mixed media on paper, 22 x 33 1/4 inches.

Untitled, 1962, mixed media on paper, 22 1/4 x 28 inches.

Untitled, 1962, mixed media on paper, 22 x 33 3/4 inches.

Notes for Marilyn, photo collage, 36 x 24 inches.

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Grace Hartigan, *Saint Valentine (detail)*, 1961, oil on canvas, 84 x 80 inches. ►
Courtesy of the Perry Collection, Courtesy of Michael Klein Arts, LLC.





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