

Exhibitions *United Kingdom*

Barbican show aims to raise Lee Krasner's UK profile

Exhibition continues the re-evaluation of the Abstract Expressionist who spent too long in the shadow of husband Jackson Pollock

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

LONDON. Despite having long since emerged from the shadow of her husband Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner has not had a show in the UK since the Whitechapel Gallery's in 1965. This month's exhibition at the Barbican Art Gallery is therefore overdue. Indeed, it begs the question why the Tate—which in the past brought in exhibitions from the US devoted to other Abstract Expressionists such as Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko—is not putting on such a show. Perhaps it has shifted its agenda to more modish spheres. Then again, other important names in the Abstract Expressionism pantheon—think Sam Francis, Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt—have not received their full due from any London museum either, though the first two have been seen adequately elsewhere in Europe.

The Barbican therefore goes where others fear or disdain to tread. The show also follows appropriately in the wake of the Royal Academy of Arts' 2016 Abstract Expressionism exhibition, the largest such survey ever mounted in Europe. There, Krasner's magnum opus *The Eye is the First Circle* (1960) held its own in a gallery of major Pollocks. Will Krasner's star shine as brightly when the Barbican displays far more of her opus?

Re-evaluating Krasner began with the revisionist art history of the 1970s that rightly regarded the traditional Abstract Expressionist canon—first established by the sexist Clement Greenberg and amplified by Irving Sandler's 1970 book *Triumph of American Painting*—as more or less restricted to dead white males. Ongoing feminism fuelled this shift in perspective, mainly for the good but sometimes overstating its case for reasons of gender revanchism. For example, a survey seen at the Brooklyn Museum in 2000 left mixed feelings. In short, Krasner appeared then as an uneven artist and one who was not quite such an outsider as the curatorial thesis suggested. Nor did Krasner ever establish a signature style. Instead, she roved restlessly over the decades between late Cubism, collage, calligraphy, minuscule and epic scale.

Krasner's first truly original work was perhaps the *Little Image* series at the end of the 1940s. They were complex and innovative compositions, especially in the allusions to hieroglyphics and Hebrew script, yet maybe not without some debt to Mark Tobey, just as the collages of the next decade look to Henri Matisse in their lush hues and curvaceous planes. With the great *Umber* sequence (1959–62) Krasner finally found herself. Last year Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York gave these canvases a powerful exhibition



Clockwise from above: Lee Krasner's *Icarus* (1964), *Untitled* (1946) and *Self-Portrait* (around 1928) will be heading to the Barbican this month

The curator finds a new and convincing colourful source for Krasner's self-portrait

and scholarly publication to match. Hopefully the Barbican will set them in even sharper focus.

What especially fascinates about the Barbican's approach is the subtitle, *Living Colour*. It remains to be seen whether Krasner's forte was colour

or, rather, line. The accompanying catalogue should help answer this question as much as the selection itself. Of the four essays, the curator Eleanor Nairne finds a new and convincing colourful source in Vincent van Gogh for Krasner's self-portrait from around

1928, while the critic John Yau is his usual incisive self. Above all, the show may conclusively determine whether Krasner or Joan Mitchell was the finest of the female Abstract Expressionists.

David Anfam

- *Lee Krasner: Living Colour*, Barbican Art Gallery, London, 30 May–1 September
- David Anfam is an art historian, curator and critic. He curated the Royal Academy of Arts' *Abstract Expressionism* show in 2016

First institutional survey for artist 'discovered' at 94

LONDON. In an era in which the reassessment of overlooked female artists is commonplace, the story of Luchita Hurtado is nevertheless nothing short of extraordinary. The Santa Monica-based artist was 94 when, in 2015, nearly 1,200 drawings and paintings, most unsigned, were discovered by Ryan Good, the director of the estate of her late husband, Lee Mullican. While those close to Hurtado knew that she made art throughout her life, few realised the depth and quality of her oeuvre.

This May, London's Serpentine Sackler Gallery will host the first institutional retrospective of Hurtado's art. The show comes on the back of a string of successes: an exhibition of early paintings and drawings from the 1940s and 1950s at Hauser & Wirth, New York, earlier this year, and an acclaimed inclusion in last year's Hammer biennial, *Made in L.A.* 2018. In 2020, her centenary year, Hurtado's retrospective will open at Mexico City's Museo Tamayo before travelling to institutions in the US.



Many of Hurtado's works, such as *Untitled* (1969), incorporate Native American rugs

During her long life, Hurtado has moved through diverse styles and artistic scenes. "Luchita has always had this very fluid identity," Hans Ulrich Obrist, the curator of her Serpentine survey, recently told the *New York Times*. Her Hauser & Wirth show, *Dark Years*, revealed her experimentation with abstract biomorphic and landscape forms, while in *Made in L.A.* 2018 she

presented crisply rendered paintings from the 1960s and 1970s featuring parts of her body against Native American rugs, and another series showing feathers floating in the sky, inspired by a fire ritual she once witnessed.

Born in Venezuela, Hurtado's family emigrated to the US when she was eight. In New York, she attended art classes at the Art Students League, and

FROM LEBANON TO CORNWALL

The Hammer Museum's *Made in L.A.* biennial has an impressive track record of bringing some of the city's lesser known senior artists into the limelight. A memorable inclusion in the 2016 edition was Huguette Caland, born in Lebanon in 1931 and unknown to most Angelenos despite her residence in Venice Beach between 1987 and 2013. Caland's luminous and erotically suggestive semi-abstract paintings and drawings from the late 1960s to the 1980s are the subject of an exhibition at Tate St Ives this month, her first in the UK. In the 1970s, she collaborated with the designer Pierre Cardin on designs for billowy caftans, which are also included in the show. *J.G.*

- *Huguette Caland*, Tate St Ives, 24 May–1 September

- *Huguette Caland's Tendresse* (1975)



later did fashion illustration and shop window design. In the 1940s, the artist Isamu Noguchi introduced her to the Austrian-Mexican painter Wolfgang Paalen, and she moved with him and her two young sons (from a previous marriage) to Mexico City where she mixed with Leonora Carrington, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

Paalen was a key member of the Dynaton group, which also included Gordon Onslow Ford and Lee Mullican. In 1948, Hurtado and Paalen moved to the San Francisco Bay, where Ford and Mullican lived; in 1950 Hurtado left Paalen and, soon after, married Mullican, with whom she had two more sons, John, now a filmmaker, and Matt, an artist.

Hurtado was never considered a member of Dynaton, though the group's Surrealist sensibility, cosmic mysticism and interest in indigenous art—especially pre-Colombian and Native American art forms—were undeniably incorporated into her own transcendent visions. While she has never made overtly political art, her work embodies an assertively female viewpoint that is both universal and uniquely her own.

Jonathan Griffin

- *Luchita Hurtado*, Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London, 23 May–8 September