

In the decades after World War II, societal shifts made it possible for larger numbers of women than ever before to pursue careers as artists. Abstraction dominated artistic practice internationally between 1945 and the late 1960s, as many artists working in the aftermath of the war sought a formal language that might transcend national and regional narratives—and for women artists, additionally, those relating to gender. But despite new opportunities, women often found their work dismissed in the male-dominated art world, and, without the benefit of the feminist advances that would take root in the 1970s, they had few support networks.

This exhibition spotlights the stunning achievements of women artists, surveying their contributions to the remarkable range of abstract styles that took hold during these pivotal decades. Building on the legacies of early twentieth-century modernism, artists in the postwar period—marked by recent trauma, migration, and reconstruction—found new urgency for their abstract impulses, whether in the form of existential gestures, the rationalizing order of geometry, or the disruptive potential of new materials and processes. The history traced here begins in the 1940s and 1950s with women who made space for themselves in the domains of painting and sculpture, as well as those who pursued independent visions through photography or works on paper. It culminates in the 1960s with radical works forged out of the traditionally feminine disciplines of weaving and craft and with other unorthodox objects whose very nature challenged art historical conventions and boundaries.

The works in the exhibition are drawn entirely from the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. On view are objects that were acquired soon after they were made as well as many recent acquisitions that reflect the Museum's efforts to amplify its representation of women artists.

Organized by Starr Figura, Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints, and Sarah Hermanson Meister, Curator, Department of Photography, with Hillary Reder, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints. Special thanks to Juliet Kinchin, Curator, Department of Architecture and Design.

Generous funding for the exhibition is provided by The Modern Women's Fund.

Additional support is provided by the Annual Exhibition Fund.

MoMA Audio+ is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.