



**Franz Kline** (1910 - 1962)

*Untitled (ZP-12)*, 1950

Oil on canvas

16 by 25 inches (40.6 x 63.5 cm)



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Provenance:           Estate of the artist  
                              Sidney Janis Gallery, New York  
                              Elisabeth Zogbaum  
                              Private collection

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## Franz Kline (1910 - 1962)

### *Untitled*, c. 1950



Painted circa 1950, Franz Kline's *Untitled* is a beautiful example of his most celebrated body of work, the black-and-white paintings he created between 1950 and 1961. Rendered in authoritative yet restrained applications of black paint against a complex white ground, the present work conveys Kline's preoccupation with gesture and space. *Untitled* presents Kline's characteristic architectural forms with an assured touch without relying on a large-scale canvas for a profound and monumental effect.

Kline abandoned perceived notions of line, form, and three-dimensional space to develop an entirely new and revolutionary artistic language. In works like *Untitled*, the black gestures are not necessarily figurative representations of physical objects or even the emotional psyche. Instead, they can be read as investigations into fundamental ideas of space and depth. In a review of a 1954 exhibition, critic Hubert Crehan identifies Kline's new, more complex form of expression. "[he] makes his pictures with black and white paint...the blacks don't become holes; the whites never recede or appear as backdrops. The black-and-white shapes are functions of each other to a degree that the conception of positive-negative space is cancelled out. This is an achievement of technique and artistic will" (H. Crehan, "Inclining to Exultation," quoted in C. Christov-Bakargiev, *Franz Kline 1910-1962*, Turin, 2004, p. 317). Continuing this theme, the following year, curator Thomas Hess wrote, "In Kline's pictures, white and black count as colors. The whites in Kline's paintings... are not negative or positive spaces but mean the same as the blacks" (T. Hess, *Art News*, Vol. 55 No. 1, New York, March 1955, quoted in C. Christov-Bakargiev, *Franz Kline 1910-1962*, Turin, 2004, p. 317).

With deftly articulated tectonic elegance, *Untitled*, like many of Kline's greatest paintings is marked by an impressive and iconic simplicity. According to Elaine de Kooning, "It was Kline's unique gift to be able to translate the character and the speed of a one-inch flick of the wrist to a brushstroke magnified a hundred times." (Elaine de Kooning in: Exh. Cat., Washington, D.C., Gallery of Modern Art, Franz Kline Memorial Exhibition, 1962, p. 16) With tonally modulated coats of white paint surrounding the two black geometric forms floating on the picture's surface, *Untitled* belies

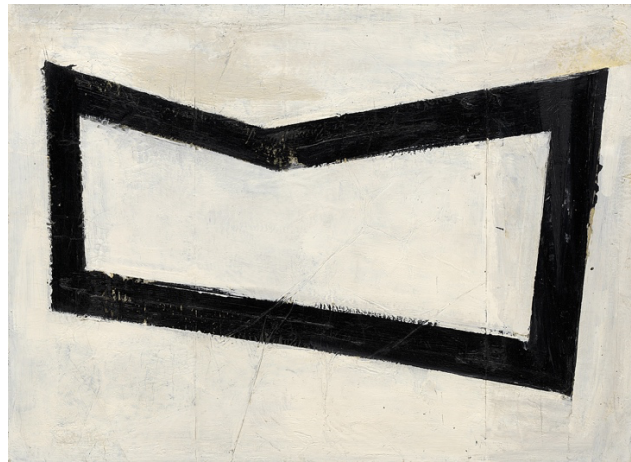


the assumption that Kline painted heavy black strokes over white backgrounds. Instead, the artist alternated between the colors to achieve a taut, unified composition and atmospheric ground. One senses that each application of pigment invited a corresponding gesture so that the balanced dynamism of *Untitled* evokes a strong kinetic response from the viewer.

Similar paintings to *Untitled* can be found in museum collections around the world, including *The Chair*, 1950, The Walker Arts Center, Milwaukee, and *Untitled*, 1952, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Franz Kline, *The Chair*, 1950, The Walker Arts Center, Milwaukee



Franz Kline, *Untitled*, 1952, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York