



Willem de Kooning (1904 - 1997)

Woman, 1951

Graphite on paper (double sided)

17 7/8 by 12 1/2 inches (45.4 x 31.8 cm)



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Signed “de Kooning” lower right

Provenance: Collection of the artist
Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York
Private collection

Exhibition: Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Willem de Kooning*, September 19 - November 19, 1968, no. 109, illustrated; traveled to London, The Tate Gallery, December 5, 1968 - January 26, 1969; New York, The Museum of Modern Art, March 5 - April 27, 1969; Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, May 16 - July 6 1969; Los Angeles, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 28 - September 14, 1969

Baltimore, Baltimore Museum of Art, *Willem de Kooning: Paintings, Sculpture, and Works on Paper*, August 8 - September 24, 1972

Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *de Kooning - Drawings/Sculpture*, March 10 - April 21 1974; traveled to Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada, June 7 - July 21, 1974; Washington DC, Phillips Collection, September 14 - October 27, 1974; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, December 3, 1974 - January 19, 1975; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, February 21 - April 6, 1975; St. Louis, Washington University Gallery of Art, May 30 - June 20, 1975

EDWARD TYLER NAHEM

980 Madison Avenue • Suite 305 • New York, NY • 10075 • 212-517-2453 • info@etnahem.com • www.etnahem.com

London, Gimple Fils Gallery, *Willem de Kooning: Recent Paintings*, June 29 - August 12, 1976; traveled to Zürich, Gimple & Hanover Galerie, August 27 - October 3, 1976

Santa Barbara, The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, *American Drawings: 1927 - 1977*, April 11 - May 14, 1978

Reykjavik, National Gallery of Iceland, June 4 - July 1, 1978

Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, *Eduardo Chillida/Willem de Kooning Pittsburgh International Series*, October 26, 1979 - January 6, 1980, no. 81, p. 111, illustrated

Roslyn, Nassau County Museum of Fine Art, *The Abstract Expressionists and Their Precursors*, January 20 - March 22, 1981, no. 16, p.31, illustrated in black and white

Miami, Frances Wolfson Art Gallery, *The Spirit of Paper*, June 3 - July 29, 1982

Kansas City, Smith Kramer Art Connections, *American Works on Paper*, 1984-85, no. 22

Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, *Willem de Kooning: Paintings*, May 8 – September 5, 1994; traveled to New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 11 – January 8, 1995; London, Tate Gallery, February 15 – May 7, 1995

Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, *Willem de Kooning: Tracing the Figure*, February 10 - April 28, 2002; traveled to, San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, June 27 - September 8, 2002

Literature: Russell, John, "Two Artists Share the Carnegie International", New York Times, November 18, 1979, p. 39, illustrated.

National Gallery of Art, *Willem de Kooning: Paintings*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1994, p. 130.

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Willem de Kooning's *Woman* series, a significant pillar of post-war American art, is exemplified in the present work, *Woman, 1951*. *Woman*, a preliminary drawing for one of his most iconic masterpieces, *Woman I*, now housed in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, is a foundational iteration of the eponymous series. Drawing from the multi-perspectival logic of cubism and the dynamism of Futurism, the work's intricate blend of flattened planes and bold black lines deconstruct the naturalistic rendering of the female body, blurring the figure-ground distinction and revealing a raw, unmediated human essence. *Woman* showcases de Kooning's unique ability to combine the expressive, two-dimensional practices of painting and drawing.

The present work marks a critical point in de Kooning's oeuvre, one in which he returns to 'the figure.' Regarding his decision to paint women, the artist remarked, "Certain artists attacked me for painting the *Women*, but I felt that this was their problem not mine. I don't really feel like a nonobjective painter at all. Today some artists feel they have to go back to the figure, and that word 'figure' becomes such a ridiculous omen – if you pick up some paint with your brush and make somebody's nose with it, this is rather ridiculous when you think of it, theoretically or philosophically. It's really absurd to make an image, like a human image, with paint, today, when you think about it, since we have this problem of doing or not doing it. But then all of a sudden it was even more absurd not to do it. So I fear that I have to follow my desires" (artist statement from his solo exhibition at Sidney Janis Gallery, in March 1953, as quoted in Diane Waldman, *Willem de Kooning*, New York 1988, p. 79). *Woman* elegantly resolves the dialectical oppositions of abstraction and figuration as well as tradition and innovation. Bursting with unbridled energy and evoking a beauty that is both confrontational and unsettling, de Kooning's *Woman* exemplifies the artist's mastery of line and form.

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Woman and the series that follows it, reveal a heightened interest in planar anatomy and dissecting the human body into its constituent parts. The artist's achievement lies in his innovative deconstruction of mass and space. Attacking perceptions of beauty, freedom in painting, and his own masculinity, his *Women* are formidable treatises on the existential condition of humanity. The present work narrates the speed, grit, and coarseness of being in an urban landscape, representing the figure as irrevocably entangled within its environment.

The expertly outlined components of the subject's body describe space with brilliant precision, posing the figure in a tradition of synthetic Cubism whereby various geometric planes intersect and overlap with extraordinary force. Describing the composition of de Kooning's *Woman* works on paper, art historian Thomas Hess suggested, "the vectors [of the drawings] seem to have become the parts of a giant watchworks which tick around the figure, hiding, revealing, then hiding her again as if she has become a part of time... perhaps some idea about the bending nature of space and time informs this image." (Thomas B. Hess cited in Exh. Cat., New York, Museum of Modern Art (and traveling), *de Kooning: A Retrospective*, 2011, p. 254)

Similar works to *Woman* can be found in museums around the world, including *Woman*, 1952, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and *Woman I*, 1950-52, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Willem de Kooning, *Woman*, 1952, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



Willem de Kooning, *Woman I*, 1950-52, The Museum of Modern Art, New York