



Franz Kline

Harry F. Gaugh

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Franz Kline (1910–1962) was a leading figure among the Abstract Expressionists: his energetic black strokes on a white field are as recognizable as Jackson Pollock's drips or Mark Rothko's rectangles of glowing color. Kline's mature works of the 1950s display an astonishing mastery, locking contending forces into architectonic configurations that seem even larger than their actual size, which is considerable. According to an oft-repeated story, Kline arrived at his signature style in a single moment of inspiration, when he saw the individual strokes of one of his figurative drawings blown up to an enormous size with an opaque projector.

The reality, of course, was somewhat more complex, as Harry F. Gaugh reveals in this sensitively written account of Kline's career. Drawing on extensive interviews with Kline's associates, Gaugh traces the artist's development through his early training as an illustrator in Boston and London; his penniless years in Greenwich Village, turning out figurative canvases for a few devoted patrons (and murals for barroom walls); and the progressive experiments with abstraction that finally led to his famous breakthrough. Gaugh also reminds us of the depth of Kline's oeuvre; in truth, the artist had never confined himself entirely to black and white, and before his untimely death he had begun a series of vibrantly colored canvases. The text is complemented by 170 illustrations, reproducing an ample selection of Kline's work, as well as notes on conservation and technique, and a detailed chronology.

A model of art-historical writing, *Franz Kline* is, remarkably, still the only available monograph on its subject. It belongs on the book shelf of everyone with an interest in American painting.

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