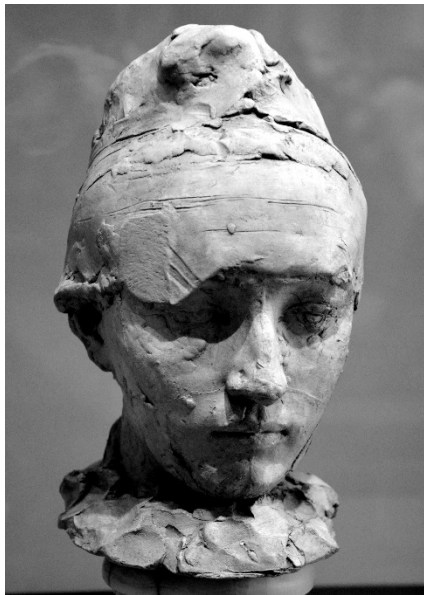


## Women Artists Overshadowed by their Spouses/Partners

There have been a number of great women artists whose art was overshadowed by that of their spouse or partner. This piece introduces several of those female artists.

### **Camille Claudel (1864-1943)**

Camille Claudel was a French sculptor known for her figurative works in marble and bronze. Claudel worked in the workshop of Auguste Rodin, considered to be the preeminent French sculptor of his time, and became his lover. They never lived together, as Rodin was reluctant to end his 20-year relationship with Rose Beurat. Claudel was an inspiration and model for Rodin.



Auguste Rodin, *Camille Claudel*

In the early 1900s, Claudel exhibited signs of mental illness, destroying a number of her sculpture, disappearing for extended periods of time, and accusing Rodin of stealing her ideas. She died in relative obscurity, but later gained recognition for the originality of her work. The *Waltz* is among the most famous of her pieces, inspired by her affair with Rodin. Various versions were created between 1885 and 1905, originally in plaster and later cast in bronze.



Camille Claudel, *The Waltz*

The 1988 French film, *Camille Claudel*, starring Isabel Adjani and Gerard Dépardieu, explores the tumultuous relationship between Claudel and Rodin.

### **Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)**

Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, both Mexican artists, married in 1929. Rivera was 20 years Kahlo's senior. Kahlo was Rivera's fourth wife. The two had a messy relationship, marked by fights, extramarital affairs and a divorce (followed by remarriage a year later). In the early years of their marriage, he was an internationally known muralist. According to a 2015 article in the *Detroit News*, when the two arrived in Detroit in 1932, Rivera was just coming off a one man retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in NYC. Kahlo gave an interview to *The Detroit News*. The title of the resulting article was: "Wife of the Master Mural Painter Gleefully Dabbles in Works of Art". Kahlo died at age 47; the official cause was pulmonary embolism. After Kahlo's death, Rivera would go on to marry a fifth.

Kahlo's work as an artist remained relatively unknown until the late 1970s. Today, Frida Kahlo is viewed as an icon. Diego Rivera is much less well known, particularly among people under 40.

Kahlo's body of work is relatively small. She painted herself over and over. Of her 143 paintings, 55 are self-portraits.

The painting below is Rivera's and Kahlo's wedding painting, painted by Kahlo in 1931.



Frida Kahlo, *Frida and Diego Rivera*

The painting below (1943) depicts Kahlo in a headdress from Tehuantepec, in the state of Oaxaca. A portrait of Rivera is centered on her forehead, suggesting he was not only on her mind but part of her.



Frida Kahlo, *Diego On My Mind*

The 2002 film, *Frida*, explores the life of the artist, including her relationship with Rivera.

### **Josephine Nivison Hopper (1883-1968)**

When Josephine Nivison started dating Edward Hopper in 1923, she was a relatively well known artist, exhibiting alongside such names as O’Keeffe and Picasso. Hopper hadn’t sold a painting in years. Nivison wanted to help him out; she convinced the curators of her then current show to feature his work alongside hers. That was the turning point in their artistic careers. His star rose; hers fell. When Nivison bequeathed a trove of his and her paintings to the Whitney upon her death in 1968, the museum kept most of his work and discarded much of hers. The couple had an eccentric lifestyle and a difficult marriage. The actress, Helen Hayes, said of Edward Hopper, “I had never met a more misanthropic, grumpy, grouchy individual in my life...”.

Apparently Josephine Nivison Hopper was Edward Hopper's only model. The red-haired woman in Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* was modeled by Josephine.



Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*

An April 2020 article in the *New York Post*, entitled "The woman who made Edward Hopper famous finally seizes the spotlight", suggests that Josephine Nivison Hopper is finally going to make a comeback. One of her paintings (undated), found at a flea market and shown below, is back at the Whitney.



Josephine Nivison Hopper, *Obituary*

More detail on the stormy relationship between Josephine and Edward is contained in Gail Levin's 1995 biography, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, which focuses on the introverted painter's stormy forty-three-year marriage to the gregarious Josephine. It drew extensively on Josephine's diaries which she kept from the early 1930s until shortly before her death in 1968.

### **Lee Krasner (1908-1984)**

Lee Krasner was an abstract expressionist painter, specializing in collage. She met Jackson Pollock in 1942 when they both were exhibiting at the same gallery and married in 1945. Pollock is considered one of the most famous representatives of the Abstract Expressionism movement and leading artists of the United States of the last century. Krasner's work is less known to the general public, although it is

said that it was due to her support that Pollock was able to gain recognition the level of recognition that he did.

The couple had moved to an isolated farmhouse in East Hampton, NY in 1945, hoping Pollock could stay sober. Although they both devoted themselves to their art, her career suffered, as she was supporting his. The arrangement worked for a while, but by 1956, Pollock's career seemed to be on a downslide, he was drinking heavily again, and he was engaged in an extramarital affair with a 26-year old model and painter. Krasner decamped to Europe: two months later, Pollock, his lover and a friend were involved in a fatal alcohol related car accident in which Pollock (aged 44) and the friend were killed. It was after Pollock's death that Krasner returned fully to painting and created some of her best work.

In 2019, her painting, *The Eye is the First Circle*, sold at a record \$11.7 million at auction, shattering the previous 2017 record for a sale of her work of \$5.5 million. (One of Pollock's paintings sold for \$140 million in 2006.) *The Eye is the First Circle*, which measures some 20 feet across, was completed in a period of grief following Pollock's death.



Lee Krasner, *The Eye is the First Circle*

The painting below is a self-portrait, completed in 1930.



Lee Krasner, *Self-Portrait*

Lee Krasner was portrayed in the 2000 film, *Pollock*, by Marcia Gay Harden, who won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.

### **Elaine Fried de Kooning (1918-1989)**

Elaine Fried was an American abstract expressionist and figurative expressionist artist, known for portraiture. She married Willem de Kooning in 1943. She was described in a *Smithsonian Magazine* article as a “femme fatale and proto-feminist, a free thinker, a writer, a respected critic, a popular friend and beloved teacher.” She was also described by a friend as “a daredevil”. Yet the title of the article was “Why Elaine de Kooning Sacrificed Her Own Amazing Career for Her More-Famous Husband’s”. Some questioned the wisdom of her adoption of her husband’s last name.

Elaine and Willem were polar opposites: she social, he antisocial. Elaine was convinced Willem was a genius, and promoted her husband’s work, sometimes by sleeping with and painting portraits of people who could help his career. The couple separated in 1957: too much alcohol and too many affairs (on both sides). They reconciled in 1976, she having become sober; she became manager of his studio. As a world famous painter, he needed her to protect him from distractions. Elaine died in 1989, having lost a lung to cancer and suffering from severe emphysema. Elaine’s work received increasing acclaim after her death, including a 2015 exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery entitled “Elaine de Kooning: Portraits”.

*Self-Portrait #3*, which is part of the National Portrait Gallery’s collection, is one of only two fully realized self-portraits de Kooning created in the 1940s. The still life objects that are in the painting result from the intense tutorials with Willem, in order to develop a sense of pictorial organization.



Elaine de Kooning, *Self-Portrait #3*

The painting of John F. Kennedy below is also part of the permanent collection of the National Portrait Gallery, found in the “America’s Presidents” gallery. It resulted from a commission De Kooning received in 1962 to paint an official portrait of JFK for the Truman Library in Independence, MO. The choice was unorthodox, due to the facts that De Kooning was a woman; she painted in an abstract impressionist style; and she had executed few commissions during her career. However, her ability to quickly record the essence of a subject won her the job.

