

to compare two of his beach pictures. *Along the Beach, Jonesport* (1972) shows the view from a bluff above the water's edge. The vantage extends to the right, toward a series of small promontories, which scallop the shoreline and shred the waves to froth. Much of the pleasure of the painting comes from the intense activity of color, the speedy brushstrokes, and the quick shifts in value that Malicoat employs to register that scene.

But some of the thrill derives from the composition itself. *Along the Beach, Jonesport* reverses the traditional recession of landscape paintings: it begins with lighter hues in the foreground, which remains the more abstract region of the painting, and then recedes to the darker, more prominent hues in the background. I found myself focusing first on that particular detail in the background, then returning to the front, where my eye could rest, but only tenuously. The feeling was one of subtle edginess; the painting pulls you to the line between the familiarity of plein-air composition and the reordering of that tradition, between an attention to the truth of the subject and an obsession with the pure life of the paint.

Back Shore (1975) offers a very different response to a similar motif. The vantage here leads straight from the shore toward the ocean. The painting contains three clear regions of color, registering the sand, water, and sky. There's a starkness that you might associate with Milton Avery, except that even in the simple arrangement of forms, Malicoat's unique touch remains identifiable. It's a touch that somehow feels both spontaneous and intensely deliberate at the same time. Whether he's after a mood of agitation and exuberance, or one of repose, Malicoat is always attempting to uncover essences, to find the full potential of his palette, and to render the objects in his gaze with a refreshed curiosity.

Philip Malicoat is a vital figure in the history of painting, not only in Provincetown but in America. Locals will remember him as one of the founders of the Beachcombers, a club of artists and writers, where he and other painters like Ross Moffett enjoyed each other's company over chess matches and glasses of Prohibition punch. Malicoat was known and respected not only for the seriousness of his work but also for the congeniality of his friendships with painters of very different styles, painters like Hans Hofmann, for example. But Malicoat's work transcends the boundaries of eras and schools. Looking at the work in the show at ACME, I'm continually impressed by the tensed forms of his compositions and the vivacity of his colors. For all of their firmness, these paintings testify to the force that propels any fine artist, the constant pursuit of essential forms.

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Remembering Franz Kline

BY BUDD HOPKINS

It was in early June, 1962, when my wife and I drove to Provincetown to set up house in a ramshackle cabin I'd rented up on the hill behind the Patrician Shop. Besides Joan and me, our overloaded car contained a wailing cat and enough art materials and clothes for a three-month stay. We found that the place we'd rented had been recently involved in a propane gas explosion and was topped by a colander-like leaky roof, so we had our work cut out for us.

The month before we arrived had been one of the most emotionally complex periods in my life. On May 13, Franz Kline, one of America's greatest artists, died in a New York hospital of heart failure. For the art world, his death signaled the end of an era, but for me, it marked the close of one of my most revered friendships. Kline had been not only the quintessential Abstract Expressionist painter, but also a brilliant, funny, and marvelously generous companion. Over many years he was the Cedar Bar, the artists' gathering place, where he held forth night after night, drink in hand, offering friendship, jokes, elliptical personal stories, and surprising insights into the art and artists we all cared deeply about.

He especially loved to talk about certain painters whose drawings were made with speed and assurance, the line denoting a mixture of clarity and velocity: Toulouse-Lautrec, Rembrandt, Picasso, and Hokusai were four he referred to often, as well as a number of British caricaturists and illustrators unfamiliar to me. (When I mentioned Matisse, he snapped, "Who said Matisse could draw?") Virtually all of us were dazzled by Kline's range of art knowledge, his wit, and his quirkily inventive way of expressing himself. I realized, with a deep sense of loss, that after May 13, there would be no more of these insights and no more of his welcoming warmth and humor. When Jackson Pollock died six years before, I remember immediately thinking with regret that there would be no more Pollock paintings. With Franz's passing, I discovered that for several days I couldn't allow myself to think about the end of his powerful, exuberant work. I missed the man too much.

Joan and I attended his funeral service with our suitcases at our side, because immediately after the formal, Episcopalian rites we had to take a train to Chicago, where a show of my work was scheduled to open at the Kasha Heman Gallery. We left New York in a mutually grieving silence. The next day, when we arrived in Chicago, I learned that a singer friend of mine was performing at Mister Kelly's, a leading Chicago nightclub. We met him there after the last show, and he and his wife insisted that we accompany them to the Playboy Club, then in its heyday, where we were introduced to Hugh Hefner. "Hef" was friendly and surprisingly knowl-

edgeable about art, and he promptly invited us to a late-night party at what was then called the "Playboy Mansion." Momentarily taken aback by this ongoing wave of showbiz glitz during our first twenty-four hours in Chicago, we entered the Mansion with an upbeat sense of excitement, but the first thing we saw in Hefner's vast living room, hanging above the happy partygoers, was a huge Franz Kline abstraction. Memories suddenly flooded back and I saw that Joan had to turn away to hide the tears running down her cheeks.

All of this happened quickly, and so it was only a few weeks later that we found ourselves unpacking the car in Provincetown and setting up our summer quarters. Within a short time a friend, the painter Herman Somberg, called to say he was coming to the Cape on a mission for which he needed my help. Elizabeth Zogbaum, Kline's companion during his last years, had asked Herman, an old and trusted colleague, to go to Provincetown and open Franz's West End studio to make an inventory of any artworks that remained. No one had been there since his death.

Herman arrived a few days later with the key and a sense of foreboding at how it might feel to be in Franz's studio, wandering among all the things he had so unexpectedly left behind. He, Joan, and I entered through the main part of the white, nineteenth-century house, and walked into a wide, shallow room that contained a number of antique rocking chairs—chairs that had for years been one of Franz's most frequently painted and drawn studio props. He had obviously sought out these antiques and collected them with love, so the row of rocking chairs, sitting empty and abandoned and eliciting memories of his early work, was powerfully emotional.

The studio behind the house was far more difficult to face. Franz apparently slept here often, and his bed looked as if it had been vacated only moments before, the covers carelessly thrown back and his tattered bathrobe hanging limply on a nearby hook. His paint-spattered jeans draped over a chair, a pair of his sneakers and two rumpled socks lying abandoned on the floor by the bed, and several empty glasses and coffee cups all came together to underline what seemed like a momentary absence. It was as if he had just walked down to the Studio Shop to buy a sketch pad and would be right back.

Lying on his worktable was a small stack of black-and-white drawings—studies, perhaps, for future paintings—which Herman and I carefully measured, initialed on the back, and catalogued. Nearby were some flat pans partially filled with drying paint, a row of his typically wide house-painters' brushes, and a roll of canvas—everything he needed to resume painting. Franz had left

the studio in the fall, obviously planning to return, but his illness and death came before the summer began.

I MET FRANZ KLINE around 1954, not long after I had graduated from Oberlin and moved permanently to New York. I saw his work first through Robert Motherwell, who came to Oberlin in 1952 to give a series of seminars and to install an exhibition of his work at the Allen Memorial Art Museum. He had shown slides of Abstract Expressionist paintings, Kline's among them, and I was captivated by their strength and simple power. Motherwell had also discussed Piet Mondrian at length, and I became equally dazzled by the strange, mystical power of the

Dutch artist's strict distillation of vocabulary into black and white and the three primary colors. In retrospect, I feel that, because of Kline's own stark, black-and-white simplifications, I saw his paintings as resembling a free, unbridled Expressionist version of Mondrian's, veering away from occasionally strict, almost geometrical structures to slashing, leaping emotional battlefields. (In fact, in 1979, I published a piece in *Artforum* making this comparison.)

By the time I arrived in New York, I had seen quite a few reproductions of Kline's work, and was bowled over. I met him for the first time at a show of his in the Egan Gallery, and then later at the Cedar Bar. Though I was a twenty-four-year-old neophyte, crazy about painting, and Franz was in his midforties, he seemed to accept me and offered his characteristic friendship. The fact that we both liked jokes—often smutty, and each of us had a personal collection—helped cement late-night, Cedar Bar rounds of small talk, providing a welcome antidote to the miseries of the art world. We enjoyed trying our jokes on each other, and though Franz's delivery was full of expressive gaps, and was sometimes slurred and a little surreal, his stories were hilarious. But because of his odd ellipses and outrageous leaps of imagery, they were often almost impossible to remember, despite their hilarity. In a recent conversation with Irving Sandler, he recalled one of them: Two men go into a bar and start drinking. An hour passes and one of the now drunken friends announces a trip to the men's room. More time passes and he doesn't return. His companion, worried, goes looking for him and, on the way to the men's room, passes an open door on the elevator shaft.



FRANZ KLINE, BRIDGEHAMPTON, NEW YORK, 1964

He looks down to the basement floor below and sees his friend squatting there. The man looks up, and in a panicky voice shouts, "No! No! Don't flush!"

Physically, Kline was—surprisingly—a bit less than medium height, but with the broad, powerful shoulders of the high school football star he had once been. He had a large, handsome head, which sported a narrow, downsloping mustache and a thick mop of dark hair that he brushed straight back. His style resembled that of a thirties or forties movie actor of the Ronald Colman–John Barrymore type, except for Franz's frequent display of a happy, wide, and generous grin. For all of these reasons, and apparently throughout his life, he had been catnip to the ladies.

Despite his thick, well-muscled body, Franz was graceful, dexterous, and quick in his gestures as he told his stories and mimicked the various characters they featured. He was, in fact, a great mimic, and one day I was convulsed by his imitation of our mutual friend, Herman Somberg. Later, I told Herman, "In the Cedar last night, Franz had you down to a tee." "I'm not surprised," Herman replied. "You should see him when he does you."

However, along with his playful humor, his sense of camaraderie, and his ebullient energy as a painter, one always sensed a profound sadness in the man. He had had a difficult life, living often in solitary poverty and extreme discouragement, though he once quipped that a bohemian like him was someone who could live in a place where an animal would die. To make matters worse, Elizabeth, his British wife, suffered from depression and schizophrenia. Although he managed,

irregularly, to care for her, she ended up spending most of her life in mental hospitals. Though Franz, in the Cedar Bar, was most typically smiling and obviously enjoying the company of his (mostly male) friends, at more private moments, his expression was often unhappy, quiet, and brooding. It was a face he rarely displayed in public, but the dark emotion behind it was perhaps a source of his stark black-and-white paintings.

The 1950s, the reactionary Eisenhower years, were not favorable to women in general—nor, obviously, to blacks, gays, Latinos, and other minorities—and it would be decades before some of these problems were even recognized. I recall sitting with Franz one afternoon in a neighborhood bar when he told me about an incident that had happened the day before. An ardent collector of his, a Wall Street impresario of some sort, had come banging on his studio door, pushing in front of him a beautiful, well-dressed young woman. "The guy told me," Franz said, "that I could have the girl for the afternoon, and that he'd already paid her. He said he would come back around five to get her and that he wanted to pick out a drawing as an exchange." The collector left the woman with him, and, somewhat perplexed, he said he sat down with her on the couch. "She was young and very pretty, but sad," he went on. "I asked her how she had gotten into this business, and she said that she had come here from London, wanting to be a model, and that things hadn't worked out. She'd met some men and needed money, and one thing led to another. She seemed very down and started to cry, so I tried to comfort her. I made her a cup of English tea and told her I'd once lived in London,



BUDD HOPKINS, WELLFLEET, MA, 1982

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and sort of calmed her down. She was so young and so unhappy. . . .” He looked down at his beer glass and then took a meditative sip. I was quiet, too, thinking about the whole scene he’d described, and the poor young woman who had so recently become a call girl. After a minute or two I looked up and asked, “Well, Franz, what happened then? Did you make love to her?” He grinned and his eyes sparkled. “Sure. Of course. And she was great, too.” It was a “man’s world” in the fifties, and this was a very fifties encounter.

Kline’s conversation ran to oblique cracks, which nevertheless hinted at great, buried complexities. When he was asked how he, a native of rural Pennsylvania, liked living in New York, he answered, “If you’ve been here longer than a year, you’re beyond answering that question one way or the other.” Another time, he and a group of his contemporaries were recalling the crazy things they had done when they were young. “How could we have ever tried such risky stuff?” one asked. “Oh, hell,” Franz explained. “When I was young, I was nineteen.” He had a marvelous way of describing bad painting. Of a botched still-life, he said that the vase was there to hold up the table, and in a similarly bad landscape, that the mountains were there to keep the sky off of the river. He never liked to talk about his own painting, and particularly avoided serious comments about his working methods. (His interviews with critics are painful to read.) When asked how he managed to keep the space in his black-and-white paintings so flat and consistent, he said, “It’s like stuffing mattresses. You keep stuffing and stuffing and then you see a bulge, so you start pulling the stuffing out for a while and then you see more hollows, so you start

stuffing again. You do this for awhile, and then, out of the corner of your eye, you notice that the damn thing is flat, so you tip-toe away and leave it.”

When Franz had his first show at the prestigious Sidney Janis Gallery, he asked me to help him stretch some of the paintings that were too large to fit in the elevator, and had to be brought in rolled up. Philip Guston was there, too, and after we’d stretched all the paintings, Kline stood them up around the room and took out a piece of notepaper. It was a list of potential titles, and our job, now, was to assign names to the works. One smallish painting had a flat, simple shape taking up much of the surface. That painting, we decided, was “Thorp,” the name of the great Native American Olympic athlete Franz admired, and whom he liked to talk about because the sound of his name was simple and flat. “Mahoning,” another title on the list, was the name of a river in Pennsylvania, where Franz had grown up. One of the largest paintings had

a series of bars flying through a complex space, so that became “Mahoning.” By the time it was over, all of the works had titles, and none of us could recall who named what. In retrospect, I saw that the process had been Franz’s ingenious way to link his abstractions with the intricacies of his own life.

His final studio, on West Fourteenth Street, was two short blocks away from mine, and I visited him often. When we’d first met, he’d been living in a large loft on East Ninth Street, but after that, his successive studios—on Tompkins Square in the East Village, on Sixth Avenue near Eighth Street, and, finally, on West Fourteenth—were far less spacious. This is an important aspect of the effect of his paintings, because his huge, powerful black-and-white abstractions often looked as if they were bursting out of their frames, and that neither their edges or the walls they were on, or even the rooms they were in, could comfortably contain them. I recall once visiting Franz’s friend Jackie Martin in the East Village apartment she had sublet from W. H. Auden. There, in the poet’s cramped living room, a huge Kline black and white was precariously and aggressively resting along the back of the sofa, as if someone had parked a locomotive in a tiny bookshop. When the Whitney Museum held a memorial retrospective of Kline’s work in 1968, the big paintings hanging in the Whitney’s grand, impersonal, high-ceilinged spaces lost some of their compressed power, while the works in the smaller, low-ceilinged rooms, more typical of the space they had been painted in, retained all of their aggressive force. The drama of Kline’s paintings had a great deal to do with the real-life, limited space from which they seemed to want to break free.

Though Franz had restricted most of his mature production to black and white (there are many magnificent color paintings, too), his formal range was extraordinary. Some works were almost Minimalist in feeling, suggesting Malevich or Mondrian, while others were wildly Baroque and made up of drips, splashes, and thick, rushing brushstrokes. Some were stark, while others were lusciously painterly, and some even included areas of gray tones between the black and white. Many of us saw a kind of precarious architecture in his paintings, and when one large abstraction, made up of a few out-of-plumb horizontal and vertical beam-like forms, was hung in a show at the Whitney Museum, his good friend Bill de Kooning looked at it and said, “My God, Franz—that painting is holding up the building.” This same work—one of Kline’s finest—is now in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, where it hangs next to de Kooning’s masterpiece, *Excavation*, and efficiently holds up the entire lower floor.

ABOUT FIFTEEN YEARS after Kline’s death, I awoke from a remarkably vivid dream about him, and, rousing myself, found paper and pen on my bed table and recorded it. I had rarely, if ever, had such a realistic and emotionally accurate dream about another person.

As it opened, I was walking along a path on the ridge of a long hill, when I saw someone coming toward me from the opposite direction. I knew that it was Franz, and was startled because I also knew—even in the dream—that he was dead. As he approached, I resolved to ask nothing about where he’d been, but just to pick up where our friendship left off, back in 1962. He greeted me in his usual friendly manner, smiling broadly, and asked where I was going. I explained that I was headed to a party I’d been invited to, at a collector’s house, and asked if he wanted to come along. “Sure,” he said with a shrug, never having been one to pass up a party. In a moment we were above a valley where the collector’s impressive house and grounds lay spread out below. In front of the house stood a sculpture of a female nude, a typical French garden decoration.

“I see he has a Dujardin in his yard,” Franz said. I asked who Dujardin was, never having heard of him, and he replied that he was a little-known nineteenth-century academic sculptor. I was amazed once again, as I had been many times in the past, by his knowledge of the obscure artists of many countries.

We walked down the hill and into an area behind the manor house, where a curving flight of stone stairs led down to the collector’s open-roofed “party area.” As we descended the stairs, a young man and his girlfriend, arguing fiercely, were coming up. Suddenly the young man threw his drink at his girlfriend, which immediately soaked into her blouse, rendering the fabric across her breasts almost transparent. Franz, smiling mischievously, gave me a nudge and we both gaped at the spectacle. I was thinking, He hasn’t changed a bit. He’s the old Franz I remember.

The party area was filled with guests, and for a moment Kline disappeared, apparently heading for the bar. The collector took the opportunity to

come over to me and whispered, "Isn't that Franz Kline you're with?" I told him it was, and he looked dumfounded, saying, "But isn't he dead?" I put my finger to my lips, implying that he was not to say anything about it. Franz came over, drink in hand, and I told the collector that he had identified the Dujardin in front of the house.

"That's amazing," the collector said. "There aren't five people in the United States who would recognize a Dujardin." "Well, I recognized it," Franz said. "And it isn't a good one, either."

Soon we left the party, and as we ascended the curving stairway, Franz asked, "What ever became of old Hans?" By this he meant Hans Hofmann, who, in the fifties, had been unfairly overlooked by the Museum of Modern Art. "Oh," I said, "the Modern finally gave him a big retrospective, and they even had Clement Greenberg write the essay for the show." "That's the trouble with those guys," Franz said. "Give them half a chance and they'll catalogue you to death."

We went back up to the path that ran along the ridge, where a man approached us. We both noticed a certain look in his eye that suggested he was a panhandler about to ask for a handout. He was wearing a suit and tie, but his shirt collar and sleeves were frayed and his jacket badly worn. "Excuse me," he said to Franz, speaking in a slightly unnatural voice, "I'm very embarrassed to have to ask a favor, but I left my wallet at home and I find I don't have enough money for the train back to Westchester. If you could possibly lend me five dollars, I'll take your name and address and mail the money back to you." Franz was already taking out his wallet as the man went on with an attempt at profound sincerity: "I'm really embarrassed to have to ask such a favor. I've never had to do this before." "Don't worry about it," Franz said, handing him a five. "You do it very well."

At that, the man wandered off and Franz turned to me to say good-bye. We shook hands, and I knew that meeting him had been some kind of miracle, and that, sadly, I would never see him again. I watched as he walked away, heading along the path, back to wherever or whatever he'd come from.

There my dream ended and I woke up, stunned at the realism of the entire experience. It was as if Franz had been there in person, as his usual generous, aware, amusing self, making wisecracks and commenting on obscure works of art. His gift of a five-spot to the panhandler, whom he'd seen through in an instant, was at one with his ironic assurance that the man shouldn't worry because, "You do it very well."

I lay awake, wondering where all of this had come from. I could not recall any of Kline's remarks in the dream as actual quotes from the past. And who, I thought, was Dujardin? Even in my waking state, I'd never heard of him. Where did I get that name? Franz's concern about Hans Hofmann—a man much older than Franz, whom I was aware he barely knew—was also typical of his care and respect for his fellow artists. To me, the whole experience seemed like an extraordinary gift, and I found it almost impossible to believe that I'd imagined it all—that I'd been a kind of ventriloquist for everything he'd said.

35 @ 35

curated by Brenda Correia

June 24 - September 10, 2006
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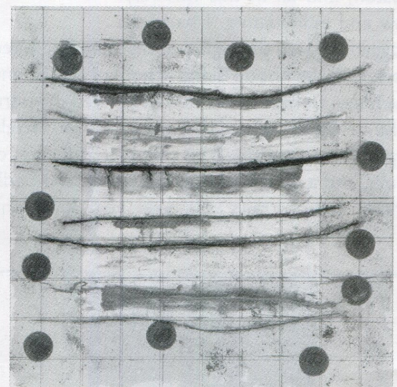


A year or so later, I visited Elizabeth Zogbaum and related my dream to her. She seemed as stunned as I had been by the way my unconscious had created such a three-dimensional image of the man, exactly as we both remembered him. She also seemed as touched as I had been by the final scene of the dream, when he'd said good-bye and wandered back to the place or the existence—whatever it was—which he'd so memorably, and temporarily, left behind.

It has now been over four decades since Franz Kline passed away. Presently, his paintings look even more powerful, and, remarkably, even fresher and more spontaneous than almost anything around. The farther we move away from that time in the fifties and early sixties when Abstract Expressionism ruled the day, the more his stature seems to have grown. I think, now, of that distant time as being like a long, dimly lit corridor, at the end of which, behind a half-open door, I can still glimpse lights and talking, and laughter—edged with despair. And in the middle of that crowd of artists stands Franz, drink in hand, cracking wise and making quick, incisive observations about the artists we all revered. The corridor between me and that place is long and dark and empty, but the distant room at its end still glows with life.

BUDD HOPKINS is an abstract painter whose work has been widely exhibited since his first New York show in 1956. A founding member of Provincetown's Long Point Gallery, Hopkins's articles have appeared in Artforum, Art in America, Provincetown Arts, and elsewhere. This article is excerpted from an ongoing memoir.

Joan Snyder



In Times of Great Disorder Plate XII 2000 Monoprint on paper 30" x 30 1/4"

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