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Robert Fishko, *Director*

WILLIEM DE KOONING
(1904-1997)

Untitled (double-sided), c.1951
graphite on paper (recto)
graphite and colored pencil (verso)
14 x 16 3/4 inches
signed lower right "*de Kooning*"
numbered upper left "47"



Recto

Provenance

The Artist
Gift of the Artist to Tom Ferrara (the Artist's
studio assistant), New York, c. 1981-82
James N. Goodman, New York
(acquired from above, 1987)
The James N. Goodman Estate, New York



Verso

Note

In the December 1952 issue of *ARTnews*, art critic and champion of Abstract Expressionism Harold Rosenberg published his seminal essay "The American Action Painters" that helped define the new Abstract Expressionist movement. At the center of the movement was Willem de Kooning.

In the summer of 1950, de Kooning pinned two large sheets of paper to the wall of his studio and drew two standing female figures. Those figures led the way to a series of drawings and paintings culminating in the painting *Woman I* (1950–52), his best-known

work and a landmark of twentieth-century American painting, acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 1953.

During the two years he developed *Woman I* and its successors, Willem de Kooning worked out many of his ideas in smaller drawings, including *Untitled (double-sided)*, c. 1951.

Writing about the drawings of the early 1950s, Paul Cummings [author of the 1983 monograph on Willem de Kooning] notes that de Kooning's "line in these few years underwent its greatest changes. This is recognized in the increasing velocity of application, the varying graphic weights achieved by the reiteration of the gesture in building a reinforced line, and his innovative use of the eraser as a stylus of light."

Willem de Kooning once summarized the history of female representations as "the idol, the Venus, the nude." In Willem de Kooning's "woman" series of paintings and drawings, he both alludes to and subverts such conventions, while possibly referencing the long-held societal ambivalence between reverence for and fear of the feminine.

The "woman" series stands as one of Willem de Kooning's defining contributions to the canon of Western art and is iconic of de Kooning's approach to Abstract Expressionism in which he blended abstraction and representation.