

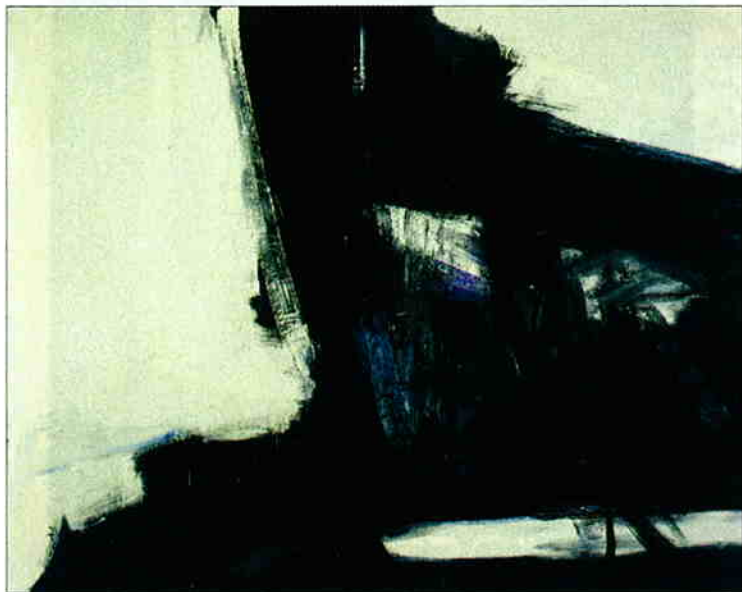
Franz Kline

L&M Arts

A recent renewal of interest in abstraction has brought some seminal American painters back to the fore. The five paintings and two drawings in this small Franz Kline show exhibited a monumentality of form and gesture that clearly spoke of the heroic moment in which they were conceived.

In Kline's anything-but-flat paintings, the large sweep of black occasionally mixed with blue or brown carves out a space that is both generous and—for all of his gesticulating—relatively angst-free. The works here ranged from spare groupings of simple forms to compositions with complex brushwork. When gesture and form united, Kline seems to have hit his stride. *Ninth Street* (1951) shows the artist developing his forms by negotiating between figure and ground, using white to cover pieces of his black brushwork until solidity emerged. The more spontaneous gesture in *Harleman* (1960), which suggests a reclining figure, looks effortless, and the space of the painting opens up quickly to great resolve.

Heaume (1958), here shown publicly for the first time, derives its energy from the interplay between a large central form and a triangle on the canvas's upper edge. As the viewer's eye takes in the point-counterpoint relationship, the paint-



Franz Kline, *Diamond*, 1960, oil on canvas, 64½" x 73¼". L&M Arts.

ing's depth emerges from what at close range looks like a fury of surface activity.

In *Diamond* (1960), a large white ex-



Shirin Neshat, *Munis & Revolutionary Man*, 2008, C-print and ink, 49" x 90½". Gladstone.

panse on the left pushes an open form to the right; the resulting compression finds release in driving bits of blue toward a deep horizon. The opening in the center allows us to move in and traverse the painting freely. It creates the time needed to appreciate that Kline was as adept at nuance as he was at bravado.

—Joan Waltemath

Shirin Neshat

Gladstone

In her convoluted recent films and giant photographs, Shirin Neshat continues her fascination with Iranian émigré Shahrnush Parsipur's 1989 magic-realism novella, *Women without Men*, depicting the oppression of Iranian women during the 1953 coup d'état that brought back the shah of Iran.

Two films (both 2008) were the show's main event. Described as video/sound installations, they were closer to short features, running 12 to 13 minutes each, fully scripted, and with ac-

tors, costumes, sets, and auteur-style direction. *Munis*, the more compelling of the two, is named for the central charac-

ter in Parsipur's book. It begins with the unmarried Munis trapped in an apartment under the domination of her brother, while outside demonstrators supporting the overthrown democratically elected government are crushed by pro-shah mobs. Munis goes up to the roof of her building. There she observes the death of one of the protesting revolutionaries. She jumps. A long, graceful, hallucinatory sequence floats her gently to her death. Resurrected, she appears hovering amid the warring factions. As in Parsipur's book, the fantastic, or impossible, is presented as straightforwardly as the historical.

Munis & Revolutionary Man, an eight-foot-wide photograph, depicts a scene from Neshat's film: Munis and the murdered radical are dead in the street, but their bodies have been carefully laid out, as if in a mortuary, and show no sign of violence. The street's ancient stone blocks are covered with excerpts from the novella, handwritten in tiny, overlapping lines of Farsi. We know from the film that the figures are dead, but they seem disturbingly tense.

Though *Munis* is reasonably accessible without Parsipur's book as a guide, *Faezeh* (2008) is somewhat perplexing and less effective. It depicts a garden and forest, where all of the novelist's women characters eventually congregate. Here Neshat takes on too much, conflating several story lines and departing radically from the book's deadpan presentation. Her drift toward campy surrealism is part *The Wind in the Willows* and part *Don't Look Now*, with creepy figures springing in and out of the woods. All that's missing is Neshat's characteristic self-possession and elegance.

—Rex Weil