Figuration/Abstraction: Fairfield Porter/Willem de Koonig

Jud Yalkut

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While the worlds of figurative art and abstract expressionism may seem to be eons apart for the average viewer, it was the premise of "Figuration/Abstraction: Fairfield Porter/ Willem de Kooning" to explore, in the words of curator David Leach, "a shared attitude regarding the essentiality of image making, the collision of realism and abstraction which highlighted a long period of East Coast painting characterized by these two major figures, Leach has seen a love of color and a strong interest in shape" as well as "a love for the fast-moving gestural mark."

Simplication and search for the essence of his subject matter would seem to have been the prime motivating factor for much of Fairfield Porter's work. Though part of the New York scene since 1939—when he met de Kooning—Porter's early works to be abstractions, and later when he was a co-member of the well to do artistic community of southern Long Island—Porter remained committed to the expressiveness of the figurative image. This concern was shared by de Kooning who, throughout his career, returned to the human figure as inspiration, albeit in fantastically fractured aspects as attested to in his multiple views of Porter's Seated Woman (Self Portrait), c. 1939, with its shaded modeling and suggested extremities.

Through the careful placement of adjacent works by these two artists, this exhibit achieved its quiet, didactic purpose. With juxtaposing of works, the contrasts and similarities of the lesser-known Porter, "Figuration/Abstraction" revealed the freedom of technique overlaying a vital concern for fundamental shapes common to both artists. This common well of inspiration drew from both the great masters of the past and the pioneer masters of the early 20th century. Porter's and de Kooning's works included Studies of Men (1939) in which carefully drafted pencil renderings of figurative details in multiple views recall Leonardo da Vinci's sketchbooks. Also included to his Studies for Seated Man (Self Portrait), c. 1939, with its shaded modeling and suggested extremities. These are seen beside Porter's Lizzie the Infant (1936-57) where the minimalist line projections of body and leg are surmounted by the head's poignant eyes and articulated lips. De Kooning's Acrobat (c. 1942) is the artist as acrobat in cubistic relaxation, momentarily free of the perils of e. e. cummings' poet as acrobat in cubistic relaxation, momentarily free of the perils of e. e. cummings' poet as acrobat in cubistic relaxation, momentarily free of the perils of e. e. cummings' poet as acrobat in cubistic relaxation, momentarily free of the perils of e. e. cummings' poet as acrobat in cubistic relaxation, momentarily free of the perils of e. e. cummings' poet as acrobat in cubistic relaxation, momentarily free of the perils of e. e. cummings' poet as...