

11-1995

## Figuration/Abstraction: Fairfield Porter/Willem de Koonig

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### Repository Citation

Yalkut, J. (1995). Figuration/Abstraction: Fairfield Porter/Willem de Koonig. *Dialogue: Arts in the Midwest*, 18 (6), 20.

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DAYTON OH

"Figuration/Abstraction: Fairfield Porter/  
Willem de Kooning"/Wright State University  
Art Galleries/17 September-22 October

By Jud Yalkut

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 essentials of image making." In 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."

Simplification 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 and other soon to be prominent abstractionists, 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 monumental "Woman" series.

Through the careful placement of adjacent works by these two artists, this exhibition achieved its quiet, didactic purpose. With a justified stronger concentration on the works of the lesser-known Porter, "Figuration/Abstraction" revealed the freedom of technique overlaying a vital concern for fundamental shapes common to both artists. Their common well of inspiration drew from both the great masters of the past and the pioneer masters of the early 20th century.

De Kooning's early drawings included *Studies of Men* (1939) in which carefully drafted pencil renderings of figural details in multiple views recall Leonardo da Vinci's sketchbooks. Also included is 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* (1956-57) where the minimal linear 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 tightrope walker who is cheered on by the crowds only as long as he holds his precarious balance.

The balance between recognizable image and formal composition hovers over the mysterious encounter of human emotion with the textural surface of reality. In *White Tree Stump*, 1961, Porter revels in the dramatic subtlety of the twisted, shaded stump within patchy earthen colors of rocks and ground strata seen against deep green forests. The free-form wash outlines of de Kooning's lithograph *Landing Place* (1971) extend into the grayblackness of ocean mystery. Light breaks through the trees in Porter's *Woods and Rocks*, 1964, highlighting a bright birch with broken limbs against singing greens. In de Kooning's lithograph *Woman at Clearwater Beach* (1971), broad lines flowing over anthropomorphic forms suggest the squatting figure.

Throughout the exhibition, the particularities of place resonate with the presence of humanity. The broad greens and bare trees with splotchy textures seen in Porter's *View of Studio with Elm Trunk* (1962) encapsulate a Southampton fall landscape mood. The greens, pale browns, and hillside grays of his *Orieto* (1967) wind a road through broadly suggested stones. The 1968 *Still Life with*



Fairfield Porter, *Self Portrait*, 1968, oil on canvas.

*White Boats* layers careful details upon the Matisse-like aspect of brilliant exteriors seen through a window flanked by a still-life study. Small, linear clouds and a calligraphic suggestion of boats exist in the fugitive pencil marks of *Boats in the Bay* (1961). De Kooning treats his *Sting Ray* (1971) as a sprawling sea creature wherein large black shapes suggest the depths from which it emerged.

Porter's *Self-Portrait* (1968) extends the landscape palette into portraiture with the green tie, blue shirt and tan pants seen before a bright window of exterior light. His gestural sense is unleashed in the contour simplifications of *Untitled (Coastline)*, 1962, where dark and light pencil lines vie in the contrast of a curving coast and hidden houses. The dynamism of these lines is paralleled by the bold calligraphy of de Kooning's lithograph *Valentine*. Their shared value of an economy of means and a directness of approach can be seen even in such bold contrasts as the vibrant flesh pinks and voluptuous red curves of de Kooning's *Woman* (1966), and the close-hatched, gentle lines and bright patches of Porter's *Untitled (Seated Woman Reading with Lamp)*.

Jud Yalkut is a graphic/media artist and writer living in Dayton.

GAMBIER OH

"Portraits of the Holocaust"/Jeffrey Wolin/  
Olin Art Gallery/Kenyon College/24 August-1  
October

By Daniel P. Younger

Jeffrey Wolin's black-and-white photographic portraits of Holocaust survivors, which incorporate the handwritten narratives of their subjects, may be understood as a part of an ongoing zeitgeist—an unprecedented and widespread cultural remembering of the horrors of the Nazi "Final Solution." Wolin's project embodies the imperative of our historical moment: we recall so that we may never forget.

Preceding the "Portraits of the Holocaust" series and his contacts with Holocaust survivors (primarily in the Indianapolis and Chicago areas), Wolin evolved a technique for writing on his images, alternately with silver or black pen, by means of blocking out broad positive and negative spaces of the photograph. Wolin photographed each of the survivors (some of whom were contacted initially through the Jewish Studies program at Indiana University) at the conclusion of his interviews with them.

Many of the artist's subjects, like Miso Vogel—the only survivor among a family of seven—poignantly and self-referentially display their tattooed prisoner numbers, pic-