

## ETHEL SCHWABACHER (1903–1984)

Photographed in about 1924 or 1925, Ethel Kremer—then in her twenties—is dressed in the height of women’s fashions in Paris and New York.<sup>1</sup> She wears a fur-trimmed wide-shouldered wrap coat and a beret-style turban hat. Lacking feathers and frills, her attire gives off a masculine aspect, while her relaxed pose conveys her androgynous persona: she slouches on a diagonal and holds a cigarette, while gazing both toward and past the photographer, whose identity is unknown. She is at once sophisticated and bohemian, guarded and self-confident, outward and inward. The photograph captures the complexity of an artist (who became Ethel Schwabacher after her marriage in 1935) driven constantly by a search in her life and art to find and understand her identity—as a woman, artist, and American—in relation to the tide-breaking ideas and events of the second half of the twentieth century.

Schwabacher was at the center of the New York art world from the 1940s through the 1960s. She was represented by Betty Parsons Gallery, the leading showcase for the avant-garde, where she had five solo exhibitions and was in fourteen group shows. Her friends and acquaintances included leading artists of the era. In addition to painting, she was a skilled writer and published her first book, in 1957, on the life and work of her friend and mentor Arshile Gorky (1904–1948). Her authentic and interpretive account emphasized how Gorky’s Surrealist method, stressing a “freedom from the purely conscious,” was of foundational significance to the Abstract Expressionist movement.<sup>2</sup> She also wrote extensively on the nature of art and on the work of other artists, including the painter John Charles Ford (1929–2014). Schwabacher was featured in Whitney Museum annuals almost every year between 1949 and 1963. Committed to the Civil Rights movement, she actively opposed segregation in the 1950s and 1960s and expressed the battle for a just humanity as a mythic and epic event in her art. In 1987, a traveling retrospective of her work was organized by the Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University. It was curated by the art history professors Greta Berman (Juilliard School) and Mona Hadler (Brooklyn College, City University of New York), both of whom contributed to the show’s catalogue. Schwabacher’s daughter Brenda S. Webster and the poet Judith Emlyn Johnson were the co-editors of a volume containing excerpts from the journal she kept from 1967 to 1980, *Hungry for Light*, published in 1993 by Indiana University Press, Bloomington. In 2016–17, Schwabacher was among the twelve artists included in the landmark traveling exhibition, *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, organized by the Denver Art Museum. Belonging to the first generation of Abstract Expressionist women artists, Schwabacher achieved recognition and respect in the New York art world for both her work and her intellect.

Schwabacher’s works belong to numerous museum collections including the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the Denver Art Museum, Colorado; the Jewish Museum, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota; the Mint Museum, North Carolina; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and the Yale University Art Gallery, Connecticut.

Berry Campbell is pleased to announce its representation of the Estate of Ethel Schwabacher, where the artist will join a stable of other women whose ambitious, independent, and insightful art is essential to a complete historical understanding of the era.

Schwabacher was born in New York on May 20, 1903, to Eugene George and Agnes (née Oppenheimer) Kremer and raised in a privileged and creative context. Her maternal cousin was the poet George Oppen (1908–1984), an early publisher of the writings of Ezra Pound (1885–1972). In 1908, the Kremer family

moved to Pelham, New York, and Ethel attended the Horace Mann School in Riverdale. There, while still in high school, she enrolled at the Art Students League, studying briefly with the Canadian American painter and teacher of anatomical and figural rendering, George Bridgman (1864–1923), as well as with the French American modernist figural sculptor, Robert Laurent (1890–1970), with whom she continued to receive instruction until 1927. Initially intending to become a sculptor, she also studied sculpture with Brenda Putnam (1890–1975) and Georg J. Lober (1891–1961), both figural sculptors. In 1920, after a lingering illness, Ethel's father died. In his memory, she created a three-panel plaster bas relief, dedicated to the heroes and heroines of World War I.<sup>3</sup> Following her graduation from Horace Mann, Ethel attended the National Academy of Design (1920–21) and apprenticed for a summer in The Bronx with the Piccirilli brothers, renowned marble sculptors of Italian descent. In January 1921, she was photographed wearing a simple black dress by the German American fine-art portrait photographer Arnold Genthe (1869–1942), who captured her direct, contemplative, and unassuming demeanor.

In 1923, Ethel began a romantic relationship with Mortimer J. Adler (1902–2001), a philosopher who originated the great-books educational curriculum. With Adler, she spent many hours discussing the connection between hearing and seeing, which led her to understand both within a “reservoir of sensory responses.”<sup>4</sup> In the summer of 1923, she studied with the figurative sculptor Anna Hyatt Huntington (1876–1973). Despite Huntington's renown, Ethel perceived her study of horses under Huntington to be irrelevant to the issues of women artists, which had become her central interest.<sup>5</sup>

The year, 1927, was traumatic for Ethel: she felt abandoned by her father; her affair with Adler ended; her widowed mother became overly possessive; her brother sought treatment for mental health; and she fell in love with her analyst, the Freudian Bernard Glueck (1884–1972). All of these events led to her first of several suicide attempts. On recovery, she decided to give up sculpture for painting, enrolling in a class at the Art Students League taught by Max Weber (1881–1961), who had transitioned from Fauvism to become the foremost Cubist in the United States. About that time, she met Gorky, who would later have such an important impact on her art. In 1928, for both professional and personal reasons, she departed for Europe. There she studied painting in the South of France and then resided in Vienna, where she was psychoanalyzed by Helene Deutsch (1884–1982), a pupil and assistant to Freud, who was one of the first psychoanalysts to specialize in women.<sup>6</sup>

Ethel returned to the U.S. in 1934. That January, she and the artist Mina Boehm Metzger (1877–1975) began taking private lessons together from Gorky at his 36 Union Square studio.<sup>7</sup> Not well known at the time, Gorky was merging Cubism and Surrealism while also creating figural works. Among them are a drawing of Ethel in conté crayon (1934–35), and a sketch of her in 1943 for a painting that he did not complete.<sup>8</sup> Under Gorky's influence, Schwabacher developed a style influenced by Matisse, Cézanne, and Cubism into which she folded biomorphic Surrealism, evident in works such as an image of a chair that is also a still life that dissolves into a decorative backdrop. She explored Surrealist juxtapositions in Magritte-like collages. On August 12, 1935, she married Wolfgang Schwabacher (1898–1951), a New York lawyer who represented literary and creative clients, including the novelist Erskine Caldwell (1903–1987), the playwright Lillian Hellman (1905–1984), and Gorky. Ethel and Wolfgang had two children, Brenda, born in November 1936 and Christopher, born in August 1941. That year, Ethel was featured in a group exhibition at the Georgette Passedoit Gallery in New York.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1940s, Schwabacher developed an abstract, spontaneous method, merging art and psychoanalysis. Using a process of association, she summoned childhood memories and impressions

of the animals and nature around her in her New Jersey studio into suggestively freeing images in which archetypal forms emerge; her works were similar to those of Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) in the same years. Schwabacher also began to reference women’s issues in her art, including using a photograph of a “girl guerilla fighter” milking a cow captured from the enemy as the basis for a number of works.<sup>10</sup> Mona Hadler noted that in interviews, Schwabacher “repeatedly referred to all the cattle she depicted—cows and bulls alike—as bulls, and to bulls and flowers as representing the coexistence of the masculine and feminine.” As Hadler comments, “Surely one must question the implications of a cow called a bull inspired by a cow milked by a woman fighter—or the dazzlingly beautiful male peacock surrounded by flowers—and one discovers a complex androgynous identification on the part of the woman artist.”<sup>11</sup>

Schwabacher took care of Gorky after his cancer diagnosis in 1946. She was planning a book about him with his wife, Agnes, consisting of recordings of Gorky’s conversation “to crystallize thought and action into communicable form.”<sup>12</sup> However, in July 1948 Gorky committed suicide. The planned book was put aside but Schwabacher returned to it. Published by the Whitney Museum of American Art and completed in 1957, it constituted the first monographic account of Gorky’s life and art. Its preface was by Lloyd Goodrich and its introduction was by Meyer Schapiro (1904–1996). In one of few in-depth treatments on a contemporary artist in a hard-bound book form rather than in an exhibition catalogue, Schwabacher compensated for having to abandon her original plan by including statements made by Gorky to his friends and about art in general. In the book, she wrote that as one of Gorky’s “students,” she belonged to him.<sup>13</sup> One book reviewer remarked that Gorky had “probably revealed more of his serious side to her than he did to anyone except his wife, Agnes.”<sup>14</sup>

Schwabacher’s first solo exhibition was in February 1947 at the Passadoit Gallery. Included were oils and pastels titled with quotations from poetry by D. H. Lawrence and the Hebrew Bible—from the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Job. She sought to exemplify the poetic spirit of the biblical sayings she chose. For example, her title *A Handful of Quietness*, derives from Ecclesiastes 4:6: “Better to have one handful of quietness than two handfuls with hard work chasing the wind.” In the catalogue’s foreword, Schwabacher wrote that her struggle had been “first to break away from the cliché, the worn out memory that has no emotional or intuitional root” and to reject the “‘novelty’ which is just a new grouping of clichés; and finally to find for myself a rhythm in style which would be the rhythm of a living thing.”<sup>15</sup> An *Artnews* reviewer commented that in the show her radiant, poetic pastels revealed “affinities with Redon and the Symbolists” and noted that her titles “captured the rhythm of living things,” suggesting “the forces of nature in a brilliant shimmer of color and sweeping line.” The critic concluded: “Despite the mystical pantheistic overtones of her work, her idiom is modern and sensitively fuses flower studies with abstract design. The elliptical, somewhat Gorky-like idiom of the oils comes as a shock.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1951, Schwabacher wrote the text for the memorial exhibition of Gorky’s work, organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, which traveled to six other museum venues. The *New York Times* called her commentary “deeply sympathetic,” and mentioned that she was at “work on a life of the artist.”<sup>17</sup> Early in the same year, she began her *Women* series. Emerging from Gorky’s influence, she drew on her own experiences of pregnancy and childbirth and those of women throughout time. In her imagery, she incorporated the forms of women’s bodies, fetuses, and emblems of female fertility into dynamic all-over compositions.

On August 29, 1951, Wolfgang Schwabacher died suddenly at age fifty-three, leaving Ethel in a state of utter grief. She channeled her devastation into her art. Stripping the living and dining rooms in her New York apartment, she turned her entire space into a studio and began a series of mourning *Odes* while listening to classical music at an ear-splitting decibel.<sup>18</sup> She often played Richard Strauss's orchestral tone poem, "Death and Transfiguration," which describes a man's thoughts of his life as he lies dying, at the end receiving the transfiguration which he had desired for so long. At this time, Schwabacher limited her palette to black, white, and blood-red, painting with jagged, fierce brushwork. However, in suggestions of nature's orderly cycles, she found a method of alleviating her despair and color began to emerge.

Schwabacher had a second failed suicide attempt in 1952. Afterward she began therapy with the psychoanalyst Dr. Marianne Kris (1900–1980), who was associated with the Yale Child Development Center. Kris's pediatrician father had been a friend of Freud's, and Kris was herself a friend of Freud's daughter Anna. Marilyn Monroe was among Kris's patients. Schwabacher remained under treatment with Kris until Kris's death in 1980 and the journal Schwabacher kept at the end of her life grew out of the self-analysis that developed during her therapy.

In June 1953, Schwabacher showed her work for the first time at the Betty Parsons Gallery, located at 15 East 57th Street. The exhibition included paintings from 1951 through 1953 consisting of her *Woman*, *Ode*, and *City* series. Also included were five glass collages, now lost, in which she juxtaposed fragments of broken glass with souvenirs of her former happiness. Lloyd Goodrich wrote the catalogue's brief essay. Calling Schwabacher an "artist of sensitive intelligence" he described her art as the "product of an essentially poetic mind, capable of both lyric rapture and depths of tragic emotion." He noted that the origins of her paintings went back to "something in nature, experience or reverie, but always translated into an artistic language of singular purity," while "speaking in allusion rather than explicit statement." He commented that Schwabacher was an artist "steeped in the art and thought of our time," who "records living emotions and sensations with utter directness."<sup>19</sup> Howard Devree reviewed the show for the *New York Times*, remarking that some representational elements were suggested "but these are hardly clues to the highly-personal statements in which elusive color-shapes serve their own inscrutable purposes in a somewhat Gorky-like free brushwork."<sup>20</sup> In the following year, when Schwabacher was featured in a show sponsored by the National Council of Women of the United States that was held in May at the Riverside Museum, New York, her contributions caught the eye of the poet Frank O'Hara (1926–1966), who described them in *Artnews* as "brilliantly colored post-Gorky abstractions (with concealed images)."<sup>21</sup>

In 1955, Schwabacher was included in the Fourth Annual Stable Gallery Exhibition, which Devree called "the closest thing to an advance guard salon that the New York art world holds."<sup>22</sup> Held from 1953 until 1957, the Stable held five annual exhibitions of abstract art that became legendary. Schwabacher's second Parsons exhibition occurred in November 1956. A review in *Artnews* stated: "Turning to classic and modern Orientalism handled with the free manner of the most recent American abstractionism, her hand hesitates between the calligraph and the natural image. A year later, Parsons again featured Schwabacher in a solo show. This time Schwabacher wrote the statement that appeared in the catalogue. Remarking that "the artist no longer searches for perfect beauty," she commented: "The grueling and absorbing effort of the artist is to translate sensation, emotion, vision by means of a new logic into solid and enduring form," which "may be achieved by bringing to bear on this newness the conscious control of knowledge."<sup>23</sup> She titled a series of works from this

time *Et in Arcadia Ego* (Also in Paradise I am), referencing the memento mori images with this title by Guercini (1618–22, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome) and Nicolas Poussin (1637–38, The Louvre). Yet in works identified as “rock gardens” and “seascapes,” Schwabacher turned from brooding on mortality to convey a love of life through an embrace of the natural world. *Artnews* remarked that she was “knowing in the current abstract idiom.”<sup>24</sup>

In 1958, Schwabacher was included in *Nature in Abstraction: The Relation of Abstract Painting and Sculpture to Nature in Twentieth-Century American Art*, curated by John I. H. Baur and held at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In the following year, Schwabacher began using epic mythological subject matter to ennoble and legitimize her own psychology. She began with Oedipus, Orestes, and Prometheus, expressing powerful messages of torture, deprivation, and redemption in action paintings, using the canvas surface, as advocated by the critic Harold Rosenberg (1906–1978), as a “place to act.” A Sophocles play inspired three images of *Oedipus at Colonus*, and number two in the series (Whitney Museum of American Art) was included in *American Art of Our Century* (1961, Whitney Museum of American Art). In the catalogue the authors, Goodrich and Baur, grouped Schwabacher with Enrico Donati (1909–2008), Conrad Marca-Relli (1913–2000), Robert Motherwell (1915–1991), Mark Rothko (1903–1970), Theodoros Stamos (1922–1997), and Adja Yunkers (1900–1983), as Abstract Expressionist artists who subordinated individual brush strokes to forms from the artist’s mind or from a more general unconscious realm of feeling and emotion.<sup>25</sup> Schwabacher perceived Oedipus as a tragic figure who “unwittingly sinned,” due to the “drives that exist in us all.” But she saw that after going forth into exile and “traveling across great stretches of land,” and blinding himself, the mythical king reached his deathplace where he could feel that his sins were forgiven, knowing what they meant. In images of Orpheus and Eurydice, she questioned whether Orpheus failed to bring back his wife from the underworld due to “his wanting to prevail as a single individual . . . in a sort of idealized narcissism” or “due to some weakness of whose beginning we do not know.” She continued to wrestle with the decisions and fates of mythological figures until the end of her life, writing in her journal on May 4, 1978: “Have I not come at last to the end of a long-time journey, as Prometheus did when, finally unchained, he stepped forward from the mountain to ‘the place where’ and became an individual no longer subject to the will of Zeus?”<sup>26</sup>

Schwabacher’s fourth show at Parsons in February 1960 featured mythological subjects with the titles of *Oedipus*, *Antigone*, and *Orestes*. Dore Ashton described the works on view in the *New York Times* as “large, colorful abstractions with loose stroking and exuberant splashes of reds and blues, in which the movements suggest landscape.”<sup>27</sup> By the time of Schwabacher’s last solo exhibition at Parsons, in November 1962, she had begun dissolving overt figurative form into canvases filled with vivid, monumental, and emotive color and form. The *New York Times* described the exhibition visually: “Elegant powder-puffs of color in large canvases paneling the entire gallery produce an effect of singular warmth. The warm and glowing radiations of color produced by these drifting shapes turn the gallery into a modern and feminine version of rococo elegance.”<sup>28</sup>

Having worked throughout her life for the cause of diversity, in the 1950s, Schwabacher took an active role in the Civil Rights movement. After Wolfgang’s death, she assumed his place on the board of directors of the Greater New York Urban League and she served on the Board of Education Committee on Integration (1953–54). In the early 1960s, Schwabacher also responded powerfully in her art to the movement, especially in her *Birmingham Series* of 1963–64. Using pastel and conté crayon with emotive force, she alluded to the bombings in Birmingham of African American leaders, which were probably carried out by the Ku Klux Klan, and resulted in violent interchanges that took place between protesters

and the police as well as federal troops. In these works, she evoked the spirit of Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) in the depiction of frightened, distorted figures and faces, often with bared teeth. Although Parsons was a close friend, she refused to show Schwabacher's political works, and Schwabacher decided to seek a new gallery. In 1964, she showed the series in a solo exhibition at the Greenross Gallery at 41 East 57th Street in October–November 1964, along with a new series of expressionistic portraits. The *New York Times* cultural writer Naomi Bliven (1925–2002) wrote the catalogue's essay, commenting on the variety of people in "surprising and tender" paintings—"victims and leaders, old women and young"—which were products of the "freedom [Schwabacher] learned in abstraction," resulting in "marvelously exciting" figurative work.<sup>29</sup> A review in *Artnews* mentioned portraits capturing James Baldwin's "hypersensitive stare" and Gorky's face, coming "back through a casual, expressionistic handling."<sup>30</sup>

By the late 1960s, Schwabacher had returned to biblical and mythological subject matter in works that became more explicit but were also enigmatic and rendered with a new lyrical force. In addition, she began to work in acrylic, achieving a coloristic vibrancy evoking egg tempera works produced during the Italian Renaissance. She returned repeatedly to themes of Orpheus and Eurydice, Sisyphus, Prometheus, Antigone, and Apollo. Her "continuing therapy with Dr. Kris and her efforts to retrieve and exorcize lost childhood memories produced a mythology of its own," as noted in the *Woman's Art Journal* in 1989.<sup>31</sup> Schwabacher had two important shows in the 1970s, in 1972, at Gallery 219, at the State University of New York, Buffalo, and a joint show in 1976 with the Abstract Expressionist mosaicist Jeanne Reynal (1903–1983), at Bodley Gallery in New York City. Her Buffalo show received a long review in the *Buffalo News*, stating that Schwabacher, at age 69, was "still searching for that magic goal, the true expression of self and life in art." The article reported: "What interests her are the larger themes, life and death, love and hate, themes around which great art has flowed for centuries." Quoted in the article, Schwabacher stated: "I like art that makes me understand humanity, that makes me laugh or be aware when the sun comes up, or when it rains."<sup>32</sup> In her show with Reynal, Schwabacher mainly featured pastel portraits, which a reviewer for *Artnews* described as combining "qualities of Van Gogh's backgrounds and the new museum exhibition techniques, in which walls are painted in rich colors."<sup>33</sup> In 1973, Schwabacher wrote an article for *Leonardo* magazine titled "Formal Definitions and Myths in My Paintings." She described her many influences, including Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, William Blake, and of course, mythology. She commented that in her new paintings, she achieved a balance between formal definition and mystery by "the use of a diagonal," which focuses attention on the "precipitous divisions between stability and instability, between life and death, between the here and there, between the sense of danger and color."<sup>34</sup> Such polarities resonate throughout her art.

After 1976, illness and arthritis kept Schwabacher from painting although she continued to create drawings with magic markers. She also maintained her journal, using a pen, a typewriter, as well as dictating her thoughts into a tape recorder. "She painted in words," as noted by Greta Berman in the catalogue for Schwabacher's 1987 Rutgers retrospective.<sup>35</sup>

Schwabacher passed away on November 25, 1984. The 1987 Rutgers retrospective traveled in the following year to the Mills College Art Gallery, Oakland, and the University Art Gallery, State University of New York, Albany. In addition to her published journal, *Hungry for Light*, and her article in *Leonardo*, Schwabacher left many unpublished manuscripts that yield much insight into not only her work but the context of the New York art world over her long career.<sup>36</sup> Schwabacher's archives also contain her extensive correspondence, with many art critics and fellow artists.

Lisa N. Peters, Ph.D.

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- <sup>1</sup> The main sources on the artist are Greta Berman and Mona Hadler, *Ethel Schwabacher: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers, 1987); Judith Johnson, Jayne L. Walker, Brenda S. Webster, "Ethel Schwabacher: The Lyric/Epic and the Personal," *Woman's Art Journal* 10 (Spring–Summer 1989), pp. 3–9; and Brenda S. Webster and Judith Emlyn Johnson, eds., *Hungry for Light: The Journal of Ethel Schwabacher* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993).
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted in Hadler, p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> *Woman's Art Journal*, p. 3.
- <sup>4</sup> *Hungry for Light*, pp. 106–7.
- <sup>5</sup> Mona Hadler, "Ethel Schwabacher and the Paradise of the Real," in Berman and Hadler, p. 5.
- <sup>6</sup> Deutsch's work later came to be seen as anti-feminist.
- <sup>7</sup> *Arshile Gorky Catalogue Raisonné*, catalogue entry, *Sketch for a Portrait of Ethel Schwabacher*, ca. 1943p. 269 (<https://www.gorkycatalogue.org/catalogue/entry.php?id=2033>). The lessons were three hours a week for three hours each.
- <sup>8</sup> Gorky, *Portrait of Ethel Kremer*, ca. 1934–35, conte crayon on paper, 25 by 19 inches, Private collection (<https://www.gorkycatalogue.org/catalogue/entry.php?id=782>) and Gorky, *Sketch for a Portrait of Ethel Schwabacher*, ca. 1943, oil on canvas, 25 by 20 inches, Private collection), p. 269. According to Agnes "Mougouch" Gorky (1921–2013), Gorky's wife, Gorky created the sketch on top of an old canvas as the sketch for a portrait that he never created.
- <sup>9</sup> Howard Devree, "A Reviewer's Notebook: Brief Comments on Some of the Recently Opened Shows," *New York Times*, June 22, 1941, p. X7. The Passadoit gallery opened in April 1935.
- <sup>10</sup> Mona Hadler, "Ethel Schwabacher and the Paradise of the Real," in Berman and Hadler, pp. 3–5.
- <sup>11</sup> Mona Hadler, "Ethel Schwabacher and the Paradise of the Real," in Berman and Hadler, p. 5.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert Reiff, "Reviewed, Arshile Gorky by Ethel K. Schwabacher," *College Art Journal* 18 (Winter 1959), p. 191.
- <sup>13</sup> Ethel K. Schwabacher, *Arshile Gorky* (New York: Macmillan in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1957).
- <sup>14</sup> Reiff, p. 191.
- <sup>15</sup> Ethel Schwabacher, "Foreword," *Pastels and Oils by Ethel Schwabacher*, exh. cat. (New York: Passadoit Gallery, 1947).
- <sup>16</sup> "Ethel Kremer Schwabacher," *Artnews* 44 (February 1, 1947), p. 50.
- <sup>17</sup> "Whitney to Offer Arshile Gorky Art," *New York Times*, January 4, 1951, p. 27.
- <sup>18</sup> *Woman's Art Journal*, p. 6.
- <sup>19</sup> Lloyd Goodrich, *Schwabacher: Paintings and Glass Collages, 1951–1953*, exh. cat. (New York: Betty Parsons Gallery, 1953).
- <sup>20</sup> Howard Devree, "Diverse Moderns: Stress on Expressionist and Abstract Approaches in the New Shows," *New York Times*, June 7, 1953, p. X8.
- <sup>21</sup> F[rank] O'H[ara], "Ten Women Artists," *Artnews* 52 (June 1, 1954), p. 56.
- <sup>22</sup> H[oward] D[evree], "Advance Guard at the Stable Gallery," *New York Times*, April 27, 1955, p. 26.
- <sup>23</sup> Ethel Schwabacher, *Ethel Schwabacher: Paintings, 1956–57*, exh. cat. (New York: Betty Parsons Gallery, 1957).
- <sup>24</sup> "Ethel Schwabacher," *Artnews* 56 (December 1, 1957), p. 11.
- <sup>25</sup> Lloyd Goodrich and John I. H. Baur, *American Art of Our Century*, exh. cat. (Frederick A. Praeger published for the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1961), pp. 220, 222, and 226.
- <sup>26</sup> *Hungry for Light*, p. 164.
- <sup>27</sup> Dore Ashton, "Art: Double Anniversary Celebrated at Exhibition," *New York Times*, February 5, 1960, p. 24.
- <sup>28</sup> "This Week Around the Galleries," *New York Times*, November 4, 1962, p. X21.
- <sup>29</sup> Naomi Bliven, *Ethel Schwabacher*, exh. cat. (New York: Greenross Gallery, 1964).
- <sup>30</sup> N.E., "Ethel Schwabacher," *Artnews* 63 (December 1, 1964), p. 14.
- <sup>31</sup> *Woman's Art Journal*, p. 8.
- <sup>32</sup> Jean Reeves, "A Successful Artist Works On, Still Seeking the Best Painting of All," *Buffalo News*, June 7, 1972, p. 91.
- <sup>33</sup> Ann Sargent Wooster, "Jeanne Reynal and Ethel Schwabacher," *Artnews* 75 (March 1, 1976), p. 142.
- <sup>34</sup> Ethel Schwabacher, "Formal Definitions and Myths in My Paintings," *Leonardo* 6 (Autumn 1973), p. 55.
- <sup>35</sup> Greta Berman, "Ethel Schwabacher's Later Years: A Voyage Into Self," in Berman and Hadler, p. 20.
- <sup>36</sup> These include copious notebooks she kept from 1948 to 1974, her 1974 essay on John Charles Ford, an essay titled "The Portrait as Image," and "Comments on Work, 1971–1976."

CV

Birth, 1903

Art Students League, New York, 1918

Studied sculpture with George Bridgeman

National Academy of Design, New York, 1920

Studied sculpture with Brenda Putnam, 1921

Studied sculpture with Anna Hyatt Huntington, 1923

Art Students League, New York, 1926–1927

Studied painting with Max Weber and sculpture with Robert Laurent  
Independent study in Europe, 1928-34  
Studied with Arshile Gorky, 1934-36  
Death, 1984

**SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

Passedoit Gallery, New York, 1935.  
Passedoit Gallery, New York, *Ethel Schwabacher: Pastels and Oils*, 1947.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, *Schwabacher: Paintings and Glass Collages, 1951-1953*, 1953.  
Women's City Club, New York, 1955.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, *Schwabacher*, 1956.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1957.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, *Ethel Schwabacher: Recent Paintings*, 1960.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1962.  
Greenross Gallery, New York, 1964.  
Gallery 219, State University of New York, Buffalo, New York, *Visions on the Way: Paintings by Ethel Schwabacher*, 1972.  
Bodley Gallery, New York, *Of People: Ethel Schwabacher Pastels, Jeanne Reynal Mosaics*, 1976.  
Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, *Ethel Schwabacher: A Retrospective Exhibition*, 1987. (Traveled to Mills College Art Gallery, Oakland, California, 1988; University Art Gallery, State University of New York, Albany, New York, 1988)  
Gallery Schlesinger-Boisante, New York, *Ethel Schwabacher: Paintings from the Fifties*, 1987.  
871 Fine Arts, San Francisco, California, *Ethel Schwabacher: Paintings from the 1950s and 1960s*, 1988.  
Things of Beauty Art Gallery, Albany, New York, *Ethel Schwabacher: Mythical Paintings*, 1988-89.  
Gallery Schlesinger, New York, *Ethel Schwabacher: Abstract Expressionist Works*, 1989.  
Gallery Schlesinger, New York, *Ethel Schwabacher: Hungry for Light*, 1993.  
Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Women! Women! (of the 50s)*, 2016.  
Berry Campbell, New York, *Ethel Schwabacher: Woman in Nature (Paintings from the 1950s)*, 2023.  
Berry Campbell, New York, *The Early Sixties*, 2025.

**GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Sculpture, Watercolors, and Drawings*, 1947.  
Passedoit Gallery, New York, 1947.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, 1949-1950.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, 1951-1952.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, 1952-1953.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Recent Acquisitions*, 1953.  
Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, *149<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture*, 1954.  
Riverside Museum, New York, *10 Women Artists*, 1954.  
Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 1954.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, 1955-1956.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1956.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition of Sculpture, Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings*, 1956-1957.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition of Sculpture, Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings*, 1957-1958.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Nature in Abstraction*, 1958.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *The Museum and Its Friends: Twentieth-Century American Art from Collections of the Friends of the Whitney Museum*, 1958-1959  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1958.  
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., *Twenty-Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, 1959.  
Brooklyn Museum, New York, *20<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Watercolor Exhibition*, 1959.  
John Herron Art Institute, Indiana University, 1959.  
Indianapolis Art Institute, Indiana, 1959.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1959.  
American Federation of the Arts, New York, 1959-60.  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, *60 American Painters, 1960: Abstract Expressionist Painting of the Fifties*, 1960.  
Dord Fitz Gallery, Amarillo, Texas, 1960.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1960.  
I.B.M. Gallery, New York, 1960.  
University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1960.  
Mexico City Museum, Mexico, *Inter-American Biennial*, 1960.  
Brooklyn Museum, New York, *21<sup>st</sup> Biennial International Watercolor Exhibition*, 1961.  
Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, *The 1961 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, 1961-1962.  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition 1961: Contemporary Painting*, 1961-1962.  
Whitney Museum of Art, New York, *Thirtieth Anniversary Exhibition*, 1961.  
Dord Fitz Gallery, Amarillo, Texas, 1961.  
Dustin Rice Gallery, New York, 1961.  
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Michigan, *Watercolor Exhibition*, 1961.  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Penthouse Exhibition*, 1962.  
Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, *Inaugural Exhibition*, 1962.  
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1962.  
Sidney Wolfson Gallery, New York, 1962.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Sixty Years of American Art: Works from the Permanent Collection*, 1963-1964.

Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1963.

Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Selections from the Art Lending Service*, 1963.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Annual Exhibition 1963: Contemporary American Painting*, 1963-64.

The St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri, 1963.

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, 1963. (lending service)

Baltimore Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, 1963. (lending service)

Greenross Gallery, New York, 1964.

Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1964. (lending service)

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Twentieth-Century Works from the Permanent Collection*, 1967.

Finch College Museum of Art, New York, *Betty Parsons's Private Collection*, 1968.

Graham Gallery, New York, 1969.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Women in the Permanent Collection 1970-71*.

Museum of Religious Art, Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, New York, *The Sacred Image in Traditional and Contemporary Art, East and West*, 1977-78.

Rutgers University Art Gallery, New Brunswick, New Jersey, *Realism and Realities: The Other Side of American Painting, 1940-1960*, 1982.

Gallery Schlesinger-Boisante, New York, *Abstraction-Re-Visions of the 1950s*, 1988.

Graham Gallery, New York, *The 30s and 40s: Paintings by Women Artists*, 1988.

871 Fine Arts, San Francisco, California, *Abstraction/1950s*, 1989.

Knoxville Museum of Art, Tennessee, *American Women Artists: The 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 1989-90. (Traveled to Queensborough Community College Art Gallery, Queens, New York, 1990.)

Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions*, 1989. (Traveled to Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Florida, 1989; Terra Museum of American Art, Chicago, Illinois, 1990; Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1990; Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990)

The Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, New York, *Watercolors from the Abstract Expressionist Era*, 1990.

The Gallery at Bristol-Myers Squibb, Princeton, New Jersey, *Watercolor Across the Ages: With Selected 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Works*, 1991.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Women of the Fifties*, 1993.

Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, New York, *Reclaiming Artists of the New York School, Toward a More Inclusive View of the 1950s*, 1994.

The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, *Dark Images, Bright Prospects: The Survival of the Figure after World War II*, 1997.

Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, New York, *Women and Abstract Expressionism: Painting and Sculpture, 1945-59*, 1997. (Traveled to Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York)

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Artists of the 1950s*, 1997.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Artists of the 1950s: The Development of Abstraction*, 1998.

Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York, *Shaping a Generation: The Art and Artists of*

*Betty Parsons*, 1999.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Art for Art's Sake—Credo of the 50s*, 2000.

Gary Snyder Fine Art, New York, *Abstract Expressionism: Expanding the Canon*, 2001.

Gary Snyder Fine Art, New York, *500 Works on Paper 1922-2002*, 2002.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Buffie Johnson, Transcendentalist & Women Artists of the 50s*, 2002.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Betty Parsons and The Women*, 2005. (Traveled to The Opalka Gallery, The Sage Colleges, Albany, New York)

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Paper Works by Abstract Masters*, 2006.

Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, New York, *In Color, Recent Gifts to the Baruch College Collection*, 2006.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Buffie Johnson & Friends*, 2007.

Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, *Pathways and Parallels: Roads to Abstract Expressionism*, 2007.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Masters of Abstraction*, 2008.

Robert Miller Gallery, New York, *Beyond the Canon, Small Scale American Abstraction, 1945-1965*, 2008-09.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Paper Proposes Pleasure & Sculptors*, 2009.

Instituto Cervantes, New York, Amster Yard Gallery, *The Spanish Nexus: Spanish Artists in New York, 1930-1960*, 2009-10.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *50s & 60s Abstract Artists, "50s & 60s Prices?"*, 2011.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Little Gems: Small Paintings and Paper Pieces*, 2011.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *TALL & small, Abstract Paintings and Sculptures*, 2013-14.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Abstract Approaches*, 2014-15.

Denver Art Museum, Denver, Colorado, *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, 2016. (Traveled to Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina, 2017; Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, California, 2017)

Amar Gallery, London, England, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, 2018.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Abstract-Schmabstract*, 2019.

Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, *Heroines of Abstract Expressionism*, 2019.

Anita Shapolsky Gallery, New York, *Precious Gems*, 2021.

Whitechapel Gallery, London, *Action/Gesture/Paint: A Global Story of the Women of Abstraction 1940 – 1970*, 2023. (Traveling to Fondation Vincent Van Gogh, Arles; Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany)

Southampton Arts Center, New York, *Heroines of the Abstract Expressionist Era: From the New York School to The Hamptons*, 2023.

Berry Campbell, New York, *Perseverance*, 2024.

Telfair Museums, Atlanta, Georgia, *Primary: Artists Working in Red, Yellow, and Blue* 2025.

Wichita Art Museum, Kansas, *Abstract Expressionists: The Women*, 2025. (Traveling to Muscarelle Museum of Art at William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia; Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky; Grinnell College Museum of Art, Iowa; Mobile Museum of Art, Alabama) Brattleboro Museum, Vermont, *Singing in Unison, Part 13: Homage to Meyer Schapiro*, 2025-2026.

## MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Anita Shapolsky Art Foundation, Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania  
The Art Museum of Greater Lafayette, Indiana  
Brooklyn Museum, New York  
Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York  
University of Delaware, University Gallery, Newark, Delaware  
Denver Art Museum, Colorado  
Femmes Artistes Musée Mougins, France  
The Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, Long Island, New York  
Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Scotland  
The Jewish Museum, New York  
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota  
Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, The City University of New York  
Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey  
Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida  
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona  
The Rockefeller University, New York  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California  
Smithsonian American Art Museum and Renwick Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York  
Sweet Briar College Art Collection and Galleries, Sweet Briar, Virginia  
Syracuse University Art Museum, New York  
Telfair Museums, Savannah, Georgia  
Tougaloo College Art Collections, Mississippi  
Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas  
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut  
Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts  
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut  
Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey