



HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN

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CONTACT: Shelley Farmer, Director (shelleyf@HirschAndAdler.com)
Madeleine Hermann, Coordinator (madeleineh@HirschAndAdler.com)
Tel: 212-535-8810

Prelude: The Early Work of Franz Kline

April 24 – May 30, 2025

New York, NY—March 18, 2025—Hirschl & Adler Modern is delighted to announce an exhibition of early works by American Abstract Expressionist painter Franz Kline (1910–1962). The installation will feature more than 20 paintings and works on paper from 1940 to 1950, before Kline debuted his large-scale black-and-white canvases in his first solo exhibition at the Charles Egan Gallery, New York, in 1950.

Franz Kline is celebrated for his powerfully gestural black-and-white paintings incorporating abstract motifs and physical brushwork. Less known, however, is the stylistic experimentation that preceded and, in some ways, presaged the artist’s now iconic work. This exhibition focuses on the imagery Kline produced *prior* to his affiliation with New York School artists Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Hans Hoffman, and Philip Guston.

Originally trained as a figurative painter, Kline was an exceptional draftsman. Unlike other post-war Abstract Expressionists who sought out European precedents, Kline embraced the urban landscape of New York City and rural industrial scenes around his childhood home of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Marked by a distinctly realist approach, the street scenes, interiors, and portraits from this period show Kline grappling with what he wanted to paint and who he wanted to be as an artist. Although figurative in appearance, the paintings reveal the flattened space, reduction of form, bold outlines, and daring composition that would define Kline’s mature work.

Of early works, *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith once wrote, “The works themselves reveal how Kline’s considerable talents for drawing and painting culminate in the architectonic calligraphies of his mature style ... he was almost from the start an impressive painter. Had he never made his

black-and whites, he would still be an artist worth cherishing” (“Expressionism’s Sooty Anomaly,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2013).

The artworks in this presentation come from the collection of the artist’s friend and earliest patron I. David Orr (1904–1997) of Long Island, New York. Orr acquired examples over a twenty-year period, which illustrated not only Kline’s stylistic evolution, but also the parallel evolution of Orr’s own taste as a collector. Together they speak to the seismic shift that took place in American visual arts during the 1940s and made New York the center of the art world, while offering rare insight into the artistic process and emergence of one of the most influential artists of the 20th century.

This marks the first time that most of these works have been offered on the market since they were acquired by Mr. Orr eight decades ago. In December 2024, Hirschl & Adler successfully debuted a selection of related work from Orr in the Kabinett Sector at Art Basel Miami Beach. Many of the works in this exhibition have only been seen publicly when loaned by Orr to important traveling solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Art (now San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

Franz Kline (b. 1910, Wilkes-Barre, PA; d. 1962, New York) studied at Boston University and at the Heatherley School of Fine Art, London, before settling in New York. His work was shown in the groundbreaking exhibition *The New American Painting* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1958, traveled to Basel, Milan, Madrid, Berlin, Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, and London). Kline’s major solo exhibitions include the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1968); the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (1979); Cincinnati Art Museum (1985); the Menil Collection, Houston (1994); Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (1994); and Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2004), among others.

Prelude: The Early Work of Franz Kline opens at Hirschl & Adler Modern on Thursday, April 24, and runs through Friday, May 30, 2025. Located on the 9th floor of the Fuller Building, at the corner of 57th Street and Madison Avenue, Hirschl & Adler Modern is open Monday through Friday, from 9:30 am to 5:15 pm until May 23. After Memorial Day the gallery hours are Monday through Friday, from 9:30 am to 4:45 pm.

This exhibition will be accompanied by a digital catalogue. For additional information or images, contact Shelley Farmer, Director, or Madeleine Hermann, Coordinator, at 212-535-8810 (phone) or by email at shellefy@HirschAndAdler.com or madeleineh@HirschAndAdler.com. Please visit our website at www.HirschAndAdler.com for an online preview of the exhibition.