

Lazevnick

ART 309

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### Willem de Kooning: Woman and Bicycle

The painting *Woman and Bicycle*, by Willem de Kooning in 1952 has many unique elements. De Kooning utilizes various techniques involving color, composition, and subject matter that implies the influence of Abstract Expressionism. Abstract Expressionism in painting in America is characterized by bold colors and large brush strokes. In this painting, *Woman and Bicycle*, there is a wide variety of color choices that seem almost child-like in their haphazard scheme. The linework and central composition of this piece also add to a general tone of immaturity through abstraction. The subject matter of the woman and a blurred bicycle in the background seem crude and insulting in the case of the woman. Overall, through the color, composition and subject matter, the tone of this painting by Willem de Kooning is one of erotica and sexism veiled under the sophistication of Abstract Expressionism.

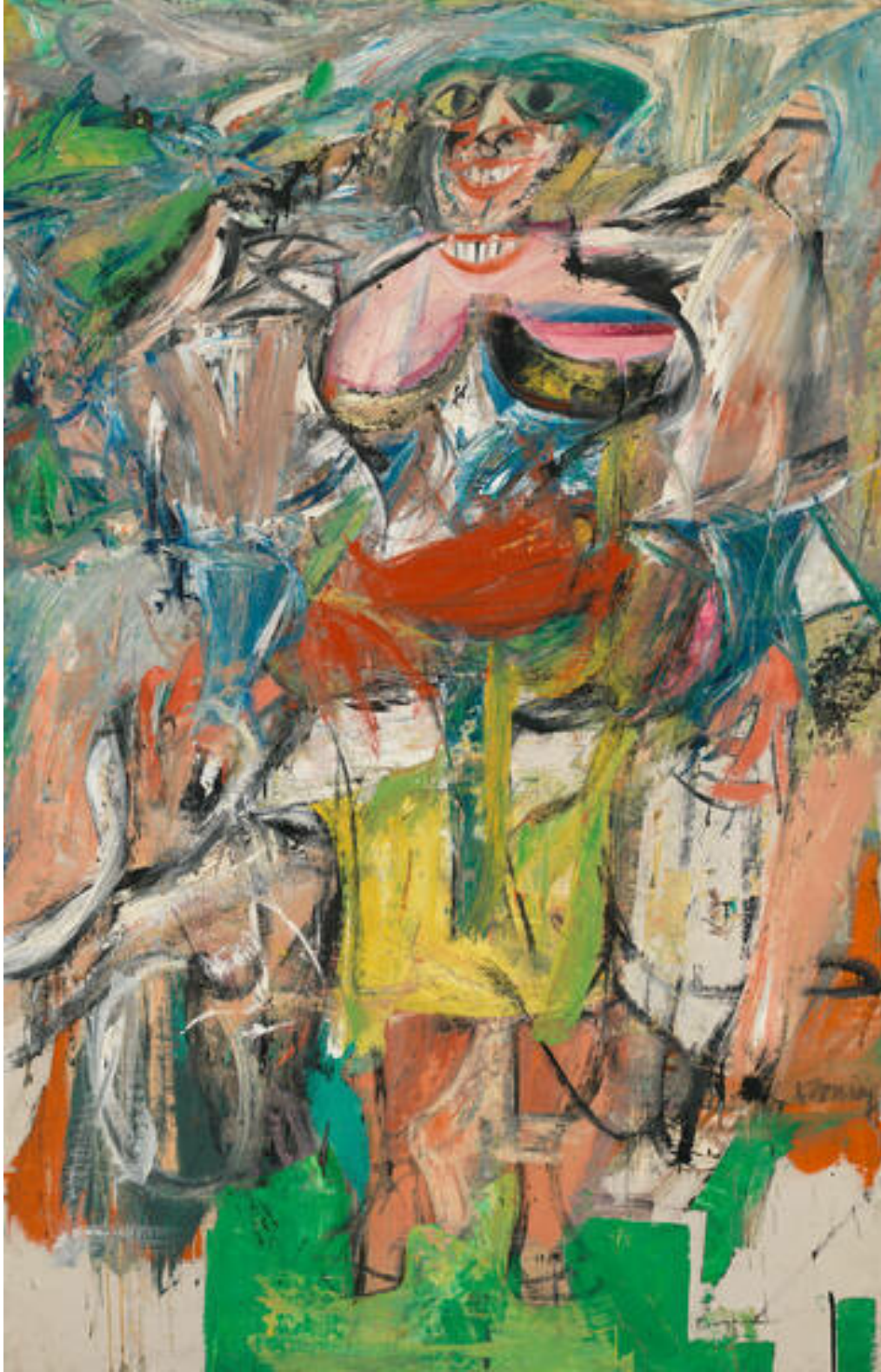
The color in the painting *Woman and Bicycle* seems to be suggesting an outside scenery, such as a park or side street. However, there are so many colors going on at once that the work almost feels immature, or like a child's rendition of a park. The pure bright green pigment used for grass, and plain orange for skin tones. Having the woman be in the center of the composition also speaks to a child-like nature of painting: putting the subject matter in the dead center, with minor details surrounding it. Through his color and compositional choices, Willem de Kooning is giving his work a tone of haphazard unsophistication, and is therefore giving the woman depicted in the painting a sense of childish immaturity and almost stupidity.

In terms of the subject matter of this *Woman and Bicycle*: the woman is the central figure and the bicycle is more implied rather than rendered and easily recognizable. The woman is mostly abstracted, however there seems to be special attention to her feet, face, and breasts. Her feet are given what looks to be black strappy heels. Her face is rendered so she has an uncanny smile that is quite off putting. Her eyes are depicted much larger than what a realistic face could handle and her smile almost looks more like a sneer. Her breasts are given a heavy black outline, which causes them to be the focus of the entire painting, as nothing else is given as dark of an outline in the composition. This attention to her breasts makes it seem as if the identity and purpose of the woman is determined by them. The lack of detail in all her other features, except her eyes, emphasizes the fact that her breasts are clearly what de Kooning thought was the most important part of her.

Abstract Expressionism can be seen as a more masculine style and was exclusive to many Abstract Expressionist female artists. The emphasis on bold strokes and action painting made it a more macho art form with little finesse. One gets the same impression in *Woman and Bicycle*: this was a painting made by a man, for other men to look at. The strokes and techniques in this painting look like they were done hastily, even if they were well thought out. This is yet another characteristic of Abstract Expressionism that de Kooning may be utilizing. However, the use of an Abstract Expressionist style does not excuse the obviously erotic rendition of a woman, with little thought put in to illustrating the personality or intellect of the woman herself.

Overall, the *Woman and Bicycle* painting by Willem de Kooning in 1952 looks like it is a part of the Abstract Expressionist movement that took place in America. However, this specific painting seems to be dealing with themes of sexism and erotica as there is an effort to make the painting and subject matter seem more childlike, and there is distinct attention to the face and

breasts of the woman. The face is deliberately out of proportion to the head and the breasts are heavily outlined with black paint. All these elements serve to make the woman, and the entire painting: seem immature and degrading of women as de Kooning is diluting the woman down to what he deems most important about her.



Willem de Kooning, *Woman and Bicycle*, 1952–1953

<https://whitney.org/collection/works/1081>

