

JOOP SANDERS

FROM THE 1950s

COVER

Untitled, 1956
Oil on canvas
23 ¾ × 25 ⅝ in (60.3 × 65.1 cm)

Joop Sanders produced the work in this exhibition during his four-year sojourn to Europe from 1955–1959. Based primarily in his native Amsterdam, Sanders and his family also spent nine months in Palma, Mallorca, Spain.

During this period, Sanders exhibited in both group and solo exhibitions throughout Europe. Solo shows include Galerie CCC in Schiedam, Netherlands (1957), Galerie Espace in Haarlem, Netherlands (1957), New Vision Gallery in London, England (1957), and Galerie du Haute-Pavé in Paris, France (1958), culminating in a solo exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1960.

Sanders was the first American Abstract Expressionist to have a solo show at the Stedelijk Museum. The original essay by Thomas B. Hess, which is reproduced here, was written for Sanders' 1960 Stedelijk Museum exhibition catalogue.

JOOP SANDERS

In 1948, while first meeting the advanced painters and sculptors who, a decade later, would become famous as the "New York School," I attended many informal symposia (it is embarrassing to recall that I even addressed a few of them).

The program was usually an earnest speech following by enraged statements posed in the form of questions only if the phrase "You are an imbecile" can in any way be considered an interrogation. As the atmosphere became heated Philip Pavia would beam, Landes Lewitin would swivel his head around like a cop at a busy corner, Milton Resnick would wave a bony finger at Jack Tworkov who, in turn, would look with a jutting chin at Ad Reinhardt, who would shrug his shoulders; Elaine de Kooning would make a soft incisive statement, Willem de Kooning a loud one; Esteban Vicente would grin knowingly; Barnet Newman would bring in Kierkegaard and, from a back corner, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., would get up and leave as Harold Rosenberg or Clement Greenberg attempted resumés. At least this is one recollection, from the top of the head; and I also recall that usually seated right in front of me would be a couple quietly holding hands, looking into each others eyes and smiling at some gentle private joke.



Isca and Joop Sanders in Joop's studio at
Casa Marchesa, Palma, Mallorca, 1956

I was introduced to them as the Sanders and was told that Joop was painting in a new style. Later I saw his pictures in some of the huge lively exhibitions the artists themselves organized in empty stores and lofts (no one in New York with the exception of Pollock was selling any paintings).

At the time, Joop obviously was deeply influenced by de Kooning who had embarked on his series of paintings of *Woman*, and, as it turned out, de Kooning's influence was the healthiest, the most open and stimulating of the moment—as many of Joop's colleagues can testify. They went on to discover, or invent, some of the most original forms of the 1950s.

Shortly thereafter the Sanders went to Europe where, I heard, he was establishing a growing reputation.

Last year he returned to New York and, this February, held an exhibition at the Stuttman Gallery of new paintings and collages. It is these which this forward accompanies to Holland.

Joop Sanders has left the figure for abstractions that relate to nature and to the cycles and signs of growth and death. A recurring title, "Budding Grove," comes from Proust, and some of Swann's violent jealousy as well as Verdurin's moral dilemma and Marcel's infinite longing are appropriate parallels to Sanders' green sprouting and dissolving shapes. The too solid flesh is resolved into a leaf dew. Water and steam circulate, there is a fluid motion and haze.

It is particularly appropriate that these ingratiating images of leaf and water (land and ocean), interpenetrating and substituting themselves one for the other in a series of sensual, often erotic curving sweeps and volutes should be by an artist who is both a native of Holland, which is built of earth in the ocean, and New York, a stone spine that breaks through the same waters 3000 miles to the west. And it is a personal—and thus, I hope not an impudent—pleasure to introduce my friend Joop Sanders, in this way, to his own family.

Thomas B. Hess
New York, December 13, 1959

BIOGRAPHY

Joop Sanders (1921–2023) was seventeen when he emigrated to New York City from Amsterdam before WWII. He took classes with George Grosz at the Art Students League, befriended Elaine and Willem de Kooning, and became the youngest founding member of The Club. He was immersed in the abstract expressionist artworld that included Franz Kline, Joan Mitchell, Barnett Newman, Pat Passlof and Milton Resnick, and many others who would continue to be friends and admirers of his work.

Sanders' work in the legendary 9th Street Show of 1951 was singled out for praise in one of the few reviews of that exhibition. He became an American citizen in 1955 and in 1960 had a solo exhibition as the first American Abstract Expressionist at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

From 1955–1959, Sanders painted in Europe, where he established a considerable reputation with solo exhibitions in Amsterdam, London, and Paris. Sanders participated in numerous group exhibitions, most importantly, his inclusion in exhibitions with the Zero Group, curated by Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni that connected his work with many of the leading Italian artists of the period, including Manzoni.

In the 1960s and 1970s Sanders showed with the Stuttman Gallery, New York, had three one person exhibitions with the Bertha Schaefer Gallery, New York, and later exhibited at the Landmark Gallery, New York. In the 1980s he showed at Schlesinger-Boisanté, New York, Biedermann Gallery, Munich, and the Alfred Kren Gallery, New York.

His last home and studio were in Lake Peekskill, NY, where he died at nearly 102.

On March 7, 2025, a Joop Sanders retrospective exhibition opened at the Milton Resnick Pat Passlof Foundation in New York. Coverage included a profile on CBS Sunday Morning.



Westeinde studio, Amsterdam, 1955



Apparition, 1956
Oil on canvas
19 ⅝ × 25 ½ in (49.8 × 64.8 cm)



Untitled, c. 1955–59
Oil on canvas
15 ⅞ × 17 ⅞ in (40.3 × 45.4 cm)



The Battle, 1955
Oil on canvas
27 ½ × 31 ½ in (69.9 × 80 cm)



Untitled, c. 1955–59
Oil on paper
4 ⅝ × 3 ⅛ in (11.7 × 7.9 cm)



Untitled, c. 1955–59
Oil on canvas
15 ¾ × 11 ⅝ in (40 × 29.5 cm)



Untitled, 1955
Oil on canvas
12 ½ × 14 ¼ in (31.8 × 36.2 cm)



Untitled, 1959
Oil on canvas
9 ⅜ × 9 ¼ in (23.8 × 23.5 cm)



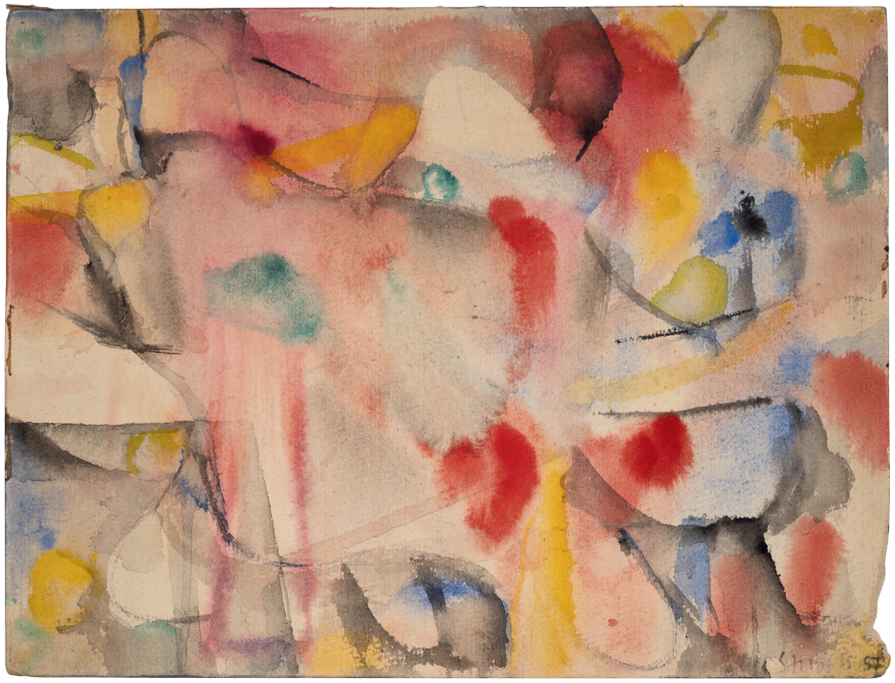
Untitled, 1959
Oil on canvas
10 ⅝ × 14 ½ in (27 × 36.8 cm)



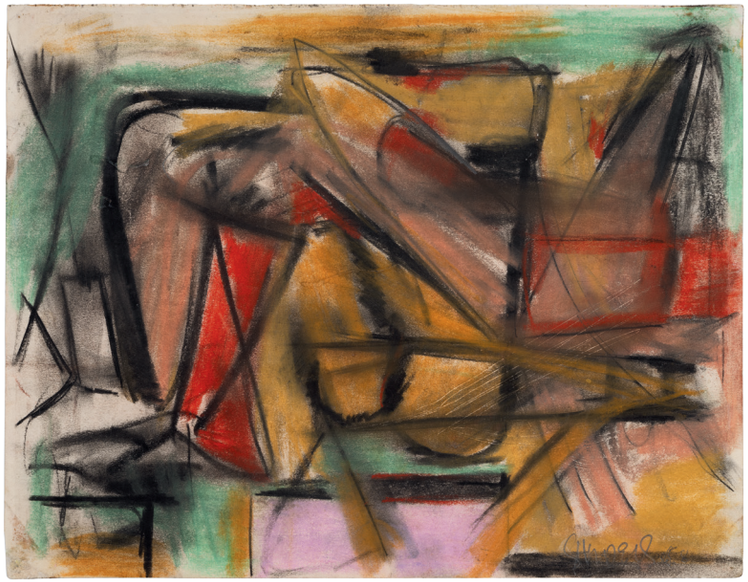
Untitled, 1955
Oil on canvas
11 ⅜ × 14 ¼ in (28.9 × 36.2 cm)



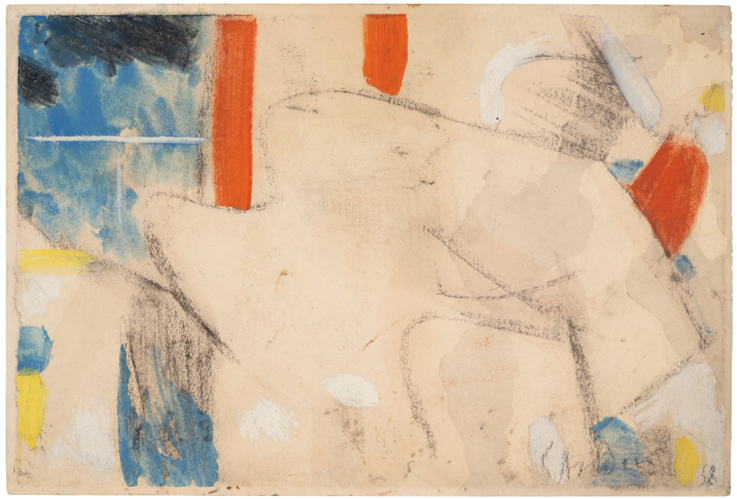
Untitled, 1956
Watercolor on paper
9 ¼ × 12 ¼ in (23.5 × 31.1 cm)



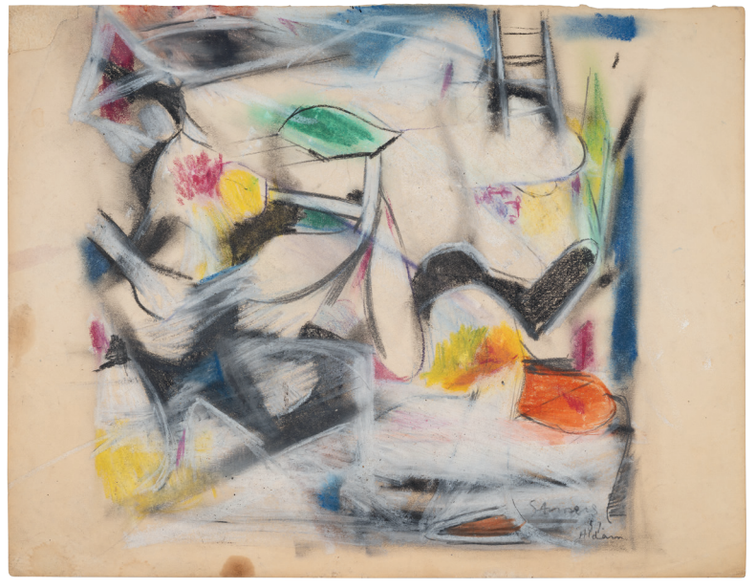
Untitled, 1957
Watercolor on paper
9 ⅜ × 12 ¼ in (23.8 × 31.1 cm)



Untitled, 1958
Pastel on paper
8 ¼ × 10 ⅝ in (21 × 27 cm)



Untitled, 1958
Watercolor and graphite on paper
7 × 10 ⅜ in (17.8 × 26.4 cm)



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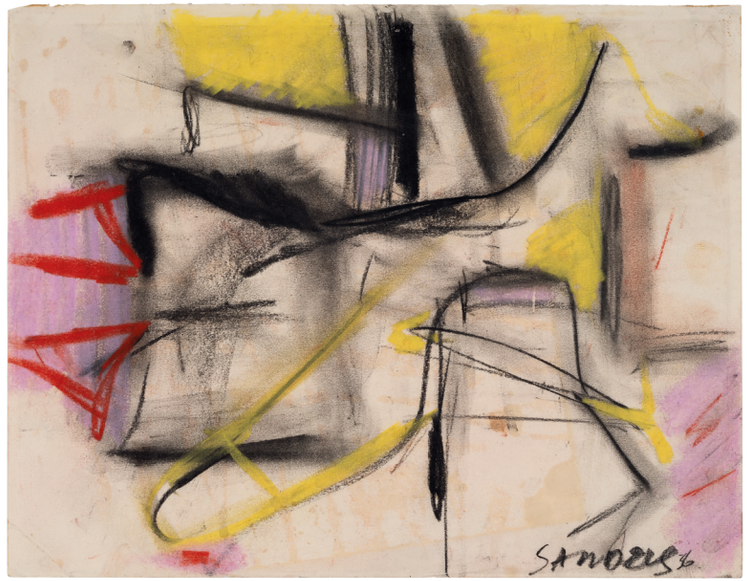

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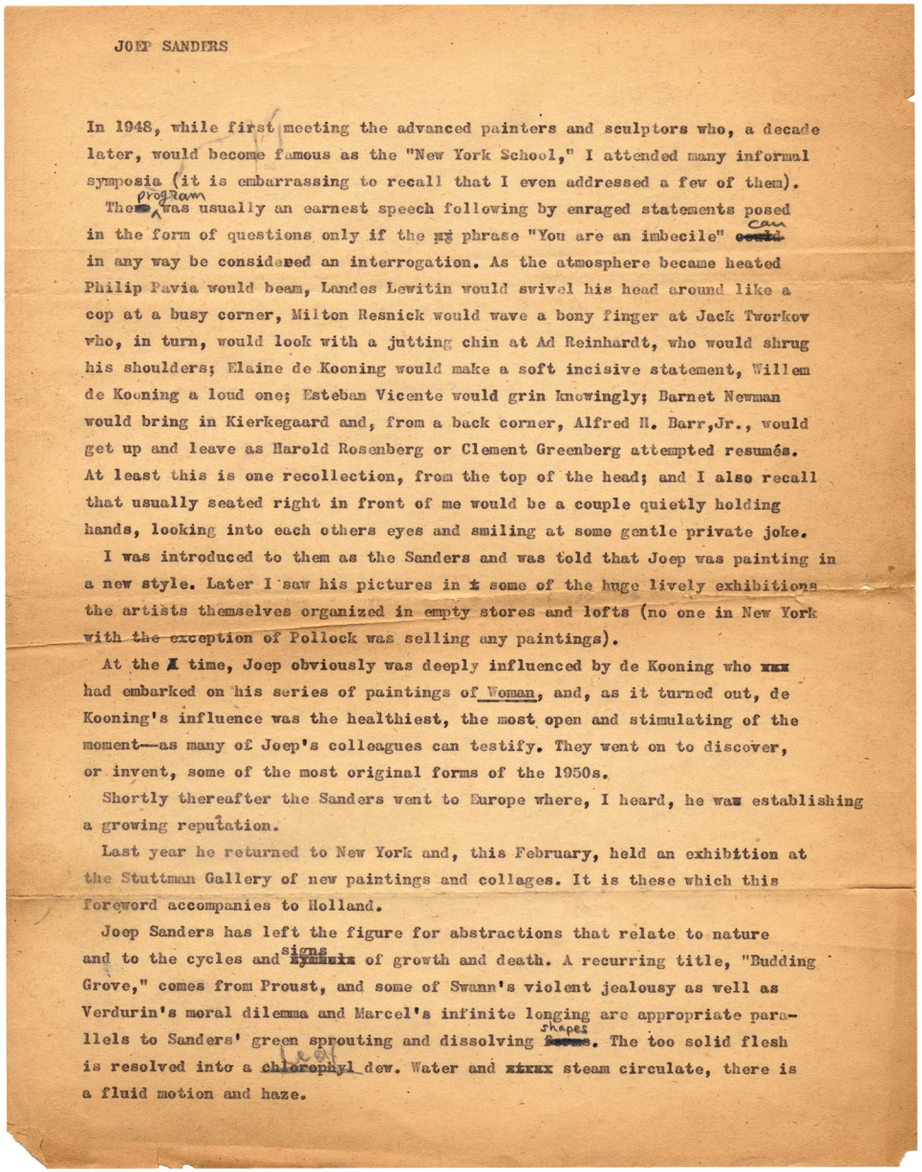

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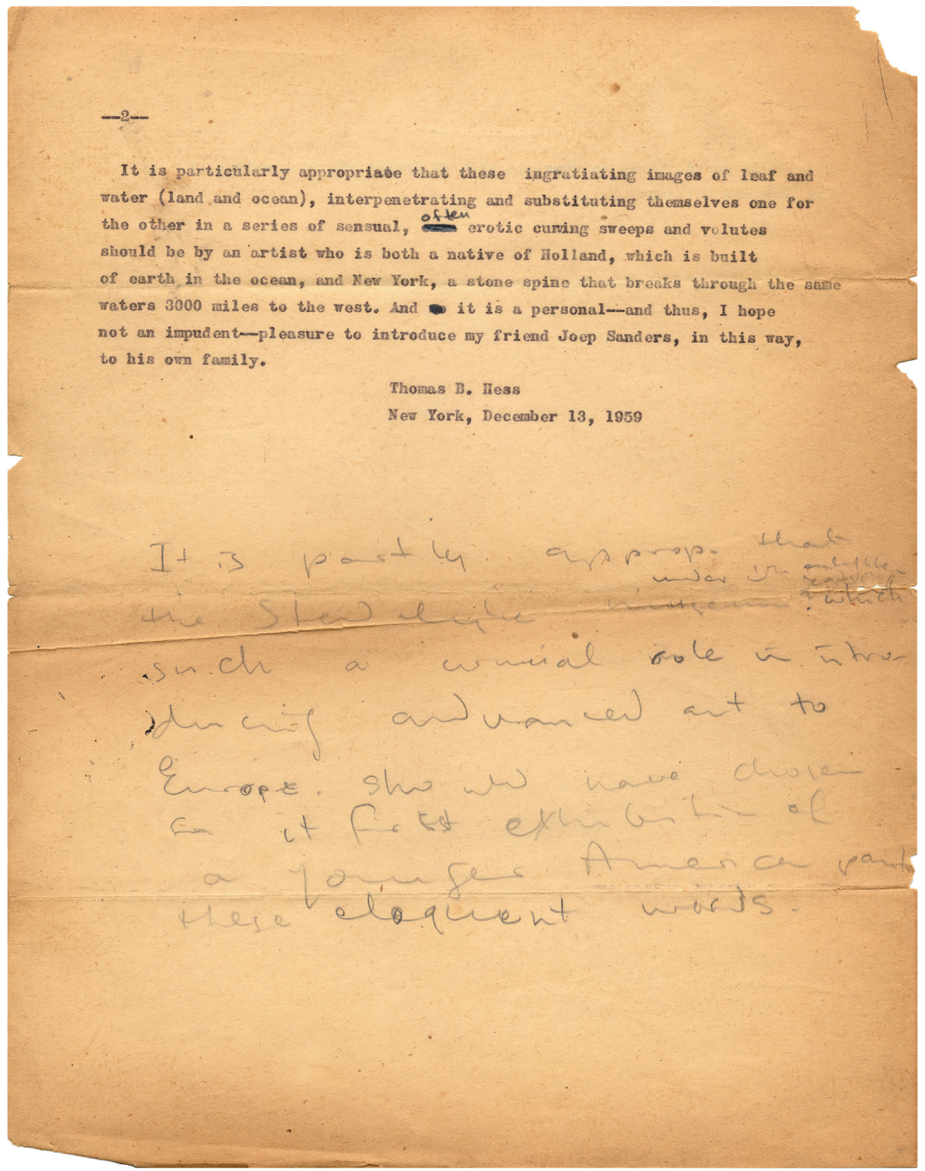

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Thomas B. Hess
New York, December 13, 1959

It is partly appropriate that the Stedelijk ... such a crucial role in introducing advanced art to Europe. Should we have chosen for it first exhibition of a younger American ... these eloquent works.

Draft essay by Thomas B. Hess with notations
December 13, 1959

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Joop Sanders, Spain, c. 1956

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