

Willem de Kooning

Chronology

- 1904** April 24. Born in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.
- 1916** Left grammar school; began apprenticeship with the commercial art and decorating firm of Jan and Jaap Gidding.
- 1917-21** Attended night classes in fine arts and gilding at Rotterdam Academy of Fine Arts and Techniques, possibly returning to finish his studies again in 1925.
- 1920** Left Gidding's firm to work for Bernard Romein, art director and designer for a Rotterdam department store.
- 1926** Immigrated illegally by ship to the United States, arriving August 15 in Newport News, Virginia, ultimately settling in Hoboken, New Jersey. Worked as a house painter.
- 1927** Moved to New York City.
- 1929-31** Met John Graham, Stuart Davis, David Smith, dealer Sidney Janis and Arshile Gorky who became one of his closest friends until Gorky's suicide in 1948.
- 1935** August. Joined mural division of WPA Federal Art Project; worked on mural for Williamsburg Federal Housing Project, Brooklyn (never executed). Left WPA after one year because he was not a U.S. citizen.
- 1936** Began painting full time.
September 14 - October 16. Included in first museum exhibition, 'New Horizons in American Art,' Museum of Modern Art, New York, cat.
Met critic Harold Rosenberg.
- 1937** Commissioned to design one section of three-part mural, *Medicine*, for 1939 New York World's Fair, Hall of Pharmacy.
- 1938** Met art student Elaine Fried, who became his student.
- 1942** Met Jackson Pollock.
- 1943** December 9. Married Elaine Fried.
- 1948** April 12 - May 12. First solo exhibition, 'de Kooning,' Charles Egan Gallery, New York (exhibition held over through June).
Met critic Thomas Hess.
July 1 - August 25. Taught at Black Mountain College, North Carolina.
October. First museum purchase, *Painting*, 1948, by Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 1949** Joined newly organized artists' discussion group, 'The Club,' 39 East 8th Street, New York (was charter member).
- 1950** Completed *Excavation*, subsequently exhibited at XXV Venice Biennale, June 3 - October 15.
Began work on *Woman I*, 1950 - 1952.
- 1951-52** Began spending summers in East Hampton, New York.

- 1953 **April 21 – May 8.** First retrospective exhibition, ‘de Kooning: 1935 – 1953,’ School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, cat. (traveled to Workshop Art Center, Washington, D.C., June 13 – July 3).
Robert Rauschenburg requested and received drawing from de Kooning to erase, now known as *Erased de Kooning Drawing*.
- 1955 Separated from Elaine de Kooning.
- 1956 **January 29.** Daughter Johanna Liesbeth (Lisa) born to Joan Ward.
- 1957 Made earliest surviving print, an etching for Harold Rosenberg’s poem, *Revenge*.
- 1958 Declined Museum of Modern Art’s invitation to have major retrospective exhibition.
- 1959-60 **July 28, 1959 – January 1960.** Traveled to and painted in Rome.
- 1960 Traveled to and made first two lithographs in San Francisco.
- 1961 Began to design and build studio in Springs, New York.
- 1962 **March 13.** Became U.S. citizen.
- 1963 **March.** Moved permanently to Springs from New York City.
- 1964 **September 14.** Awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Lyndon B. Johnson.
- 1965 **April 8 – May 2.** First American museum retrospective, ‘Willem de Kooning,’ Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts, cat. (traveled to The Hayden Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, May 10 – June 16).
- 1968 **September.** Returned to the Netherlands for first time since 1926 for opening of his first solo exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, cat. in Dutch/ English (September 19 – November 17), the first of five venues of the retrospective, ‘Willem de Kooning,’ organized by Thomas B. Hess for the Museum of Modern Art, New York, cat., March 6 – April 27, 1969 (also traveled to The Tate Gallery, London, December 5, 1968 – January 26, 1969; The Art Institute of Chicago, May 17 – July 6, 1969; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 29 – September 14, 1969).
- 1969 **July.** Traveled to Spoleto and Rome. Modeled first 13 sculptures in clay which were then cast in bronze at the foundry of sculptor and friend, Herzl Emanuel.
- 1970 **January.** Traveled to Japan with Xavier Fourcade.
- 1970-71 Created series of lithographs at Hollander Workshop, New York.
- 1975 **October 25 – December 6.** First one-man exhibition at Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York (‘De Kooning: New Works – Paintings and Sculpture’), cat. Xavier Fourcade, Inc. succeeded Fourcade, Droll in 1976 and represented de Kooning exclusively until Xavier Fourcade’s death in April 1987.
- 1978 Resumed daily contact with Elaine de Kooning.
- 1979 **April 24.** On his 75th birthday, Dutch government made him an Officer of the Order of Orange-Nassau.
- 1980 Started work on mid-size and monumental enlargements of first of three 1969 bronzes, to be cast at Tallix Foundry, Peekskill, New York.

- 1983-84** **December 15 – February 26, 1984.** Major retrospective exhibition, 'Willem de Kooning: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture,' Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, cat. (traveled to Academie der Künste, Berlin, March 11 – April 29, 1984, cat. in German; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, June 26 – September 24, 1984, cat. in French).
- 1989** **February 1.** Elaine de Kooning died.
February 11. As de Kooning was not able to manage his business affairs, Lisa de Kooning and John L. Eastman petitioned the New York Supreme Court to become conservators of the property of Willem de Kooning.
September 27. Lisa de Kooning and John L. Eastman appointed conservators of the property of Willem de Kooning.
- 1993** **October 21 – January 9.** First comprehensive exhibition of largest public collection of his works, 'Willem de Kooning from the Hirshhorn Museum Collection,' Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., cat. (traveled to Fundació 'la Caixa,' Barcelona, February 17 – April 3, 1994, cat. in Spanish; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, September 13 – November 27, 1994; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, December 10, 1994 – February 19, 1995; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, March 19 – May 28, 1995).
- 1994** **April 24.** His 90th birthday.
May 8 – September 5. Paintings retrospective, 'Willem de Kooning: Paintings,' National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., cat. (traveled to Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, October 11, 1994 – January 8, 1995; Tate Gallery, London, February 15 – May 7, 1995).
- 1995** **October 3 – January 7, 1996.** First museum overview of works from the 1980s, 'Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, The 1980s,' San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, cat. (traveled to Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, February 3 – May 8, 1996; Städtisches Kunstmuseum, Bonn, cat. in German, June 14 – August 11, 1996; Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, September 9 – November 25, 1996; Museum of Modern Art, New York, January 22 – April 29, 1997).
- 1997** **March 19.** Died at his home in East Hampton, New York, at the age of 92.

Compiled by The Willem de Kooning Foundation, 2006. Major published sources: Waldman, Diane, 'Chronology,' *Willem de Kooning*. New York: Abrams, Inc., 1988; Zilczer, Judith, 'Chronology,' *Willem de Kooning from the Hirshhorn Museum Collection*. Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1993, (Spanish translation in Zilczer, Judith. *Willem de Kooning: Colleccio Hirshhorn Museum*. Barcelona: Centre Cultural de la Fundacio 'La Caixa', 1994.); Stevens, Mark and Annalyn Swan, *de Kooning: An American Master*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.