Raucous Bacchus

Elaine de Kooning (1918–1989) often worked in series, single-mindedly attending to one theme. *Bacchus #3*, which references the Roman god of wine and agriculture, is one of more than 60 canvases she created in response to a 19th-century sculpture in Paris’s Luxembourg Gardens.

Take a closer look

This piece appears abstract, but upon closer inspection the energetic black lines reveal figures. De Kooning crowns a recumbent, inebriated deity with vibrant greens and blues. Find his limp limbs and bloated belly at the top of the composition.

Something to talk about

The artist often combined abstraction and figuration. What do her stylistic choices add to your interpretation of the work?

In her own words

“My whole approach to painting, whether it’s abstract painting or portraits, is that I place a value on ideas that are difficult to put into words.”

Elaine de Kooning, *Bacchus #3*, 1978; Acrylic and charcoal on canvas; 78 x 50 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth