

MNUCHIN GALLERY

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IL GIORNALE DELL'ARTE

The exhibition at the Mnuchin Gallery seeks to free Kline from his established iconography: beyond black and white, a more nuanced and emotional artist emerges.



Installation view of Franz Kline's exhibition at Mnuchin Gallery. Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery

At first glance, the exhibition that the Mnuchin Gallery dedicates to Franz Kline (on view until June 21) might seem like a familiar tribute: fifteen paintings from the 1950s, some drawings, prestigious loans, and an authoritative catalog. Yet, behind this institutional appearance, the show seeks to provoke a critical re-reading of the artist, escaping the now-established caricature of the "man of black and white." The selection of works on display—supported by loans from MoMA, the Guggenheim, and the Glenstone Museum—is rigorously curated, but what sets this project apart is its intent to complicate the univocal reception of Kline's work. Paintings like *Light Mechanic* (1960) highlight the persistent presence of color in his practice, where the canonical narrative had confined him to graphic asceticism. Tones and chromatic layering refute the overly convenient black-and-white dichotomy, instead offering a more nuanced reading of his painterly sensibility.

"Pale ochres and warm creams layered within and beneath his brushstrokes testify to Kline's constant sensitivity to tone and warmth. Even in his more austere-looking compositions, subtle tonal gradations

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complicate the usual [black-and-white] binary, revealing an artist attuned to the emotional resonance of even the slightest shift in value,” the gallery notes.

In this sense, the exhibition engages with a critical tension that remains unresolved: was Kline a master of form or an expressionist of gesture? The selected canvases do not provide definitive answers but instead reignite the tension between structure and spontaneity that defines his work. For Kline, abstraction is not a rejection of reality but an emotional compression, often filtered through titles that refer to places, people, and personal memories—a compressed subjectivity, but never an erased one.

The catalog, featuring texts by Carter Ratcliff and Robert Mattison—the latter being the foremost expert on the American master—adds further depth. Ratcliff provides a clear view of the American critical context, while Mattison attempts to update the historical discourse. Still, the question remains whether the curatorial framework truly manages to shift the interpretive lens: how much is it still possible to dislodge the Kline icon from its mythical pedestal without falling into the *déjà vu* of revisionism?

The exhibition performs a necessary gesture: it restores Kline’s complexity, rejecting the crystallization of a language that, precisely because it became iconic, risked being emptied of meaning. From the gallery comes an invitation to look again at what we thought we already knew.