

MARK BORGHI

NEW YORK | BRIDGEHAMPTON | SAG HARBOR

Elaine de Kooning (1918-1989)

An Opening at Egan Gallery (Portrait of Betsy Egan), 1948-52

Oil on board

13 ¾ x 16 ¾ inches (34.9 x 42.5 cm)

Inscribed 'Betsy Egan' on verso

Ex-collection

The estate of the artist and by descent until the present



Charles Egan was an enormous fan of de Kooning's paintings, and in the spring of 1948, he gave the artist his first ever solo exhibition. De Kooning was approaching 44 years of age, and after 22 years of working and struggling in New York City, one of Abstract Expressionism's true giants finally got his first exclusive, large scale show. The show was important for de Kooning and was lauded by fellow artists even though it received a tepid response from the press. Starting in 1948, Egan was de Kooning's exclusive art dealer. By 1953, however, de Kooning was lured away by the dealer and gallery owner Sidney Janis, whose gallery offered far greater public exposure than Egan's. In September of 1948, not long after de Kooning's first show at the Charles Egan Gallery, Egan met his wife-to-be, Betsy Duhrssen while vacationing on Martha's Vineyard. The two returned from their honeymoon around the same time Willem and Elaine de Kooning returned from a summer teaching at Black Mountain College. Elaine was stunned to discover Charles had married, as the two had been carrying out an affair for some time. The affair continued even after Charles' marriage to Betsy and appears not to have been terribly secretive. Betsy knew about and tolerated the affair, while both Elaine and Willem had been carrying out their own extramarital affairs for years.