

MAYA FRODEMAN GALLERY



John Opper: *Paintings and Works on Paper*
13 February – 29 March 2026

Opening reception: Friday, February 13th from 5 to 7pm.

Jane Opper, John Opper's daughter, will be in attendance. Jane will give an artist talk at 4pm on Friday, February 13th prior to the public opening. All are welcome to attend.

66 South Glenwood Street Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Maya Frodeman Gallery is pleased to present *Paintings and Works on Paper*, a solo exhibition of works by artist John Opper (1908-1994). This exhibition explores paintings from the late 1980s and works on paper from the mid-1940s created during his time living and working in Laramie, Wyoming. Known for his extraordinary command of color, dynamic sense of movement, and deeply felt painterly vision, Opper bridged early modernist encounters with later abstract expressionist innovations over a six-decade long career.

Born in Chicago, Illinois in 1908 and later moving to Cleveland, Ohio with his family, Opper's early fascination with art led him to study at the Cleveland School of Art and Western Reserve University. His exposure to modernist works by artists such as Picasso, Matisse, Cézanne and Braque at the 1928 Pittsburgh International Exposition and mentorship under Hans Hofmann sparked his interest in abstract art. By the mid-1930s, Opper immersed himself in New York's vibrant art scene, contributing significantly to the American Abstract Artists group and participating in the WPA Easel Division.

Opper's artistic evolution saw a shift from abstract gestural works influenced by nature to a refined, pure form of abstraction, both of which are highlighted in this exhibition. He believed that art should transcend mere representation to evoke profound aesthetic experiences. His association with prominent artists such as Milton Avery, Adolph Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko enriched his creative approach. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Opper balanced teaching positions across the United States with his artistic pursuits, eventually settling into the purely abstract style that won him critical acclaim.

MAYA FRODEMAN GALLERY

The works in this exhibition reveal Opper's sustained engagement with movement and color as lived, felt experiences. Across gouaches, watercolors, and paintings, color operates as both structure and sensation: layered, juxtaposed, and allowed to interact freely. Opper rejected the idea of chromatic dissonance, instead embracing unexpected combinations that build luminosity through accumulation and tension. In these works, color does not describe form; it creates it.

A central highlight of the exhibition is a group of works on paper made in Wyoming, a pivotal period in Opper's development. Responding to the openness of the landscape, shifting weather, and expansive skies, these works are marked by soft edges, fluid movement, and bold yet atmospheric color. Fauvist in spirit but distinctly Opper's own, the Wyoming works reflect his growing commitment to painting as if in nature (advice given to him by Hans Hoffman), allowing forms to emerge through sensation rather than structure. Vertical movement recurs throughout, animating the compositions.

The late 1950s marked a period of significant transformation in Opper's work, characterized by simplified color palettes and interlocking planes. Critics like Dore Ashton and Hilton Kramer praised his ability to create dramatic intensity and elegant compositions through color and form. Opper continued to innovate, incorporating Color Field sensibilities and refining his gestural techniques to produce visually compelling and contemplative works.

The exhibition also includes paintings from the late 1980s, where Opper revisits earlier concerns with renewed freedom. These works reveal striking parallels to the Wyoming pieces – shared palettes, anchoring colors, and a continued fascination with movement – while pushing color relationships further through dense layering and radiant surface interaction. Beneath the apparent spontaneity is a careful orchestration of balance and tension, creating paintings that feel simultaneously intuitive and resolved. Throughout the exhibition, Opper's works demonstrate his conviction that abstraction is not an intellectual exercise but a means of communication and feeling. Forms converse, colors push and pull, and space remains active rather than fixed. Whether on paper or canvas, each work invites viewers to experience the painting physically – to sense its rhythm, weight, and motion.

John Opper's legacy is preserved in prestigious museum collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, all in New York, New York. He was also the recipient of numerous awards, such as a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Jimmy Ernst Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Special thanks to Berry Campbell Gallery and Jane Opper, John Opper's daughter.



John Opper, *Amagansett (AM-5)*, 1987-1988, Acrylic on canvas, 66 x 78 inches

MAYA FRODEMAN GALLERY



John Opper, *Untitled (A12)*, 1984-1987, Acrylic on canvas, 66 x 66 1/4 inches



John Opper, *Wyoming*, 1947, Gouache on paper, 20 x 25 1/2 inches



John Opper, *Wyoming Wind Currents*, 1947, Gouache on paper, 20 x 25 13/4 inches

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Specializing in modern and contemporary art, Maya Frodeman Gallery unites artists from all over the world in a tightly curated vision. Maya Frodeman Gallery began in 2024, continuing the 23-year legacy of Tayloe Piggott's eponymous gallery, the first of its kind in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. In an expansive exhibition space in downtown Jackson Hole, the gallery pursues a rigorous schedule of exhibitions representing both emerging and established artists, encompassing unique practices of painting, sculpture, paper, photography, and printmaking.

Exhibiting contemporary giants such as Richard Fleischner, Jane Rosen, Rakuko Naito, Nicola Hicks, and Caio Fonseca alongside emerging stars like Jane Yang D'Haene and Kathryn Lynch, Maya Frodeman Gallery supports its extensive contemporary roster with close relationships with the estates of Wolf Kahn, Emily Mason, Hans Hofmann, and Esteban Vicente.

From first-time buyers to seasoned collectors, the gallery assists a wide range of clients with the intricacies of collecting contemporary art. Our staff has the knowledge and expertise to facilitate art acquisitions, advise collection management, and curate the interiors of private spaces.

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