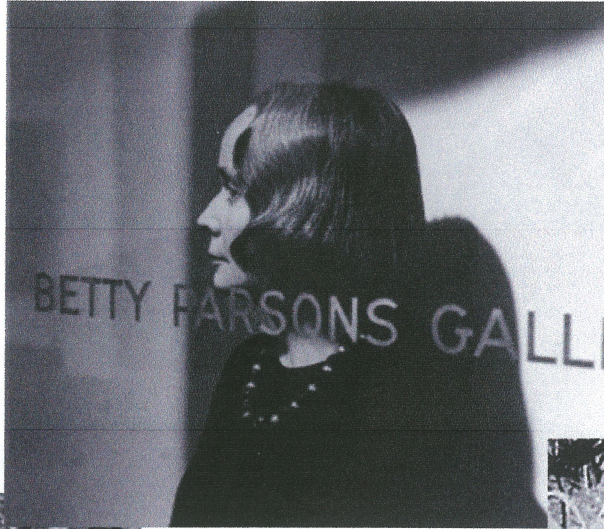


# Pollock's Champions



**Peggy Guggenheim, Betty Parsons, and Sidney Janis**

Bobbi Coller, Ph.D., Guest Curator

Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, East Hampton, New York

31 July – 31 October 2014

## Pollock's Champions

### Bobbi Collier

An artist's relationship with his or her dealer is an unusual and complex partnership which, if successful, can be long-lasting and enriching. It involves a level of risk, trust, and mutual interest. However, it is much more than a business agreement; a good dealer is not only the key to an artist's livelihood, but the source of support, encouragement and advice.

Each of the three dealers who represented Jackson Pollock during his life believed in his talent, promoted and displayed his art, and befriended him. Those three strong and distinct personalities – Peggy Guggenheim, Betty Parsons and Sidney Janis – changed the face of the New York art world. To understand their pivotal influence, it is important to consider the nature of the art environment in New York City from the 1930s through the 1950s.

Jackson Pollock arrived in New York in 1930 to study art. He first attended the Art Students League where he worked under the Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton, who became his mentor. Like most artists during the Great Depression, Pollock struggled to find work and was happy to be employed by the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration, a New Deal agency created in 1935 to provide paid jobs for artists. After working briefly on the mural division, he joined the easel division. In exchange for a wage of \$103.40 a month (later reduced to \$95.44), he was required to produce one painting every two months. Pollock worked for the FAP on and off from August 1935 until the project ended in early 1943. During those years he painted about 75 paintings, some of which were allocated to the FAP, and also made many drawings and several prints. [See Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene V. Thaw, eds., *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), vol. 1]

When few people had discretionary income, the market for abstract art in America was almost non-existent. Most collectors looked toward Europe, leaving innovative American artists with little public appreciation or support. It was primarily other artists and a few critics who made note of the exciting ideas emerging from a small group of painters in New York City. In 1958, Clement Greenberg, essayist, editor at the *Partisan Review* and critic for *The Nation*, put the artist's situation in historical perspective:

Only those on the spot back in the 1940's can realize how crucial commercial success then was to artists who lived so exclusively for their art and its seriousness. Self respect as well as material welfare was at stake. The real issue was whether ambitious artists could live in this country by what they did ambitiously. [Clement Greenberg, "Appreciation" from An Exhibition in Tribute to Sidney Janis, Pennsylvania State University, Hetzel Union Gallery, Feb 3-24, 1958; Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont, March 15-April 15, 1960]

It was a time when the entire New York art world was small and intimate. Today there are about a thousand galleries in New York City, but in 1932 only 30 commercial galleries had survived the 1929 stock market crash and the first years of the Great Depression. [NYC Art Spaces, [http://www.nycartspaces.com/gallery\\_history.php](http://www.nycartspaces.com/gallery_history.php), accessed June 12, 2014] During the 1920s and '30s in New York, the limited number of well-known galleries included Pierre Matisse, M. Knoedler & Co., Wildenstein, Julien Levy, Jacques Seligman & Co., Daniel Kraushaar, Durand Ruel, Valentine Dudensing, Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery, and Alfred Steiglitz's An American Place. It wasn't until the early 1950s that the number of galleries significantly increased, and notable dealers such as Sam Kootz, Charles Egan, Betty Parsons and Sidney Janis expanded the field.

But in 1942, a new personality joined the little sea of dealers. Peggy Guggenheim jumped into the water and caused quite a splash.

### **Peggy Guggenheim: represented Pollock from 1943-1947**

Peggy Guggenheim's surname identified her wherever she went. Her parents each belonged to the small and elite group of the wealthiest Jewish families in New York in the nineteenth century. On her father's side, the seven Guggenheim brothers amassed a fortune in mining and smelting. On her mother's side, the Seligmans, although not as wealthy as the Guggenheims, were one of the oldest and most respected German-Jewish families in New York. The J. and W. Seligman Bank had offices not only in New York, but also in Paris, London, and Frankfurt. Although both families descended from poor immigrants – one an itinerant peddler, the other a roof shingler – the Seligmans looked down on the Guggenheims as boorish parvenus. Both sides produced their share of neurotic and self-indulgent relatives. Peggy, however, would turn out to be not only eccentric, like many of them, but free-spirited, defiantly unconventional, devoted to avant-garde art, and the black sheep in a charcoal-grey family.

Born in 1898, Marguerite (Peggy) Guggenheim was raised like many upper-class children at the turn of the twentieth century in a limited world with prescribed social conventions. The family lived in a stately town house, dark inside and elaborately furnished, on East 72<sup>nd</sup> Street. She adored her handsome father, Benjamin, who was a notorious womanizer, but was not close to her mother, Florette, who was both germ-phobic and a hypochondriac. As a young child, Peggy did not go to elementary school and, except for her two sisters, had no playmates. Her parents travelled frequently, for pleasure or business, but when home, were alone with their children for only short periods during the evening. Peggy and her sisters were raised by a succession of German nannies and governesses who practiced sadistic child-rearing methods. Despite the large household staff, home life was chaotic and young Peggy learned that she could get attention by saying outrageous things. [See Jacqueline Bograd Weld, *Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim*, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1986]

When Peggy was only thirteen, her father, who had been in England on business, changed his travel plans because of a stokers' strike. Because of that decision, he died aboard the RMS Titanic in 1912. Benjamin Guggenheim had not managed his wealth as well as his brothers, leaving the family less money than expected. Peggy received an inheritance of \$450,000, to be dispensed when she turned twenty-one. Although it was a sizeable amount of money, it was far less than her Guggenheim cousins would inherit. Consequently, she would always think of herself as the "poor" Guggenheim, and throughout her life was both generous and miserly. At fifteen she attended The Jacoby School in New York, ending her formal education after graduation from high school. At the age of twenty-two, Peggy Guggenheim had her first significant experience with a wider world that transformed her thinking and altered the direction of her life.

It began with a simple, unpaid job. Searching for something to occupy her, Peggy became a clerk at the Sunwise Turn bookshop on Fifth Avenue and 38<sup>th</sup> Street. There she observed the founder, Mary Mowbray Clarke, as she knowledgeably discussed books with the patrons and befriended writers, poets, artists, and creative people. Idealistic and devoted to ideas, Clarke was completely different from the society women Peggy had known. Through her affiliation with the bookshop, Peggy attended poetry readings, discovered the freedom of Greenwich Village, and met vibrant people in the arts, including the authors Djuna Barnes, e. e. cummings, and her future husband, Lawrence Vail, a writer and artist whom she dubbed the "King of Bohemia."

Peggy and Lawrence Vail married in Paris and spent the 1920s in Montparnasse, the heart of Parisian bohemia, hosting parties and entertaining writers and artists. Lawrence tried to enhance Peggy's education, and suggested that since she had no special talent herself, she should help support the artists she liked. Peggy lent the photographer Berenice Abbott money to buy a camera, gave money to the anarchist Emma Goldman while she worked on a book, and sent monthly checks to Djuna Barnes, establishing a pattern that would later benefit Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner. After two children and a rocky marriage, the Vails divorced and Peggy relocated to London.

In 1937, at the age of 39, Peggy was despondent and in need of an outlet for her energies. Since she enjoyed being among unconventional people, a friend suggested she open an art gallery. Despite the fact that she never showed a sustained interest in the visual arts, Peggy quickly immersed herself in the art world, choosing to specialize in Modernism. In the United States, her uncle Solomon R. Guggenheim, who had been a serious collector of old masters, after 1926 turned his attention to modern art. By 1939, he had established his Museum of Non-Objective Painting in New York. So when Peggy opened her gallery in London, she cleverly called it Guggenheim Jeune, simultaneously making reference to the venerable Paris gallery Berheim Jeune and capitalizing on the Guggenheim name, already associated with money and patronage in the art world.



Peggy Guggenheim in Paris, 1924. Photograph by Man Ray.

Peggy chose a location at 30 Cork Street in London and found the first of many capable assistants to do much of the work in the gallery. With no experience, she had remarkable good fortune when Marcel Duchamp, whom she had met through a mutual friend, agreed to help. Duchamp, who had caused a sensation at the 1913 Armory Show, became a leader of the Dada movement and a friend of the Surrealists, and was, foremost, the cerebral force behind conceptual art. He directed the eager and enthusiastic Peggy to emerging Surrealist and abstract artists. The first show at her gallery, featuring the drawings of the poet and playwright Jean Cocteau, received a great deal of publicity. It was followed by a ground-breaking, one-person show of paintings, watercolors, drawings and gouaches by Kandinsky, his first exposure in England. Guggenheim Jeune soon became identified as a premiere showcase for Surrealism. The press adored Peggy, since she was always flamboyant, dressed in designer costumes accessorized with original Calder or Tanguy earrings, and played hostess to countless parties. In addition, she could always be counted on for unfiltered comments. In its first year, however, despite a rash of publicity, the gallery lost a considerable amount of money. As a result, Peggy decided to abandon the business side of the gallery and concentrate on establishing her own museum of modern art.



Peggy Guggenheim and Herbert Read in London, 1939.

To realize her vision, Peggy needed help. Herbert Read was an outstanding art scholar, a professor of fine arts at the University of Edinburgh, and an editor of *Burlington Magazine*. He agreed to work with Peggy to assemble a comprehensive historical loan exhibition of twentieth century art. Peggy was in France with Read in 1939, tracking down examples, when Hitler's army marched into Poland. With no one else interested in her nonessential project, she was forced to re-examine her plan. Armed with Read's list of stellar works, she decided to stay in France and, rather than borrow the paintings, resolved to purchase them. In her drive to acquire a great collection, she set out to "buy a picture a day," and she frequently exceeded her goal. [Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict*, Universe Books, New York, 1979. p. 209]

As the threat of war loomed over the continent, Read abandoned the project, but Peggy befriended another valuable advisor with an astute eye and knowledge of contemporary art, Howard Putzel. Putzel had run two galleries in California, and, now in France, he was eager to help Peggy find and purchase art directly from the artists. Many were his friends who were in desperate straits. In such turbulent times, Peggy had no competition: at that time no other private collectors were purchasing contemporary art on such a large scale. Peggy found that she had her pick of

treasures by acknowledged and future masters. Sometimes she coaxed an artist to part with things, as she did with Brancusi, and at other times she purchased large quantities of paintings at bargain rates, as she did from Max Ernst, who was to become her second husband (they divorced in 1943).

With the Germans encroaching, to be a Jew in Vichy France was increasingly dangerous. Peggy had to plan her escape to the United States. In 1941 she hid her entire art collection among the blankets, sheets, pots and pans comprising her domestic effects and shipped them to the U.S. labeled "household goods." Her "household goods" included paintings by Kandinsky, Klee, Picabia, Van Doesburg, Mondrian, De Chirico, Tanguy, Magritte, Dali and Brauner, along with sculptures by Brancusi, Lipchitz, Laurens, Pevsner, Giacometti, Moore, and Arp. With some difficulty, Peggy arrived back in the United States in July 1941.

Safely back in New York, with her advisor Howard Putzel at her side, Peggy was surrounded by her large collection of European art. Still determined to exhibit her collection, and ready to re-enter the business sphere, she rented gallery space at 30 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street. To create an unforgettable environment, Putzel suggested the Austrian architect and designer Frederick Kiesler. Kiesler designed a unique and revolutionary space composed of four galleries. Peggy's former husband Lawrence Vail selected the name: Art of This Century.



Peggy Guggenheim in the Surrealist gallery, Art of This Century, ca. 1942.

Extraordinary, multi-sensory, and original, Art of This Century opened on October 20, 1942 and caused a sensation. Hundreds of people each day came to experience the unusual setting and fantastical installation. Peggy insisted the paintings be hung without frames. The dramatic Surrealist gallery had flowing, curved walls from which paintings projected from the ends of adjustable posts that could be tilted at different angles. Sound effects of a train were piped into the space, and spotlights flashed on and off the pictures at intervals. In the Abstract and Cubist gallery, the paintings were hung in groupings from ropes on the walls and in the center of the room. The passageway connecting galleries featured a conveyor belt carrying a series of works by Paul Klee, and the last space, a day-lit gallery fronting on 57<sup>th</sup> street, was reserved for monthly shows of current art. In addition to the galleries, Kiesler designed a unique, multi-purpose chair that could be adapted for seven functions. Always aware of the power of publicity, Peggy scheduled a pre-opening private viewing for the press. The exciting opening of Art of This Century was covered by practically every New York newspaper and art publication, as well as many European periodicals.

Peggy Guggenheim became aware of Jackson Pollock at the end of her first gallery season, in the spring of 1943. Before that, Pollock had attracted notice in two previous exhibitions. In 1942, the influential artist and theorist John Graham included Pollock in an exhibition of American and French paintings at the McMillan Gallery. (It was through that show that Pollock met Lee Krasner, a better-known artist at the time.) In an *Art News* review, Pollock's work was singled out among the "newcomers," his first mention in print. The second show, "Artists for Victory," was a vast juried show of living American artists at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, organized in 1942 on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

The next year, Peggy planned two shows as a way to discover new talent. The first was devoted to the relatively new medium of collage and *papier collé*. At the suggestion of Robert Motherwell, Peggy invited Pollock to submit a work. The second show, the Spring Salon, was a juried competition. Matta, the surrealist artist, urged Pollock to enter. The jury included, in addition to Peggy and Putzel, her old friends Duchamp and Mondrian, and the senior staff at MoMA: Alfred Barr, director of the museum; James Johnson Sweeney, curator; and James Thrall Soby, director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture.



Jackson Pollock, *Stenographic Figure*, ca. 1942. Oil on canvas, 40 x 56 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

reminiscent of Matisse and Miró, we have a real discovery...." [Robert Coates, "The Art Galleries: From Moscow to Harlem," *The New Yorker*, 19 (May 29, 1943) p.49] That painting, later titled *Stenographic Figure* and now in the MoMA collection, launched Pollock's career.

When all the entries for the salon were assembled, Peggy was not impressed with Pollock's 1942 canvas, then simply titled *Painting*, but Mondrian thought it was the most exciting painting he had seen and told her, "You must watch this man." The stunned Peggy replied, "You can't compare this and the way you paint." Mondrian answered, "So don't compare this. The way I paint and the way I think are two different things." [Krasner to Jaqueline Bograd Weld, interview, April 19, 1979, quoted in Weld, p. 305] When the show opened, Pollock was again singled out. Robert Coates, writing in the *New Yorker*, noted, "...In Jackson Pollock's abstract 'Painting,' with its curves

After receiving additional positive reactions, and at the urging of Putzel and Matta, Peggy decided to give Pollock a one-year contract. This allowed him to leave his low-paying job doing carpentry and installations, ironically, in Peggy's uncle Solomon Guggenheim's museum. She offered to give him one show during the next year and a monthly stipend of \$150. If more than \$2,700 worth of art was sold, allowing 1/3 commission to the dealer, he would receive a settlement at the end of the year. However, if less than that amount was realized, Peggy would keep Pollock's pictures to make up the difference, amounting to his entire production for the year. Although a steep price to pay, the contract provided a rare opportunity for an artist: a year of security and the freedom to paint.

Because of Peggy Guggenheim, the year 1943 was an important one for Jackson Pollock. In addition to offering him his first solo show, Peggy commissioned the artist to paint a mural covering an enormous wall, 8 feet 11 ½ inches tall by 19 feet 9 inches wide, in the entrance hall of her townhouse at 155 East 61<sup>st</sup> Street. In a postcard to Lee Krasner on July 15, 1943, Pollock wrote, "Have signed the contract and have seen the wall space for the mural—it is all very exciting." [Jackson Pollock postcard to Lee Krasner, 1943, Archives of American Art, #494]

At Marcel Duchamp's suggestion, Pollock painted on a canvas rather than directly on the wall, ensuring that the mural could be moved at a later date. [Guggenheim, *Out of this Century*, p. 295] Because of its unwieldy size, Pollock had to tear down the partition between the front and middle rooms of his studio to work on it. [See letter from Jackson Pollock to his brother Charles Pollock, July 29, 1943, O'Connor and Thaw, vol. 4, p. 228] Guggenheim's mural gave Pollock the opportunity and freedom to explode off the easel and transition to a rhythmic, all-over abstraction full of energy, power, and

complexity. He experimented with vibrantly colored commercial paint as well as artists' oil paints, applied with varied techniques including broad swirls, splatters, drips, smears and dabs.



Jackson Pollock, *Mural*, 1943. Oil and enamel on canvas, 95 3/4 x 237 1/2 inches. Museum of Art, University of Iowa. Gift of Peggy Guggenheim, 1948.

To her credit, Peggy loved the bold and unexpected result from the moment she saw it. Since the entryway was only 13½ feet wide, the installation proved difficult, and the story has been repeated that the painting needed to be cropped in order to fit. A recent conservation project at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, however, overturns some of the myths that have accompanied the mural. Whereas the canvas appears to be wrapped unevenly around the stretcher to accommodate the wall,



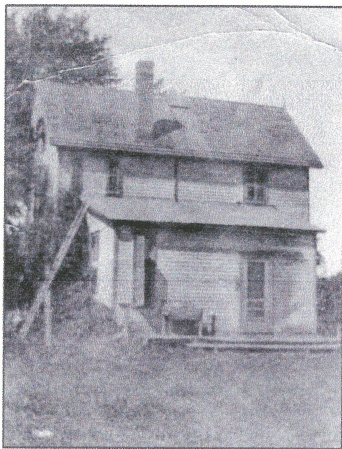
Peggy Guggenheim and Jackson Pollock with *Mural* in the hall of her town house, ca. 1944. Photograph by George Carger.

there is no evidence that it was cut. In addition, contrary to the story related by both Peggy and Lee Krasner, it has been established that the canvas was painted in deliberate stages rather than in one feverish session. [Yvonne Szafran, Laura Rivers, Alan Phenix, Tom Learner, Ellen Landau and Steve Martin, *Jackson Pollock's Mural: The Transitional Moment*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, n. d. (2014), pp. 68, 35]

By November 12, 1943, during the run of Pollock's first solo exhibition at Art of This Century, the mural had been installed, and Peggy held a party in the artist's honor. On opening day of his one-person show on March 19, 1945 at Art of This Century, she invited the public to view the mural in her home from 3-6 p.m. When Peggy moved from her townhouse in 1947, she looked to place the mural but knew the size made it problematic for a private residence. Her solution was to donate it to an institution, the University of Iowa art department.

In later years, Peggy Guggenheim reflected on Pollock's beginnings at her gallery and her commitment to him:

When I first exhibited Pollock he was very much under the influence of the Surrealists and of Picasso. But he very soon overcame this influence, to become, strangely enough, the greatest painter since Picasso.... Pollock immediately became the central point of Art of This Century. From then on, 1943, until I left America in 1947, I dedicated myself to Pollock. He was very fortunate, because his wife, Lee Krasner, a painter, did the same, and even gave up painting at one period, as he required her complete devotion. [Guggenheim, *Out of This Century*, p. 315.] (Krasner underwent a period of reassessment after she began living with Pollock, but she never stopped painting during their relationship.)



Pollock-Krasner House, ca. 1946.  
Photograph by Ronald Stein.

In August of 1945, Jackson and Lee accompanied their friends, the artist Reuben Kadish and his wife Barbara, to Long Island while they looked for a house. Jackson and Lee spent the summer in a shack at Louse Point, on the bay in Springs. The summer proved so therapeutic, and Lee enjoyed it so much, that she suggested they sublet their apartment in the city and rent a house there for the winter. At first, Jackson objected, not wanting to leave New York, but after a few days he decided they should not rent, but purchase. Through an East Hampton realtor they found a small farmhouse with a barn that could be converted to a studio with ample space for large work. Lee hoped the fresh air, quiet, and distance from the temptations of the city would help control Jackson's excessive drinking. [Gail Levin, *Lee Krasner: A Biography*, William Morrow, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 2011, pp. 226, 231]

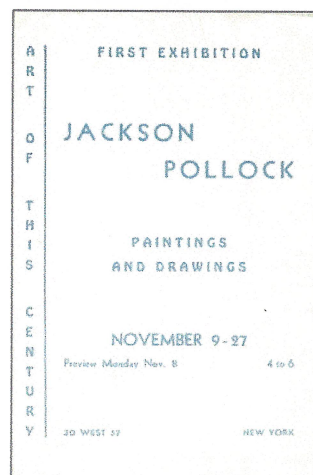
Although Lee and Peggy never liked each other, Lee went to her to ask for a loan for the \$2,000 down payment on the house. As Peggy remembered:

Lee was so dedicated to Pollock that when I was sick in bed, she came every morning to try to persuade me to lend them two thousand dollars to buy a house on Long Island. She thought that if Pollock got out of New York he would stop drinking. Though I did not see how I could produce any extra funds I finally agreed to do so as it was the only way to get rid of Lee. [Guggenheim, *Out of This Century*, p. 316]

After promising the loan, Peggy revised her arrangement with Pollock. The new, two-year contract, from March 1946-March 1948, promised a \$300 a month stipend with a \$50 a month deduction toward repayment of the loan. In exchange, Pollock gave Peggy his output for each year, excepting one painting of his choosing. Because of that arrangement, at one time Peggy owned nearly 30 Pollocks. And Lee's strategy turned out to be successful: the peace, natural beauty, and spacious studio in Springs inspired Jackson's most productive years, from 1946-1952.

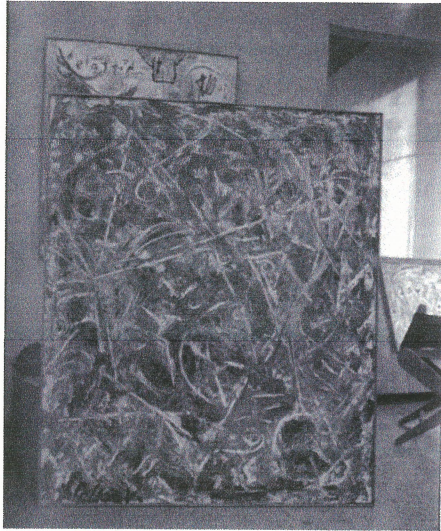
Pollock had four solo shows in five years at Art of This Century. The first, held from November 9-27 in 1943, included works that would become iconic, including *Male and Female* (1942), *The Guardians of the Secret* (1943), *Stenographic Figure* (1942) and *The She-Wolf* (1942). The brief essay in the exhibition brochure, written by James Johnson Sweeney, enthusiastically praised him:

...Pollock's talent is volcanic. It has fire. It is unpredictable. It is undisciplined. It spills itself out in mineral prodigality not yet crystallized. It is lavish, explosive, untidy,



And he concluded:

Among young painters, Jackson Pollock offers unusual promise in his exuberance, independence, and native sensibility. If he continues to exploit these qualities with the courage and conscience he has shown so far, he will fulfill that promise. [James Johnson Sweeney, Jackson Pollock, November 9-27, 1943]



Jackson Pollock's *Croaking Movement*, 1946, in front of *The Magic Flame*, ca. 1946, at Art of This Century, 1947. Photograph by Herbert Matter.

A few critics agreed with Sweeney, and from the very first Pollock attracted attention. The anonymous critic of *The Art Digest* wrote, "I consider this exhibition to be something of an event on the contemporary history of American art...Now I consider him [Pollock] to be one of the strongest and most interesting American painters." [November 1, 1943, *The Art Digest*] Certainly, no critic was more supportive and influential for Pollock's early career than Clement Greenberg who wrote in 1948: "Since Mondrian no one has driven the easel picture quite so far away from itself;... Since [John] Marin—with whom Pollock will in time be able to compete for recognition as the greatest American painter of the twentieth century—no other American artists has presented such a case." [Clement Greenberg, *The Nation*, January 24, 1948, p. 108] But if select critics were convinced, the general public was either confused, dismissive, or derisive. Pollock's paintings, more than other abstractionists', could elicit vicious responses from viewers. Nevertheless, Guggenheim, as his dealer, worked to sell his pictures which, in 1945, ranged in price from \$100-\$900. [*Art News*, 1945] She explained:

I had to find a hundred and fifty dollars a month for the Pollocks. I concentrated all my efforts on selling his pictures and neglected all the other painters in the gallery, many of whom soon left me....

Despite the nominal prices—comparable to those being asked for his contemporaries' work by galleries like Kootz and Egan—she recalled:

We did not sell many Pollock paintings, but when he gave us gouaches it was much easier.... I worked hard to interest people in his work and never tired [of] doing so, even when it involved dragging in and out his enormous canvases. One day Mrs. Harry Winston, the famous Detroit collector, came to the gallery to buy a Masson. I persuaded her to buy a Pollock instead." [Guggenheim, *Out of This Century*, p. 316]

Significantly, Guggenheim sold two works from the first show to museums: *The She-Wolf* to MoMA in 1944 and *The Guardians of the Secret* to the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1945.

When the war was over, and after more



Jackson Pollock, *The Guardians of the Secret*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 48 3/4 x 75 inches. San Francisco Museum of Art.

than five years operating Art of This Century, Peggy announced that she was closing the gallery and returning to Europe, her true love. In addition, she was exhausted from the demanding gallery responsibilities. She left with her collection, including 23 Pollocks, and purchased an exceptional Venetian home on the Grand Canal, the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni. The same year, 1948, her collection was shown at the Venice Biennale, providing the first European exposure for Gorky, Rothko, and Pollock. In 1951, she opened her home to the public three days a week. Although no longer managing a gallery, she continued to promote Pollock by lending her works to exhibitions and donating some of her choice paintings to museum collections. In 1969, in what must have been a personal triumph, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York invited Peggy Guggenheim to show her collection, then including eleven Pollocks. In conjunction with the exhibition, she pledged to donate her palazzo and its contents to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Peggy Guggenheim is probably best known for her outstanding examples of Modern, Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist art, acquired in an utterly remarkable way. While she did not independently



Peggy Guggenheim in her Venice palazzo with Pollock's *The Moon-Woman*, 1942 (left) and *Two*, ca. 1945 (right).

discover or identify all of the stellar artists she displayed and supported, she developed expertise over time, and was keenly aware of her own strengths and weaknesses. Looking back, she said, "I took advice from none but the best.... Many people buy the best advice, but they don't heed it. I listened, how I listened! That's how I finally became my own expert." [Alan Levy, "Venice's Last Duchess," *Art News*, April 1975, p. 57]

Although the Guggenheim collection has been extremely influential, when Peggy was interviewed on the occasion of the 1969 exhibition,

she said that her collection was her *second* greatest achievement and that "[Jackson Pollock was] by far my most honorable achievement." [Guggenheim, Henry Erlich, "Peggy Guggenheim's Art Comes to America," *Look Magazine*, Feb. 4, 1969, p. 37]

### Betty Parsons: represented Pollock from 1948-1951

When Peggy Guggenheim decided to return to Europe and close her gallery in 1947, she looked around for a dealer who would assume representation of Jackson Pollock. With his reputation as an alcoholic, he was not an easy sell, and Betty Parsons was the only volunteer. Another extraordinary woman gallerist, who had the distinction of also being an artist, Parsons was already known for her eye for pure form and as a champion of innovative art. She was an independent thinker as well as a woman of style and pedigree, with a following of devoted and generous friends.

At her birth in 1900, no one would have predicted that Elizabeth (Betty) Bierne Pierson would become a key catalyst in the shift of attention from the School of Paris to the New York School after World War II. As Helen Frankenthaler stated, "Betty and her gallery helped construct the center of the art world." [Carol Strickland, "Betty Parsons's 2 Lives: She Was Artist, Too," *The New York Times*, June 28,

1992] As a child of privilege, (her parents were descendents of generals on both the Union and Confederate Armies), she was expected to marry well and to be part of the social world of New York, Newport, and Palm Beach. Although Betty was an indifferent student and headstrong child, an event that occurred when she was only 13 set her on a course that would make her and her future gallery a major force in the world of art in the post-World War II period.

The event that changed her young life was a visit to the Armory Show of 1913. She had an epiphany among the crowd of paintings and sculptures. It was there that she knew, not only that she *wanted* to be an artist, but that she was *born* to be an artist. [Lee Hall, *Betty Parsons: Artist, Dealer, Collector*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, 1991, p. 17] She was especially moved by the simplified, massive sculptures of Émile-Antoine Bourdelle and Aristide Maillol. After only five years of formal schooling at Miss Chapin's School for Girls, Parsons wanted to attend college, but her conservative parents saw no value in higher education for women. She agreed to take finishing classes on the condition that she could simultaneously enroll in art classes, beginning her studies with the sculptor Gutzon Borglum, who would later carve the monumental busts on Mount Rushmore. During the summer of 1919, Betty met Schuyler Livingston Parsons, ten years older and scion of a prominent and wealthy family. They married the next year, when she was twenty, and honeymooned in style, travelling in a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce throughout Europe. If Betty imagined marriage would provide an escape from family pressure, she soon found it to be a disaster. The couple divorced amicably in Paris three years later.

Betty Parsons stayed in Paris for the next eleven years, experiencing freedom, gaining independence, studying art at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, and meeting a notable circle of friends that included Alexander Calder, Hart Crane, Man Ray, Janet Flanner, Josephine Baker, Gertrude Stein and Natalie Barney. During her Paris years, she shared her life and a small house in Montparnasse with Adge Baker, a British art student interested in spiritualism. Betty's art education was advanced and her critical eye honed during those formative years. She met Constantin Brancusi, who invited her to his studio, and she also studied with three important teachers: Bourdelle, the sculptor whose work she had admired at the Armory Show; Ossip Zadkine; and Arthur Lindsey. While in Zadkine's sculpture class, the teacher singled her out for praise along with fellow student Alberto Giacometti. Under Lindsey's influence, Betty began a lifelong habit of carrying a sketchbook and watercolor paints or pencils with her at all times. Throughout her life, wherever she travelled, she captured the feeling of a place, and her intuitive response to it, by making sketches.



Betty Parsons in Paris, 1927. Photograph by Berenice Abbott.

After her divorce, Betty's parents were mortified and disinherited her, and when the economy collapsed in 1929, her alimony vanished as well. She was forced to return to the United States with no means of support. Her generous childhood friends helped Betty relocate to California, where she worked as a portrait artist and as a wine consultant in a liquor store while continuing to study sculpture under Alexander Archipenko. She also spent time with several celebrities, including Dorothy Parker, Tallulah Bankhead, and Greta Garbo. In 1935, Parsons returned to New York, where Alan Gruskin arranged her first show in America at the Midtown Gallery. She was delighted that she received positive reviews and sold fourteen pieces. Noting Parsons's flair as well as her large and socially-connected following, Gruskin offered her a job installing exhibitions and selling paintings on commission. At the age

of 36, Parsons was positioned for a real career. She rented space for her own studio, delighted in continually visiting galleries and museums, and enjoyed her new identity as an art dealer.

For a short time Betty Parsons also worked in Mrs. Cornelius J. Sullivan's art gallery. Mrs. Sullivan was one of the three women who founded the Museum of Modern Art. In her gallery, Parsons observed Sullivan's ability to combine social occasions with gallery business. In addition to her keen sense of form and composition, Parsons's comfort with collectors and experience being around creative and famous people must have contributed to her success. She had also witnessed the power of publicity during her time in California, and through her lifelong relationship with Rosalind Constable, who became the culture scout for Time-Life Publications.

Between 1940 and 1944, Parsons managed the gallery in the Wakefield Book Store on East 55<sup>th</sup> Street. Working on commission but with the freedom to select all the artists, she gave early shows to such future notables as Saul Steinberg, Theodoros Stamos, Adolph Gottlieb, Hedda Sterne, Joseph Cornell, and Alfonso Ossorio. She recognized the individuality of their work, formed strong and lasting relationships with the artists, and attracted attention from both viewers and the press. In 1942, a complimentary article in *Art News* recognized that the "remarkable batting average maintained by the Wakefield Gallery is a source of wonder to those who drop in here often. ...Betty Parsons [is] the Director to whose cultivated taste the gallery's high score can be attributed...." [Doris Brian, *Art News*, vol. 41. No.7, May 14-31, 1942, p. 22]

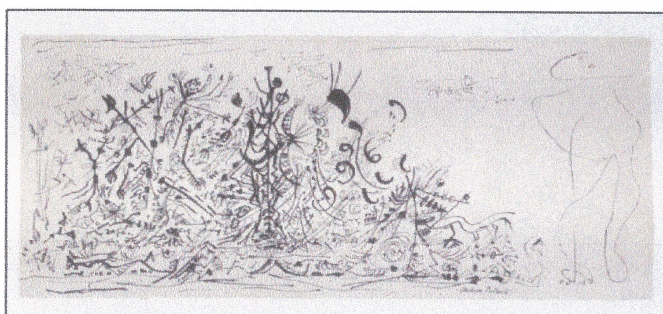
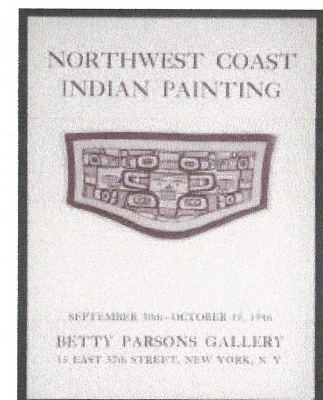
When, at the end of 1944, the Wakefield Bookshop closed its gallery, the gallerist Mortimer Brandt, who dealt in old masters, invited Parsons to create a contemporary art section for his gallery. He paid her \$40 a week, which was newfound security, and gave her the opportunity to showcase the art in a handsome space. Most of Parsons's clients from the Wakefield Gallery followed her, and they were rewarded when she showed them exciting work by Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, and Hans Hofmann. Two years later, when Mortimer Brandt decided to return to England, Betty was urged by both artists and friends to open her own gallery. She borrowed money to rent Brandt's former space at 15 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street and established the Betty Parsons Gallery.

With an unconventional, personal vision, Parsons created a different-looking gallery. She cleared the space, removed the rugs, window treatments, chairs, and gold frames, and painted the walls stark white. She said, "A gallery isn't a place to rest, it's a place to look at. You don't come to my gallery to be comfortable." [Hall, *Betty Parsons*, p. 77] Nevertheless, people seemed to be comfortable with the informal atmosphere and lack of contrivance. The gallery became a gathering place for artists and, since Betty always read and composed poetry, the site of many poetry soirées.

Parsons's inaugural exhibition was "Northwest Coast Indian Painting," a daring choice that showcased the kind of powerful tribal expressionism that was resonating with several contemporary abstract artists. It was curated by her friend, Barnett Newman, who shared Betty's instinctive attraction to ancient, tribal, and modern art and saw connections among them. She used the gallery to give shows to the artists she had

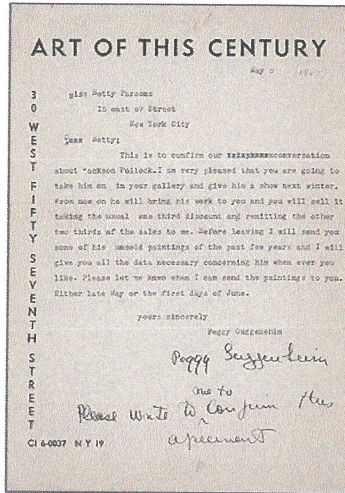
championed at Wakefield, with the addition of Newman. Each show lasted only two of three weeks but, despite their short duration, some of the accompanying invitations were so carefully conceived, they looked like works of art.

Parsons met Jackson Pollock through their mutual friend Newman. She recalled the first time she visited him and Lee at their home in Springs: "He was



Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, ca. 1946. Pencil and ink on paper, 4 7/8 x 11 3/4 inches. Private collection, London. This is the drawing Betty Parsons described.

drawing on the floor, breaking pens as he went—and they were beautiful little pens—and when the drawing was finished he gave it to me.” [Betty Parsons as quoted in Rosalind Constable, “The Betty Parsons Collection,” *Art News* 67 (March 1968), p. 58] A year later, in 1947, when Peggy Guggenheim decided to close Art of the Century, Parsons took over Guggenheim’s artists, including Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock. Parsons later said, “They chose me. The artists wanted to be in my gallery.” [Parsons, quoted in Hall, p. 77]



Jackson Pollock entered Parsons’s gallery as of December 1947, following a formal arrangement between herself and Guggenheim. Parsons agreed to give Pollock one show in the next year and, since Guggenheim had kept all but one work a year from Pollock in exchange for a monthly stipend, she stipulated that if one of those works sold, Parsons would get her 1/3 commission and Guggenheim would get the other 2/3 share leaving the artist with only his monthly stipend while he paid off the house loan.

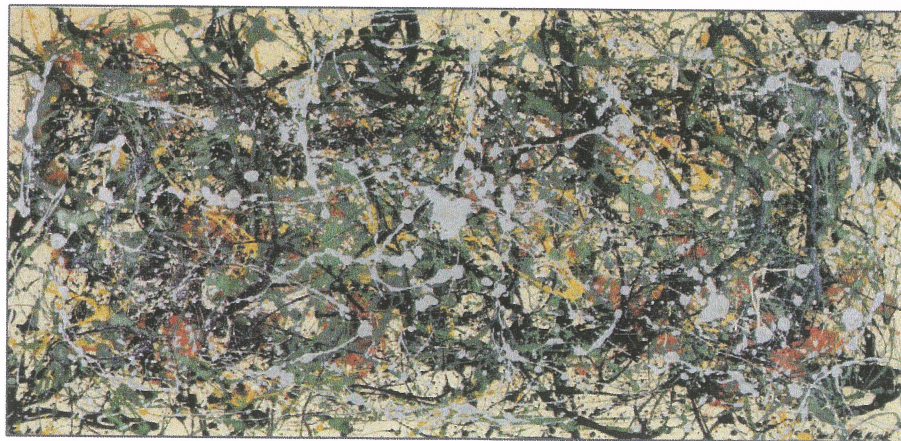
Pollock’s first show at the Betty Parsons Gallery was in January of 1948. Parsons described him at the time, saying: “By this time, he was totally free, totally creative. He was the first artist to paint large paintings. He exploded the easel painting, the wall painting. His paintings were walls—whole walls, expanding walls.” [Parsons, quoted in Hall, p. 90] That show caused a sensation, and notoriety. There were hostile reactions from the public. Despite angry shouts in the

gallery and obscenities scrawled in the guest book, Parsons never wavered in her support for Pollock and felt she was part of an exciting and momentous time.

Although Parsons rarely sold a work for more than \$1,000 during the first years of her gallery, she did place several Pollocks in important collections. *Number 23, 1949* was sold to Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, III; *Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950* and *Number 5, 1948* were sold to Alfonso A. Ossorio and Edward F. Dragon (who sold *Lavender Mist* to the National Gallery in 1976); and *Number 8, 1949* was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Roy R. Neuberger and is now in the Neuberger Museum. In his 2003 memoir, Roy Neuberger reminisced about going to the November 1949 Pollock show, held a few months after the *Life* magazine article was published, asking “Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” Neuberger remembered a huge turnout. A few days later, he received a call from Betty Parsons asking if he wanted to buy a work he had admired, adding that Pollock needed money “desperately.” Neuberger bought *Number 8, 1949* for \$800 and was told that the sale enabled Pollock to install central heating in his house in Springs. [Roy

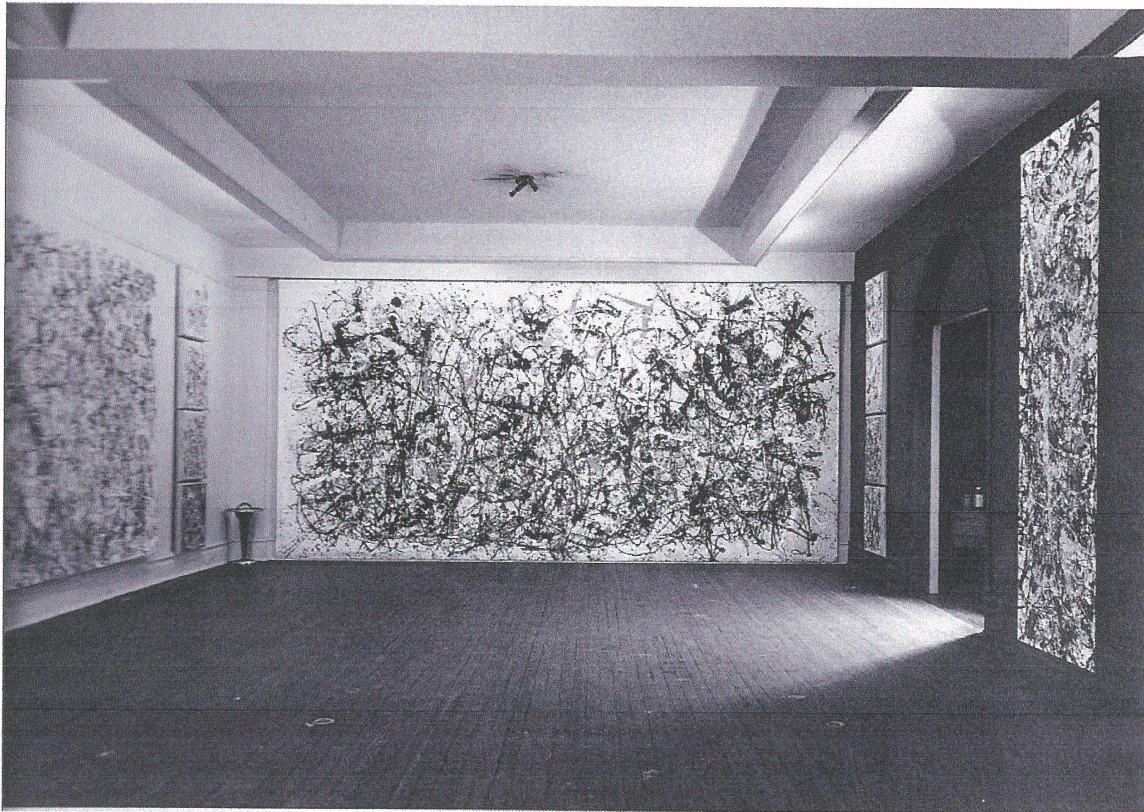
R. Neuberger with Alfred and Roma Connable, *The Passionate Collector*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2003, pp. 68-69]

Parsons kept her own typewritten list of museum holdings for all of her artists. On it, Pollocks are listed in the collections of the Los Angeles [County] Museum of Art



Jackson Pollock, *Number 8, 1949*. Oil, enamel and aluminum paint on canvas, 34 1/8 x 71 1/4 inches. Neuberger Museum, Purchase College.

(*Number 15, 1950*, a 1951 purchase for \$300), the Baltimore Museum of Art (*Water Birds*, purchased for \$250 by the collector Saidie May, who donated it to the museum in 1951), and the Whitney Museum of American Art (identified on the list as *Number 7, 1948* [oil], sold for \$225. Unfortunately there is no such work in the Whitney's collection, or by that title in the Pollock catalogue raisonné.). The priciest museum sale was to the Museum of Modern Art, which paid \$2,350 for *Number 1A, 1948*. [Betty Parsons Papers, Archives of American Art, Box 26, Folder 25] Although entering museum collections brought undeniable prestige, Pollock's peculiar arrangement, in which two dealers shared a double commission, left no money for the artist after a sale. If he was "the greatest living artist," he certainly wasn't compensated that way!



Installation view of Pollock's 1950 solo exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery, showing *Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950* (left), *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* (center), and *Number 27, 1950* (right, hung vertically). Photograph by Hans Namuth.

A handwritten note from Pollock to Parsons from about 1951 shows the artist attempting to improve his financial situation. In it, he requested an increase in the asking price of an important painting, and also makes the case that he should not have to pay *two* dealer commissions if he obtains his own mural commissions outside the gallery channels. [Letter from Jackson Pollock to Betty Parsons, Archives of American Art, #492] And Pollock was not the only artist from the Betty Parsons Gallery to voice concerns. Newman, Still, and Rothko had issues with both the number of sales and the amount of attention Parsons paid to promoting their careers. Gradually, all but Clyfford Still joined the Sidney Janis Gallery, which was acquiring a reputation as a thriving showcase for abstract art. Years later, Parsons admitted she was wounded by their defection, but she said of

Dear Betty - I think the price of *Lois* should be \$1600. I'm very fond of this painting - and this price is more or less the price of my late work. Also I want to mention that I am going to try and get some mural commissions then we can have I will pay a commission and that I feel it would be unfair for me to pay ~~two~~ one commission. I feel it important for me to broaden ~~the~~ my possibilities in this line of development. But my painting shows in your gallery and gotten by you - you will receive ~~one~~ mural commissions. I hope that you will find this satisfactory - I feel it is the only hope for me to get out of my financial mess, and ~~also~~ also to develop in this direction. Love Jackson

Pollock, "He put himself on the edge. He might be half crazy or even drunk. But he painted like an angel," adding, "...In my gallery he was never drunk. We were great friends." [Parsons, quoted in Hall, p. 95]

During the rest of her career, Betty Parsons continued to manage her two roles: she made her own art at the same time as she identified and promoted the work of emerging artists, attracting increasing accolades for each endeavor. The artists she championed became established giants, including Lee Krasner, who had her first one-person show at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951. In 1959, Parsons unexpectedly inherited money from a relative, and with it she built a home and studio, designed by the



Betty Parsons house, Southold. Tony Smith, architect, 1959.

artist and architect Tony Smith, on the North Fork of Long Island. It became her refuge and source of her nature-based paintings and sculptures, many assembled from driftwood found on the beach. In 1968 she had a show of her work at Whitechapel Gallery in London for which the distinguished critic Lawrence Alloway wrote the catalogue essay. In the same year, Finch College held an exhibition of her stunning collection, assembled over the years from the artists in her stable and others she

admired. In 1974, The Montclair Art Museum held a retrospective of her work; in 1992, The Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center had a show of her watercolors at the same time that the Fine Arts Gallery of Southampton College showed her wood constructions; and in 1999, the Heckscher Museum of Art had a show of Parsons's work in all media.

Betty Parsons died in 1984, after 38 years of encouraging, promoting, and exhibiting an astounding group of artists. Their range and renown are testament to her commitment to diverse and singular visions. In addition to the pioneering Abstract Expressionists already mentioned, she showed Robert Rauschenberg, Kenzo Okada, Jack Youngerman, Anne Ryan, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Richard Pousette-Dart, Leon Polk Smith, Forrest Bess, Sonia Sekula, Herbert Ferber, Seymour Lipton, Eduardo Paolozzi, Alexander Liberman, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Richard Lindner, Agnes Martin, Ellsworth Kelly, John Walker, Patrick Ireland, Robert Murray, Thomas Nozkowski and Richard Tuttle. Exquisitely sensitive, open, and spiritual, Parsons was totally attuned to form and color. With her special connection to artists, she was an unusual gallerist. Parsons herself said that she felt her most significant contribution was her lifelong, unwavering search for quality in art. [Betty Parsons, interview with Judy K. Collischan Van Wagner, from *Women Shaping Art: Profiles in Power*; Praeger, New York, Westport, CT., London, 1984, p. 64]

### **Sidney Janis: represented Pollock from 1952-1956**

Pollock's final championing gallerist during his short but meteoric career was Sidney Janis. Unlike both Peggy Guggenheim and Betty Parsons, he did not come from a family of great wealth. However, like Pollock's previous dealers, he was captivated by the power of European avant-garde art from his first exposure in 1928. By the time he opened his gallery in New York in September of 1948, at the age of 52, Janis was well-known as an astute and passionate collector, a friend of European artists including Piet Mondrian, Fernand Léger, and Constantin Brancusi, and the author of books exploring less-recognized and innovative areas of art, such as self-taught artists, and abstract and surrealist art. How he got from Buffalo, New York, where he was born in 1896, to become one of the most influential art dealers of the twentieth century is the story of one man with two successful careers.



Sidney Janis dancing with Grace McCann, ca. 1915.

Sidney Janis was born into a large family. His father was an affable traveling salesman and his mother and four siblings were musical and loved to sing. Sidney's talent was dancing, and in his senior year he dropped out of technical high school to travel on the Gus Sun Time vaudeville circuit as a ballroom dancer. He was a machinist in the Navy during World War I. After service, he returned to Buffalo to work for his brother, who owned a chain of shoe stores. As the business prospered, Sidney made numerous trips to New York, where he made two momentous discoveries: the work of Matisse, and his future wife, the writer Harriet Grossman, who would later collaborate with him writing art books and assembling their personal collection. Janis soon embarked on his own business, specializing in men's shirts under the label M'Lord. Having learned that men purchase many more white shirts than either colors or stripes, he limited his production to only one color and style—white shirts with two pockets, priced at \$1. M'Lord shirts flew off the shelves at Macy's and Gimbels department stores, making his one of the few businesses to prosper during the Depression.

Sidney and Harriet Janis shared a love of music and a growing appreciation of contemporary art. In 1928 they took their first trip to Europe and discovered legendary Parisian galleries. They bought a Juan Gris from the venerable dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, and they developed a particular interest in Picasso. In a 1972 interview, Janis told a story of how he met Picasso. He and his wife had travelled to Paris in 1932 expressly to be among the first to see Picasso's new works at the Galerie Georges Petit. The next day, they happened to see the artist on the street and they approached him, telling him that had seen his show. Flattered that the Americans had come so far, Picasso invited them to his studio and there, the Janises selected a work they loved. When Picasso quoted a price, they were disappointed that it was beyond their budget. Picasso asked them how much they could pay and, uncharacteristically, he agreed to sell it to them for that amount. When they returned the next day to pick up the newly-signed work, they found Picasso in a jovial mood and enjoyed an easy rapport with him. The experience buoyed their desire to befriend artists and confirmed their resolve to concentrate on collecting works based on quality rather than quantity. [Sidney Janis, interview with Paul Cummings, March 21, 1972, Archives of American Art, p.14]

The 1930s were years of artistic discovery, self-education, and relationship-building for the Janises. In 1934, Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art, asked Sidney Janis to be on the Advisory Committee of the museum, and in 1935 the museum showed 16 works from his collection. Although Janis resigned from the committee when he opened his gallery in 1948, the culmination of that longstanding relationship was in 1967, when the Janises gifted to MoMA 103 works from the Sidney and Harriet Janis collection, including major works by Henri Rousseau, de Chirico, Dalí and Kandinsky. The Janises's deep commitments to several artists was demonstrated by gifting four Arps, six Dubuffets, three Giacomettis, three de Koonings, four Légers, eight Mondrians, and five Picassos, including the 1927 work that they purchased directly from the artist. Pollock's *Free Form* (1946), and *White Light* (1954) also entered the MoMA collection as



Jackson Pollock, *White Light*, 1954. Oil, enamel and aluminum paint on canvas, 48 1/4 x 38 1/4 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

part of that gift. Janis also facilitated the 1968 acquisition of Pollock's monumental *One: Number 31, 1950* by selling a Mondrian to secure the purchasing cost for the museum.

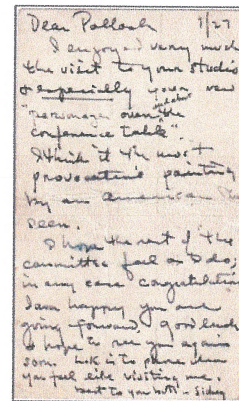
Janis retired from the shirt business in 1939 to write a book about outsider artists, *They Taught Themselves* (1942). His research for his second book, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* (1944), led him to seek out Lee Krasner, who had been recommended by Hans Hofmann as one of his most promising students. Janis visited her studio and selected a work to be reproduced in his book. Before leaving, he asked her if there were any other interesting artists he should see. She replied, "Well, there's one fellow I



Jackson Pollock, *The She-Wolf*, 1943. Oil, gouache and plaster on canvas, 41 7/8 x 67 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

know by the name of Pollock. Would you like to see his work?" Janis went to see Pollock in his studio and said he saw only two abstract works at that time. The other works were more figurative and reminiscent of Thomas Hart Benton, Pollock's early teacher. Janis sent a photographer to capture the two abstractions, hoping to use an image in his upcoming book. However, after seeing the developed photographs, he concluded that the all-over design did not reproduce well. [Sidney Janis, 1972 interview, Archives of American Art, pp. 105-106] About a year later, just before

the book was completed, Janis was in Pollock's studio and saw his new canvas, *The She-Wolf* (1943). Janis admired that work so much he featured the painting in the book, with a color plate. He also recommended to his fellow board members at MoMA that they purchase it. When MoMA purchased *The She-Wolf* in 1944 from Peggy Guggenheim's gallery for \$600, she notified Pollock, who didn't even have a telephone, with a jubilant telegram. It was the first painting by Pollock to enter a museum collection. On September 27, 1943 Janis wrote a letter to Pollock referring to another painting he admired as "the personage over and about the conference table" (later identified as *Male and Female in Search of a Symbol* [1943]), adding, "I think it the most provocative painting by an American I've seen." [Postcard from Sidney Janis to Jackson Pollock, Archives of American Art, #13815] Thus, Janis was both an extremely early and effective supporter of Pollock.



In 1958, the critic Clement Greenberg reflected on the timing and significance of Janis's *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*:

Sidney Janis started visiting the studios of artists like Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock when their names were not known beyond the circle of their friends and acquaintances. He wrote about them and reproduced examples of their work in one of the very first books that so much as noticed the 'movement' which they and a few other painters in New York were beginning to constitute. *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* appeared in 1944, a good while before either the art magazines or the newspaper critics reached the point where they were able to discuss 'abstract expressionists' with a modicum of calm. In that book Baziotes, Carles, Adolph Gottlieb, Hofmann, Motherwell, Pollock, Rothko, de Kooning, Gorky, and other Americans were discussed and illustrated – without apology or qualification – side by side with Braque,

Chagall, Kandinsky, Léger, Mondrian and Picasso. [Clement Greenberg, "Sidney Janis: An Appreciation," 1958]

In 1948, with his wife's encouragement, eager to earn more money so he could collect more paintings, and convinced that he would enjoy working with the art and artists he so admired, Sidney Janis opened his own gallery in a space at 15 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street. It was previously the Sam Kootz Gallery, situated directly across the hall from the Betty Parsons Gallery. Janis remembered that when they were hanging their inaugural show devoted to Fernand Léger, Pollock came in and stayed all afternoon. The Sidney Janis Gallery became known for exhibiting the work of modern European artists alongside emerging American abstract artists; the brash Americans held their own. Janis's intentional juxtapositions established the legitimacy of new and bold American painters. In addition, Janis loved talking to people about the art, but was mindful not to oversell a work. [Sidney Janis, Interview 1972, Archives of American Art, p.251]

By 1952, when Janis learned (from either Leo Castelli or Lee Krasner) that Pollock was leaving the Betty Parsons Gallery, he already represented Joseph Albers, Arshile Gorky, and Willem de Kooning. Janis related that Pollock and Krasner came to discuss a move and Lee did all the talking. At that time, Janis voiced his fear that the market was saturated with Pollocks, to which Lee replied, "The surface hasn't even been scratched." Janis, looking back years later, remarked, "How right she was!" [Sidney Janis, 1972 interview, Archives of American Art, p.140]



Jackson Pollock, *Number 8, 1952*. Oil and enamel on canvas, 41 1/2 x 56 inches. Wadsworth Atheneum.

Immediately after joining the gallery, Pollock brought Janis a new painting and Janis hung it in a prominent place, over his desk in his office, near other great works by artists like Brancusi and Giacometti. Pollock inquired what he would ask for it and when Janis said \$1,500, Pollock "...almost dropped dead. He had never gotten a price like that." The next client to come into the gallery was the noted architect Philip L. Goodwin, who was co-designer with Edward Durrell Stone of the 1939 Museum of Modern Art building. He admired the painting over the desk (*Number 8, 1952*, later given by Goodwin's estate to the Wadsworth Atheneum) and bought it for the asking price. Pollock was shocked but delighted to receive his 2/3 artist's share. [Sidney Janis, 1972 interview, Archives of American Art, pp. 141-142]

During 1951, the last year that Pollock was represented by Betty Parsons, he sold only 6 works with her, totaling \$1,950. The next year, after switching to the Sidney Janis Gallery, he reported an income of over \$11,500, which, at a time when the average income was about \$4,000, put him in the top 4% of wage earners. [Francis V. O'Connor, Preliminary Analysis of the Pollock-Krasner Checkbooks: 1946-1954, Pollock Krasner House and Study Center Archives] In a letter Pollock wrote to Janis at that time he said, "I think we should feel proud of our first year together." [Jackson Pollock letter to Sidney Janis, c.1953, O'Connor and Thaw, vol. 4, D 105, p. 270] To put in perspective how this increase in sales impacted Pollock and Krasner, one must consider that from the time they met in 1941, the couple had struggled to eat, pay their rent or mortgage, and purchase art supplies. When they moved into their home in Springs, it had no indoor toilet, tub, hot water or telephone, and, because of wartime rationing, they could only get one bucket of coal at a time for heating. The generous income of 1952 meant they could finally do more than cover necessities and, in the spring of 1953, Pollock renovated his shabby studio.



Jackson Pollock, *One: Number 31, 1950*. Oil and enamel on canvas, 105 7/8 x 209 1/2 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Despite the fact that the size of Pollock's major canvases made them difficult to place, Janis sold Pollock's over-sized and most expensive painting during the artist's lifetime, to a private collector. The 6'8" x 8'8" *One: Number 31, 1950* was sold for \$6,000 to Ben Heller. The work was so large that in order to get it into Heller's New York apartment, Pollock himself had to place the canvas on the top of the elevator cab. [Ben Heller, conversation with the writer, May 1, 2013] Sidney Janis recalled another collector who was reluctant, but eventually paid \$3,000 for a Pollock in early 1956. Six months later, after Pollock's death, the owner sold the same painting for \$60,000. Janis observed that Pollock's death not only raised the prices of his own works, it elevated the entire market for Abstract Expressionist artists. [Sidney Janis, 1972 interview, Archives of American Art, p. 250]

From 1952 until 1957, Janis was able to ensure that several major Pollocks entered museum collections: *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; *Convergence: Number 10, 1952* was acquired by the Albright-Knox Gallery; *Greyed Rainbow* (1953) went to the Art Institute of Chicago; and *Ocean Greyness* (1954) was sold to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. In addition he placed many works in notable private collections, including *Silver and Black I*, (1950) to Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, *Number 2, 1951* to Joseph Hirshhorn, and *Number 12, 1952* to Nelson Rockefeller.

Unfortunately, the increase in prices that Janis realized did not alleviate Pollock and Krasner's financial worries. Although the prices of his work increased, Pollock's output dramatically declined as a result of his return to heavy drinking. Whereas in 1950, his most productive year, he made 56 paintings, 15 drawings and two prints, two years later, in 1952, he made 17 paintings. And in 1954 and 1955, in the depths of



Installation of "15 Years of Jackson Pollock," Sidney Janis Gallery, 1955. *Search*, 1955 (left), *Totem Lesson 2*, 1945 (center), *The Flame*, 1937 (right), *White Cockatoo*, 1948 (ceiling). Photograph courtesy of Carroll Janis.

alcoholism and depression, Pollock painted only one painting each year. This lack of inventory surely posed a problem for Janis, who had scheduled shows of the artist's "new work" in 1952 and 1954. As a result, Janis made the 1955 exhibition a fifteen-year retrospective. Another obstacle to placing Pollock's work was that, by the 1950s, most buyers only wanted the characteristic poured works, while Pollock was trying to move in different directions. Sidney Janis emphasized that he, personally, admired all the stages of Pollock's career. He remained the primary dealer for Pollock from 1952 until 1958, two years after the artist's death when Lee Krasner transferred the estate to Marlborough Gallery in London, where a large survey show was mounted in 1961 and traveled in Europe through the following year. The Pollock estate was then represented by the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery after it opened in New York in 1964.

When Sidney Janis died in 1989, his obituary included Alfred Barr's description of Janis as "the most brilliant new dealer, in terms of business acumen, to have appeared in New York since the war." [Quoted in Grace Glueck, "Sidney Janis, Trend-Setting Art Dealer, Dies at 93," *New York Times*, November 24, 1989] His son, Carroll, however, emphasized his father's reputation as a longstanding collector who earned credibility by identifying and promoting great artists at the outset of their careers. By the late 1950s, his stable of artists included a spectacular group of future masters: de Kooning, Gorky, Kline,



Andy Warhol, *Sidney Janis*, 1967. Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas, 16 x 32 inches. Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York.

Rothko, Motherwell, Gottlieb, Baziotes, and Albers, in addition to Pollock. His shows attracted a great deal of attention and reflected his cosmopolitan tastes and scholarly research. They were often compared to museum exhibitions. In addition, Janis had wide ranging taste and was not blinded by the greatness of one era. He recognized and promoted the next generation of Pop artists, and successfully negotiated the changes in the New York

gallery scene, from a few small and inexpensive art businesses at the middle of the twentieth century to scores of large, well-financed, brand name art galleries toward the end of the century. Throughout the decades, Sidney Janis remained passionate about art and actively engaged in his gallery. At his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party, held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1986, Janis glided around the dance floor to a scintillating tango.

Jackson Pollock has become an American icon. How did that happen? Such mysterious phenomena are hard to quantify but certainly, in addition to the fundamental elements – the man, the talent, and the era – there must be people who promote and support him. Pollock was fortunate to have had three remarkable dealers to champion him during his career: Peggy Guggenheim, Betty Parsons, and Sidney Janis. In addition, in Lee Krasner, he had not only a wife, but someone who devoted herself to helping him work and to securing his reputation. After his death, Lee Krasner strategized to gain recognition for Pollock, to boost the market for his work, and to secure his legacy. She promoted scholarship that compared Pollock to established masters and validated his entire body of work; controlled the placement of his paintings; bequeathed their house and studio as a historic site; and found support to realize the ultimate record of an artist's career, a catalogue raisonné. [James Vallière, *Pollock: How Lee Krasner Built His Legacy*, Kindle Edition, May 15, 2012]

Pollock's early death at the age of 44 was a tragedy on many levels. In addition to the profound human and artistic loss, Pollock never lived to see the enormous esteem his paintings would enjoy and to benefit from the astounding prices they would command. Examining the unfolding of Jackson Pollock's gallery history, from 1943-1956, illuminates the personal relationship between an artist and his dealers and provides a perspective on the tension between artistic vision and economic reality.

## Acknowledgments

Although I have been drawn to Jackson Pollock's work and biography for many years, I, and I suspect many others, had little awareness of the conditions and arrangements surrounding Pollock's commercial relationship with the three dealers who represented him during his life. Exploring this necessary, but less discussed, aspect of the artist's career has been a fascinating journey into the New York gallery world of the 1940s and 50s. I want to thank the remarkable Pollock scholar who is the Eugene V. and Claire E. Thaw Director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, Helen A. Harrison. She enthusiastically embraced the idea of this exhibition and thoughtfully guided it through all the stages of planning and execution. Helen wears many hats reflecting her multiple talents, and I am privileged to have had the pleasure to work with her for the second time curating an exhibition at the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center.

I am very grateful to the lenders to the exhibition for generously sharing important works: A private collector's cooperation extended beyond the usual requests when he graciously handled all aspects of the loan of the singular Pollock drawing made for Betty Parsons, and the Washburn Gallery kindly facilitated the loan; Nick Olney of the Paul Kasmin Gallery helped us obtain the Warhol portrait of Sidney Janis that we had so desired; and Lisa Peters of the Spanierman Gallery gave me access to the Betty Parsons estate and facilitated the loan of a lyrical gouache, painted during the time that Parsons represented Pollock in her gallery. I also appreciate the Pollock-Krasner Foundation's long-term loan to the Pollock-Krasner House of the engravings by Pollock that were done during his representation by Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century. I could not have written about the important dealer, Sidney Janis, without the invaluable cooperation of his son, Carroll. With unstinting generosity, he shared important insights about his father. In addition, his assistant, Jeanie Deans, was always helpful, providing needed information and rare installation photographs from the Sidney Janis Gallery.

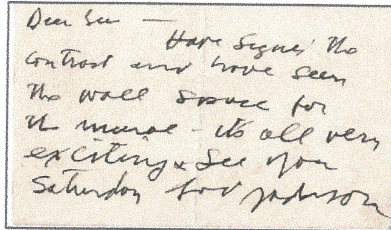
This exhibition relies heavily on rich historic documents, carefully preserved in treasured archives. I am most indebted to the collections that loaned the originals for display and to the people who assisted me in the loans and research: Susan Cary, Mary Savig and Joy Goodwin at the Archives of American Art, and Sarah Haug at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives. In addition, several people generously directed me in the early phases of research and I wish to thank especially Anne Cohen de Pietro, Jack Tilton, and Christopher Schwabacher. When the catalogue essay was complete, Joanne Feierman, editor and communications adviser, was an invaluable reader. I am very grateful for her thoughtful suggestions.

Finally, since I never had the pleasure of knowing any of the three fascinating gallerists who were key to Pollock's career, I want to thank their family members who agreed to share reminiscences of their notable and influential relatives: Karole Vail, granddaughter of Peggy Guggenheim; William Rayner, nephew of Betty Parsons; and Carroll Janis, son of Sidney Janis. The memories and insights that only family members can provide add human qualities to legendary figures and, despite the passage of time, bring them closer to us.

B.C.

## Checklist of the Exhibition

All works by Jackson Pollock © The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society



1. Jackson Pollock postcard to Lee Krasner, July 15, 1943. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

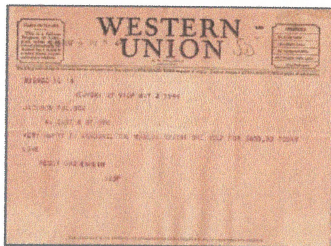
2. Sidney Janis postcard to Jackson Pollock, September 27, 1943.

Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

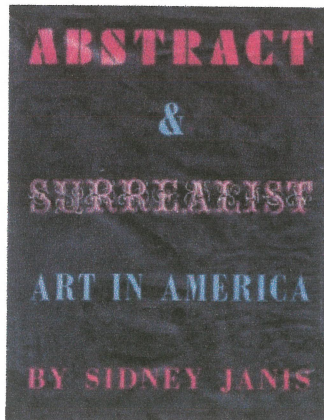
*Illustrated on page 17*

3. Exhibition brochure, *First Exhibition / Jackson Pollock / Paintings and Drawings*, Art of This Century, November 9 – 27, 1943. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

*Illustrated on page 8*



4. Peggy Guggenheim telegram to Jackson Pollock, May 2, 1944. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



5. Sidney Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944. Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, purchase.

6. Peggy Guggenheim and Jackson Pollock with *Mural* in the hall of her town house, ca. 1944. Photograph by George Carger.

*Illustrated on page 7*



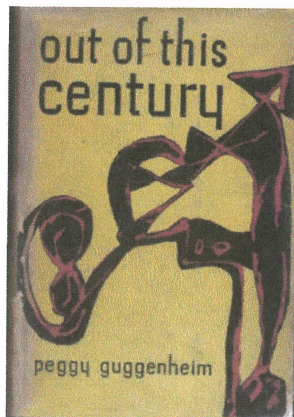
7. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, ca. 1944-45. Engraving and drypoint, printed posthumously, 1967. Sheet: 19  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 27  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches. Lent by the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York.



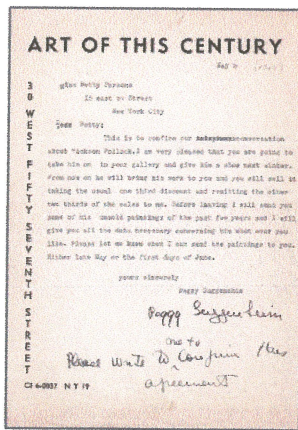
8. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, ca. 1944-45. Engraving and drypoint, printed posthumously, 1967. Sheet: 20 x 13  $\frac{5}{8}$  inches. Lent by the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York.



9. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, ca. 1946. Pencil and ink on paper, 4  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 11  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Formerly in the collection of Betty Parsons, gift of the artist. Lent by a private collection, London.  
*Illustrated on page 12*

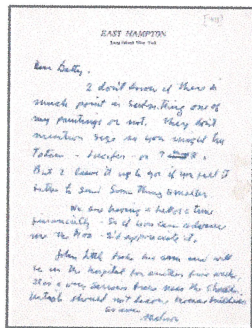


10. Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century*. New York: The Dial Press, 1946. Dust jacket design adapted from screen prints by Jackson Pollock. Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, purchase.



11. Peggy Guggenheim letter to Betty Parsons, May 5, 1947. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

12. Contract between Betty Parsons and Peggy Guggenheim, May 12, 1947. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Illustrated on page 13



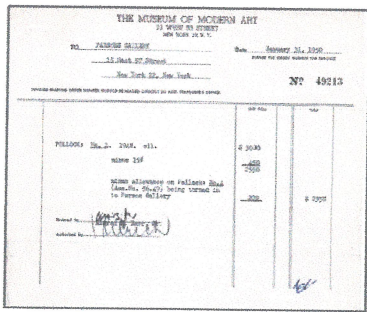
13. Jackson Pollock letter to Betty Parsons [1948]. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



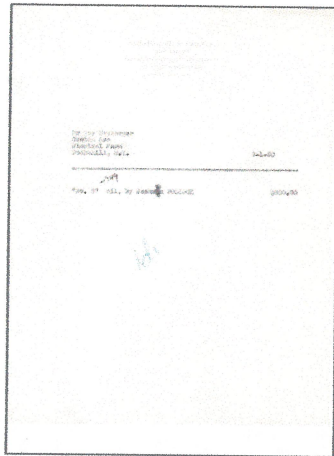
14. Exhibition invitation, "Jackson Pollock Paintings: Murals in Modern Architecture," Betty Parsons Gallery, November 21 – December 10, 1949. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



15. Jackson Pollock in the Betty Parsons Gallery, 1949. Photograph by Ben Schultz. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



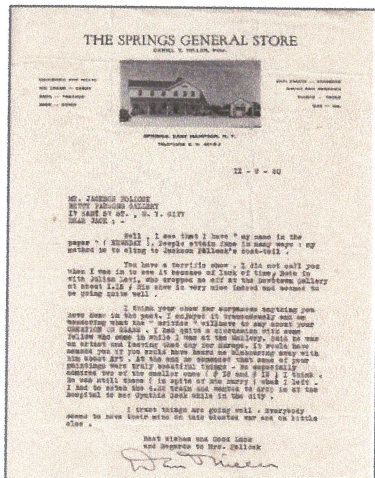
16. Sales invoice for No. 1 painting by Jackson Pollock, Betty Parsons Gallery, January 31, 1950. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



17. Sales invoice for No. 8 painting by Jackson Pollock, Betty Parsons Gallery, July 1, 1950. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



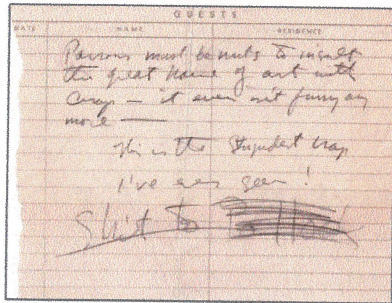
18. Exhibition invitation, "Jackson Pollock," Betty Parsons Gallery, November 28 – December 16, 1950. Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, gift of Edward F. Dragon in memory of Alfonso A. Ossorio.



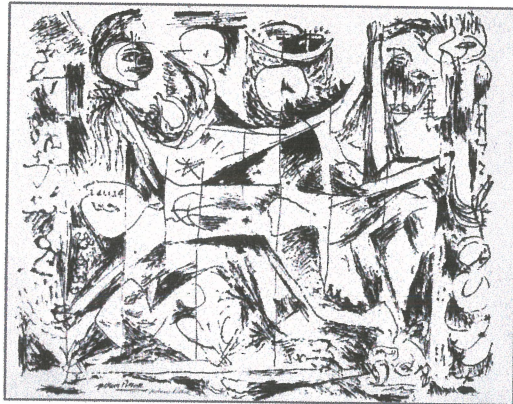
19. Daniel Miller letter to Jackson Pollock, 11[sic] - 9 - 50. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



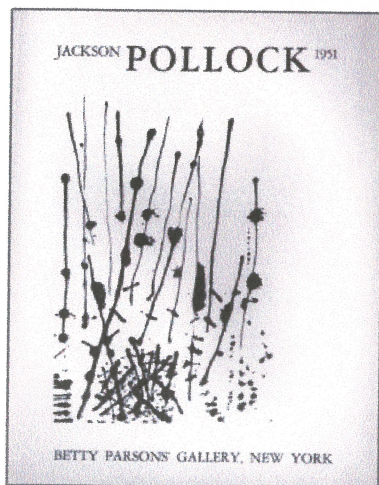
20. Betty Parsons, *Untitled*, 1950. Gouache on paper, 20 x 16 inches. Lent by Spanierman Gallery, New York.



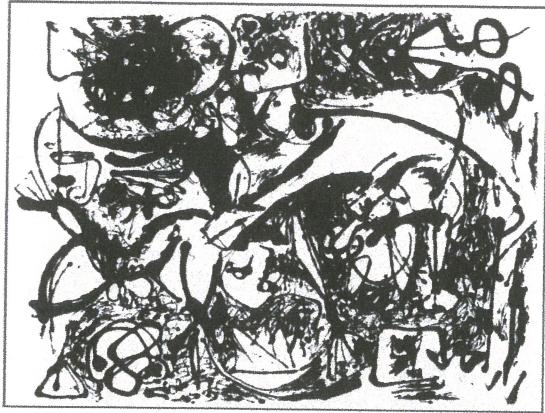
21. Guest book page, Betty Parsons Gallery, undated. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



22. Exhibition announcement, "Jackson Pollock," Betty Parsons Gallery, November 26 - December 15, 1951. Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, gift of Edward F. Dragon in memory of Alfonso A. Ossorio.



23. Exhibition catalogue, *Jackson Pollock*, Betty Parsons Gallery, November 26 - December 15, 1951. Essay by Alfonso Ossorio. Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, gift of Edward F. Dragon in memory of Alfonso A. Ossorio.

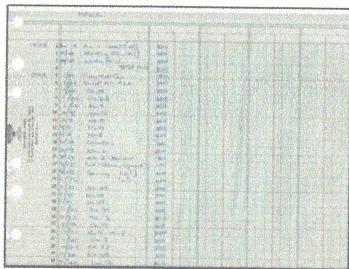


24. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled (after Number 8, 1951 / "Black Flowing")*, 1951. Screen print, printed posthumously, 1964. Sheet: 23 x 29 inches. Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, gift of the Estate of Lee Krasner Pollock.

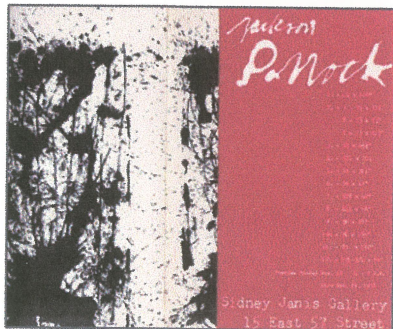


25. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled (after Number 27, 1951)*, 1951. Screen print, printed posthumously, 1964. Sheet: 23 x 29 inches. Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, gift of the Estate of Lee Krasner Pollock.

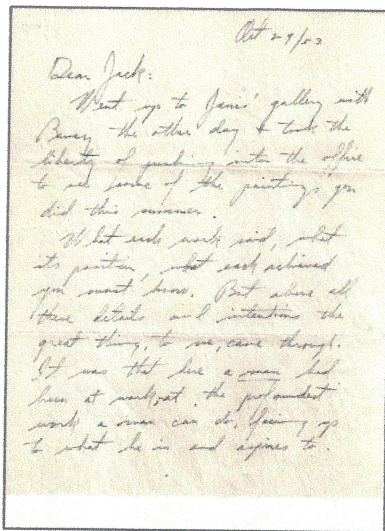
26. Jackson Pollock letter to Betty Parsons, ca. 1951.  
Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.  
*Illustrated on page 14*



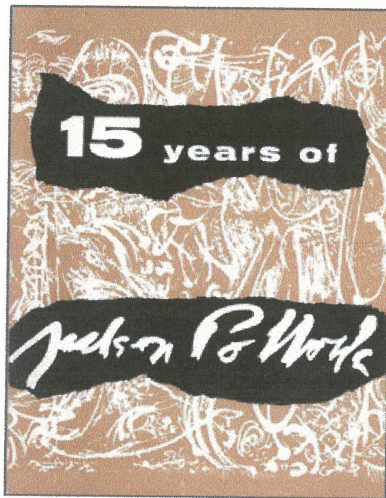
27. Sales summaries for Pollock works of art, Betty Parsons Gallery, 1946- 51. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



28. Exhibition announcement, "Jackson Pollock," Sidney Janis Gallery, November 10 – 29, 1952. Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, gift of Edward F. Dragon in memory of Alfonso A. Ossorio.



29. Clyfford Still letter to Jackson Pollock, October 10, 1953. Lent by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



30. Exhibition catalogue, *15 Years of Jackson Pollock*, Sidney Janis Gallery, November 28 – December 31, 1955. Private collection.

31. Photographs of Jackson Pollock exhibition installations, Sidney Janis Gallery, 1954 and 1955. Courtesy of Carroll Janis.



32. Andy Warhol, *Sidney Janis*, 1967 Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas, 16 x 32 inches. © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society. Lent by Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York. Illustrated on page 20