

Detail from Hans Namuth, *Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner*, 1950



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**Pollock–Krasner
House and Study Center**

STUDIO ESSAY

INTRODUCTION

Jackson Pollock painted almost all of his important masterpieces in this building between 1946 and 1955. After his death in 1956, Lee Krasner used it as her studio from 1957 until her death in 1984.

The anteroom contains their tools and materials. In the studio proper, remnants of Krasner's energetic painting process are visible on the walls. Pollock's poured paintings are documented on the wood floor, which was covered in a 1953 renovation. The covering was removed in 1987-88, revealing a unique art historical artifact.

The property is owned and operated by The Stony Brook Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit affiliate of Stony Brook University. The Study Center art reference library and research collections, housed at Stony Brook's Southampton campus, promote scholarship on 20th century American art in an international context, with emphasis on artists who have lived and worked on Eastern Long Island.



PHOTO ESSAY

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Photographs courtesy of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; Maurice Berezov; Rudy Burckhardt; Mary Louise Edwards Dodge; Ray Eames; Halley Erskine; Reuben Kadish; Larry Larkin, Life Picture Service; Thomas Moran Biographical Art Collection, East Hampton Library; Herbert Matter; Hans Namuth; Arnold Newman; Roy Nicholson; Tony Vaccaro; Waintrob-Budd.

Special thanks to Phyllis Braff, Priscilla Bowden, Helen Coriasco, Ted Dragon, Doug Garr, Richard Haagen, Jak Katalan, William King, John V.N. Klein, John H. Marburger III, Terence Netter, Jeffrey Potter, Harry Acton Stribel, Eugene V. Thaw, Master Gardeners of the Riverhead Cooperative Extension, Nardy Pest Control, Stony Brook University Physical Plant, New York Conservation Associates, Inc., Rich-Mar Maintenance.



Hans Namuth, *Artists and Writers on the Beach, Springs, East Hampton, NY, 1962*

East Hampton: A Community of Artists

When Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner arrived in East Hampton in late 1945, artists were not yet living and working in the barns and farmhouses along Fireplace Road in the Springs, as this area is called. The land was still predominately open fields with patches of scrub oak. The locals made their living farming and fishing. This property had been a homestead, built in 1879, with neither heat nor hot water. Jackson and Lee opened the main floor of the farmhouse into a single room and whitewashed the walls. Later they added plumbing and heat. They moved the old barn, in which you now stand, from its position directly behind the house (its foundation is still visible today) so that they could look out onto Accabonac Creek.

Pollock and Krasner were not the first artists to discover the beauty and serenity of East Hampton. In the 1870's dozens of noted American painters, like Winslow Homer, summered in the village and drew their pictorial material from the surrounding landscape. Thomas Moran was the first to build a permanent home and studio on Main Street in the 1880's. He was followed by other painters, collectors and critics, who established a vital artistic community. The next generation discovered the area in the late 1930's and 1940's. Most were refugees from Europe, like Fernand Léger; many were leading members of the Surrealist group: André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst. Their colony, centered in neighboring Amagansett, grew to include Arshile Gorky, Wifredo Lam, Matta-Echaurren, Isamu Noguchi, and Frederick Kiesler.

By 1958, the community could boast the presence of nearly every major figure in the abstract movement: William Baziotes, James Brooks, Adolph Gottlieb, Grace Hartigan, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Ibram Lassaw, Robert Motherwell, Tino Nivola, Alfonso Ossorio, Abraham Rattner, Mark Rothko, Hedda Sterne, and Wilfrid Zogbaum. A 1962 photograph shows a number of them at one of their now-famous July 4th beach gatherings.



Reuben Kadish, 1943



Ronald Stein, 1947



Rudy Burckhardt, 1950



Arnold Newman, 1949



Pollock and Krasner in Springs, ca. 1950



Lawrence Larkin, ca. 1950

The Early Years: New York City and East Hampton

Jackson Pollock worked in only two studios. The first was in the tenement apartment he occupied at 46 East 8th Street from 1933 to 1945. During most of the 1930s, Pollock lived with his brother Sanford McCoy and his wife Arloie, and slept and worked in the two front rooms overlooking 8th Street. In the fall of 1942, Sande left for a defense job (Jackson was “4F”), and he was joined by Lee Krasner, who established her studio in the back bedroom.

A rare 1943 photograph of Pollock in this first studio shows him seated amid work in progress, with a Krasner painting on the wall to the right behind him. In 1945, with the war over, Pollock decided to move to East Hampton, and bought this property for \$5,000. In October he married Lee Krasner, and the next month they settled here. Early in 1946 Pollock turned an upstairs bedroom in the house into a temporary studio. That summer he moved the barn to its present location. His new studio, similar in shape and orientation to that he had just left in New York, turned out to be a perfect square, with the northern window roughly facing to the summer solstice. Lee Krasner established her studio in the bedroom. Both artists were thus settled by the summer of 1946 and found themselves profoundly influenced by their bucolic surroundings, which replaced the drab streets and crowded quarters of lower Manhattan.

Why did Jackson's brother Sanford have a different last name?

Jackson had four brothers, all of whom were named Pollock at birth. But their father, LeRoy, was born with the last name McCoy. When he was a teenager LeRoy was adopted by a family named Pollock, and was given their name. In the late 1930s, when Sanford and Jackson were living in New York City and working for the WPA Federal Art Project, Sanford changed his last name to McCoy to disguise their relationship. The Federal Art Project was a work-relief program that paid artists a weekly wage. Having two relatives in the same household receiving WPA paychecks jeopardized their employment on the project.

An Expansion of Vision: 1946–1947

Pollock's work during his first year at East Hampton was strikingly different from his brooding New York paintings. Struck by the wealth of light, color, and sound revealed by his new environment, he painted two series titled "Sounds in the Grass" and "Accabonac Creek," the latter referring to the inlet to the East he saw from his back porch. Reacting to the vegetation and vista about him, these works display a new delicacy of facture and freshness of color. Stylistically, they fuse Matisse and Cubism, but their structures would soon become more energetic and expressive. In 1947 he began to experiment with his famous pouring technique, a method he had first briefly employed in 1943. A photograph shows him happily kneeling in front of the just completed *Alchemy* (now Peggy Guggenheim Foundation, Venice). It is attached to his mother's quilting frame. Later he would come to place the canvas directly on the floor. One can see how the structured organicism of the 1946 paintings, such as that behind him (probably an early version of *Sea Change* in the Seattle Art Museum) has been translated into more fluid and dynamic forms, as if he had literally captured from the crow he grasps in his hands the capacity to fly as an artist.



Herbert Matter, 1947



Lawrence Larkin, 1950



Hans Namuth, 1950

“The source of my painting is the unconscious. I approach painting the same way I approach drawing, that is direct – with no preliminary studies. The drawings I do are relative to my painting but not for it. When I am painting I am not much aware of what is taking place – it is only after that I see what I have done.”
– Jackson Pollock, 1947

“My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting. This is akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West.

I continue to get further away from the usual painter’s tools such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or a heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added.

When I am in my painting, I’m not aware of what I’m doing. It is only after a sort of ‘get acquainted’ period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.”

– Jackson Pollock, “My Painting,” Possibilities, Winter 1947/1948

THE POURED PAINTINGS: 1948–1952

From 1948 on, Pollock flew with the pouring technique. The following summer a feature in *Life* made him nationally famous. The photographers Arnold Newman and Hans Namuth recorded Pollock painting. Masterpieces such as *Number 32*, 1950 (Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf) and *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30*, 1950 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY) attest to Pollock’s desire for mural commissions. He stated, “I believe the easel picture to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is towards the wall picture or mural.” These photographs show Pollock’s working methods. A profoundly self-refrential artist, he surrounded himself with earlier canvases; an innovator who sought to transcend the limitations of traditional media, he expended large amounts of materials. Growing aware of the visceral impact of his new images, he numbered his paintings so verbal titles would not determine the viewer’s reactions. During 1951 and early into 1952, Pollock painted almost entirely black enamel on raw canvas. Studio photographs show these works pured out on sheets of canvas before they were seperated and stretched. Later in 1952, Pollock painted his last two mural-scale canvases *Convergence: Number 10*, 1952 (Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY) and *Blue Poles: Number 11*, 1952 (Australian National Gallery, Canberra), in both of which he returned to color.





Hans Namuth, 1950



Hans Namuth, 1950



Hans Namuth, 1950



Hans Namuth, 1950

POLLOCK’S MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

Pollock’s pouring method (inaccurately dubbed the “drip technique”) consisted of releasing streams of paint from saturated brushes, sticks, and large basting syringes onto canvases he rolled out on the floor of this room. He preferred commercial enamels, the consistency of which he carefully controlled. At times he would shoot whole tubes of artists’ oil paint directly into a composition. Films reveal he would often begin with a sometimes figurative drawing in black, which he would subsequently “veil” with lineations of color and silver. He worked slowly and carefully, picking up speed as he fell into a natural work rhythm. Often each poured layering would be done separately, with an interval of days between painting sessions. Attaching the top of the canvas to a long stick, he and his wife (who vividly recalled the labor involved) would lift the sheet of heavy, wet fabric onto hooks set high in the studio wall so he could study the overall composition before continuing. Occasionally he would fine-tune his pourings with a brush—extending a line or adding drops or flecks of paint to make an area “work.” Thus the canard that he arbitrarily “dripped” these paintings is contradicted by the evidence of the care he took to study each stage of their creation before going on to the next, and by intervening at the most meticulous level to ensure their formal integrity.

THE LAST THREE YEARS

By 1953 Pollock had abandoned the pouring technique, and was once again painting with a brush at an easel. Up to this time the uninsulated studio, constructed of planks with wide chinks between them, limited work to good weather. Though famous, and often critically acclaimed, he struggled to survive. He never received more than \$8,000 for a canvas during his lifetime.

By 1953 he was able to shingle and insulate the barn-studio, and lay a new floor, which consisted of squares of masonite on tar paper set over the original planks. Photographs taken by Tony Vaccaro about August, show the new walls and floor—and the new work, including Portrait and a Dream (Dallas Museum of Fine Arts), which contains a self-portrait to the right, and a portrait of Lee Krasner to the upper right of the left section, and an early version of Reclining Figure (Washington University, St. Louis). These were among the last major works he was to create in this space.

While he continued to make drawings and a few paintings, his health, undermined by years of heavy drinking, deteriorated. During the spring of 1956 he began an affair. Lee Krasner went to Europe that summer. On the evening of August 11, while driving with his mistress and her friend, his car crashed into a tree on Fireplace Road near Gardiner Avenue, and he was killed instantly. He is buried in Green River cemetery.

WHO WAS POLLOCK WITH IN THE CAR?

Jackson's relationship with Lee deteriorated after he became romantically involved with Ruth Kligman, a 26 year old aspiring artist, whom he met at the Cedar Bar in Manhattan early in 1956. After Lee left on a trip to Europe in mid-July, Ruth moved into the house with Jackson. On a return visit to New York City, Ruth invited her friend Edith Metzger to join them in Springs for the weekend of August 11 – 12. On Saturday night, driving while intoxicated, Jackson lost control of the car in which they were heading north on Springs-Fireplace Road, less than a mile from home. Both Jackson and Edith were killed in the crash. Ruth was badly injured, but she recovered. She died in March 2010, age 80.

“Modern art to me is nothing more than the expression of contemporary aims of the age that we’re living in. All cultures have had means and techniques of expressing their immediate aims – the Chinese, the Renaissance, all cultures. The thing that interests me is that today painters do not have to go to a subject matter outside of themselves. Most modern painters work from a different source. They work from within.”

– Jackson Pollock, 1950



Hans Namuth, 1950



Tony Vaccaro, 1953



Tony Vaccaro, 1953



Hans Namuth, 1950



Hans Namuth, 1950



Ernst Haas, 1981

LEE KRASNER’S STUDIOS AT EAST HAMPTON

From 1946 to her husband’s death in 1956, Lee Krasner’s studio was the north upstairs bedroom in the house. Contrary to myth, she was active as an artist during her years with Pollock, creating series of “little image” paintings, color field works, and collages. The two artists would visit each other’s studios by invitation only, and critics have noted the influence they had on each other over the years.

After Pollock’s death, and her own mourning period, Lee Krasner moved from the house to her late husband’s space. There, until her death in 1984, she created the bulk of her oeuvre. Unlike Pollock, however, she came to maintain a studio in her Manhattan apartment, where she worked during the winter months. Also in contrast to her husband, she created one major mosaic mural for a New York office building, and engaged in printmaking to a much greater extent than he did. She employed a more traditional palette, and never worked on the floor, preferring the resistant surface of a painting wall. Compared to Pollock’s deliberate, rhythmical, linear purring technique, Krasner’s brushwork tended to be more exuberant, as the colorful spurts around the ghosts which remain here, and the splatter extending almost to the studio’s ceiling, clearly indicate. Samples of her mosaic and painting materials, and her cart, are preserved here as well.



Hans Namuth, 1957



Paul De Vries, 1960-61



Hans Namuth, 1957

“Painting, for me, when it really ‘happens’ is as miraculous as any natural phenomenon – as, say, a lettuce leaf. By ‘happens,’ I mean the painting in which the inner aspect of man and his outer aspects interlock. One could go on forever as to whether the paint should be thick or thin, whether to paint the woman or the square, hard-edge or soft, but after a while such questions become a bore. They are merely problems in aesthetics, having only to do with the outer man. But the painting I have in mind, painting in which inner and outer are inseparable, transcends technique, transcends subject and moves into the realm of the inevitable – then you have the lettuce leaf.”

– Lee Krasner, 1965



Mark Patiky, 1969

POLLOCK’S GRAVESTONE, GREEN RIVER CEMETERY

Pollock’s original gravestone was a medium-size granite boulder from the pile behind the house. Krasner chose it because of her husband’s love of the natural stones. But, according to Jeffrey Potter’s account in his 1984 book, *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock*, after the stone was placed, “Lee told me that it didn’t ‘work,’ using Jackson’s word, and that she was keeping an eye open for what would.”

The huge granite boulder that now marks Pollock’s grave was located somewhere in the neighborhood by the artist John Little. Krasner indicated that it was the stone she wanted. In the early spring of 1957, Potter (a marine contractor) and his associate Harry Cullum excavated it and moved it to Green River on a reinforced flatbed trailer. The stone’s size and shape made it very difficult to hoist and set in position. As Cullum described the procedure, “we had to re-hitch everything to get the damn thing so’s it would roll off the trailer to drop in the hole we’d dug next to the coffin without crushing it...That boulder landed just where we’d wanted it, but wasn’t where Lee wanted it. We turned it for her, what we could, then that was it--turned any more the pressure against the coffin would have shot Pollock out of it like a cork of a pop bottle.” Cullum thought the deceased would have enjoyed the spectacle. “Pollock, he sure got a laugh that day,” he remarked.

The original stone was moved to the base of the plot and now serves as Krasner’s gravestone.



East Hampton Star, Lee Krasner’s and Jackson Pollock’s Graves, Green River Cemetery, East Hampton, NY