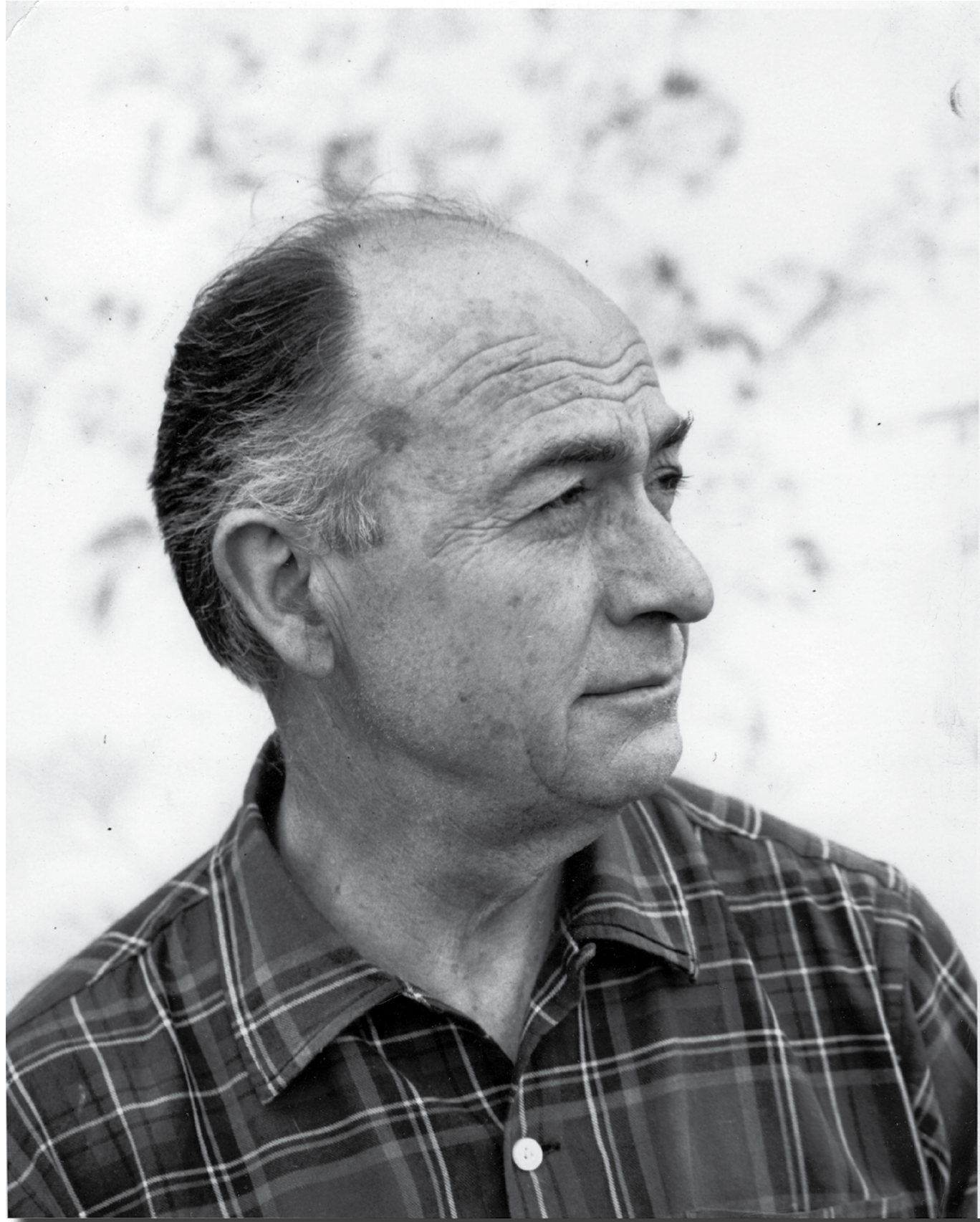


An abstract painting featuring a complex composition of bold, expressive brushstrokes. The color palette is diverse, including bright yellow, deep blue, vibrant orange, rich red, and various shades of pink and purple, all set against a background of white and light grey. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and emotional intensity.

**John Little**  
*home again*

Vallarino & McCormick





**John Little**  
*home again*

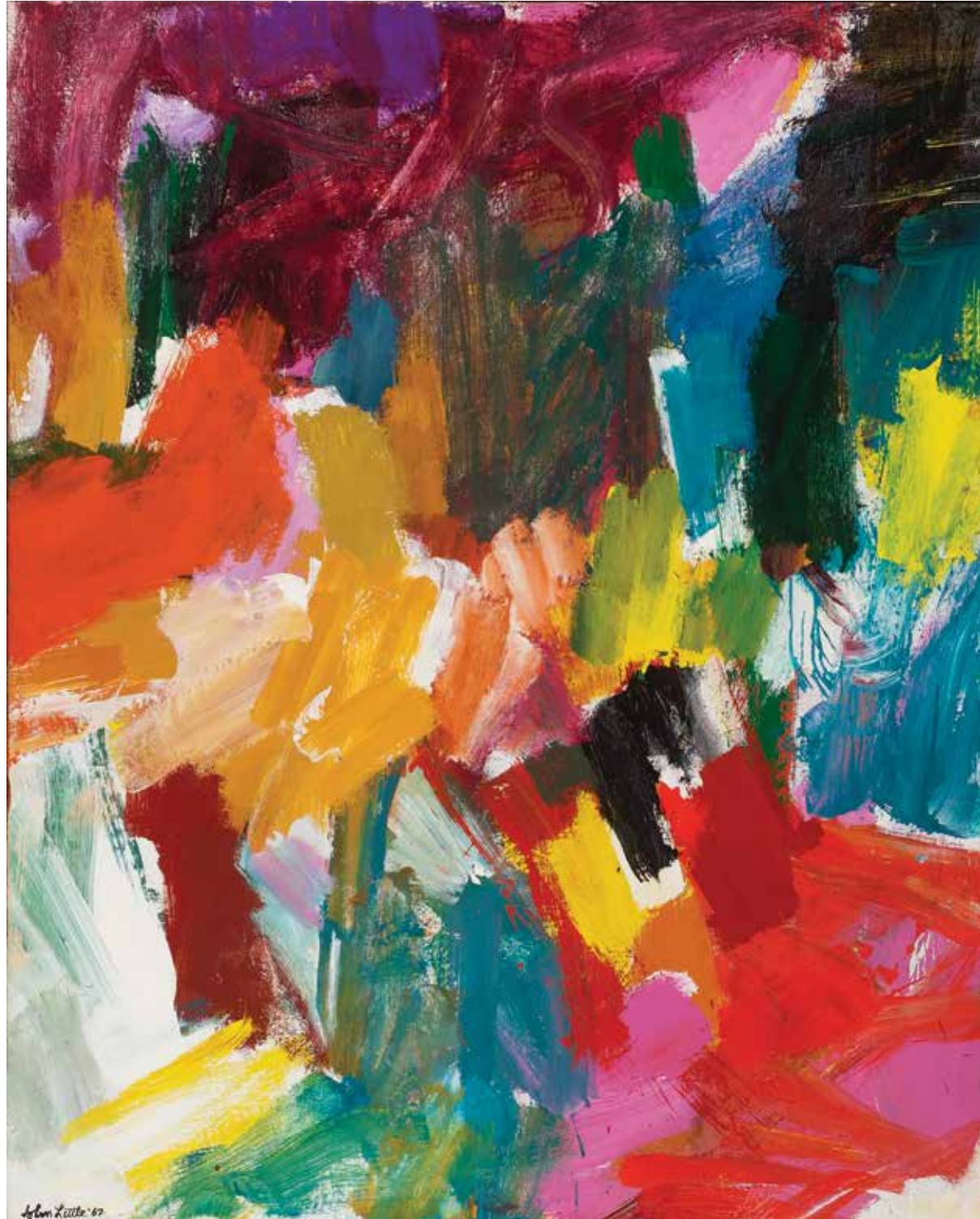


The Art Center at Duck Creek, East Hampton, New York

June 12 – July 18, 2021

McCormick Gallery, Chicago • Vallarino Fine Art, New York

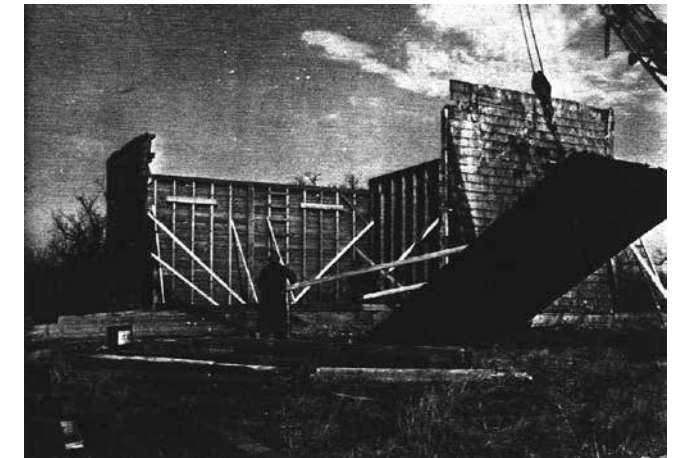
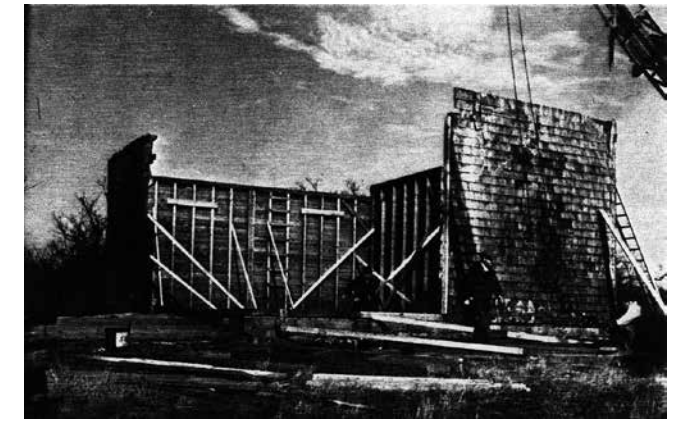




*Upper and Lower Case*, 1962  
oil on canvas, 51 x 41 inches

Collection of Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY  
Gift of the artist

When John Little first laid eyes on Duck Creek farm it was a far cry from the historic landmark property we see today. In the 1940s Little, who lived in New York City, began visiting Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner at their home on Fireplace Road. One day in 1948, hoping their friend might entertain leaving the city, Krasner took Little to look at a rundown old house with about seven acres on Squaw Road. It must not have been impressive. It was built in either 1795 or 1815 by the Edwards family on a 130 acre tract which the family farmed until 1902. By the time of Krasner and Little's visit the house was in terrible condition but something must have clicked because Little bought it and immediately set to restoring it. He also bought an old barn from the David Johnson Gardiner farm on James Lane in East Hampton for use as a studio. Black and white photos taken by Jackson Pollock in 1948 record the barn raising for what is today the exhibition and performance space for the Arts Center at Duck Creek.



In 2008, Little's daughter, Abigail Tooker, penned the following *Reminiscences of My Father*:

"Our ancient old house was on Duck Creek Farm in Springs. Almost from the beginning my father went to work on the grounds—he was a monstrous gardener—he could and did grow anything. We always had excellent vegetable gardens. He and my mother, an excellent and discerning cook, were particular about the foods they ate and shared with their friends. I grew up with arugula and mustard greens and gorgeous lettuces, basil pestos and herbs of every sort in daily use. He planted fruit trees—pear, peach, and apple—and put in four long rows of French wine grapes, which he tended assiduously. Every good year he made wine and stored the bottles in the well house. My mother made superb green jelly (the taste and texture of which I shall never forget) from the Sauterne grapes in the bad years. He planted wisteria trees and a purple lilac hedge, a white lilac bush by the studio and many other things as the years went on ... trading plants with artist/gardener friends.

Most important of all was the establishment and maintenance of the flower garden. He loved many plants, for leaf form and flower structure, but I always felt that the colors were the most important thing for him. He profoundly involved himself with his peonies, to the point of hybridizing and selecting his own. On a visit to George Washington's Mount Vernon in Virginia he broke off a couple of twigs of the handsome boxwood and brought them home. The boxwood bushes, voluptuously guarding his grave in the Green River Cemetery, are descendants of those plants.



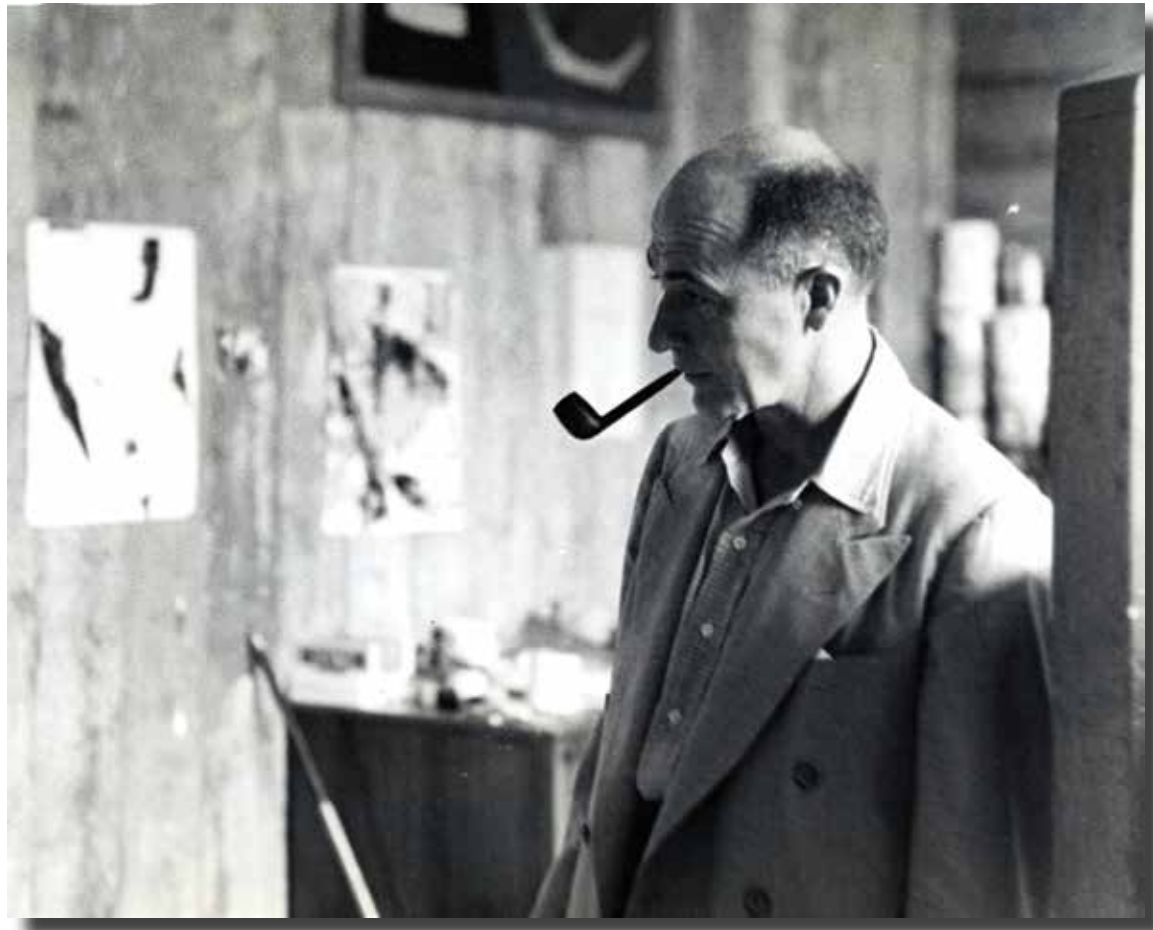
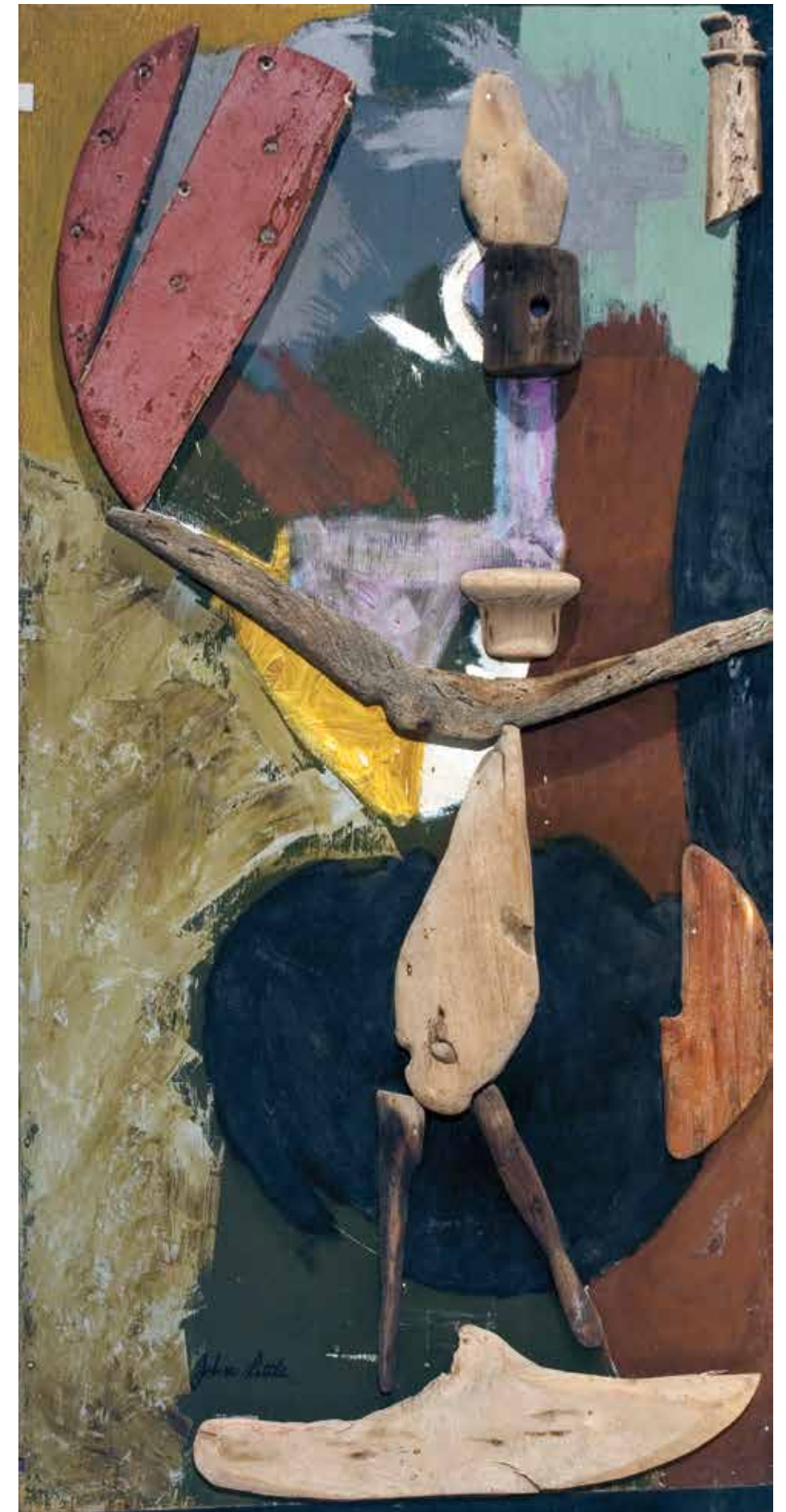


Photo by Caspar, 7/29/1953

We had a tulip tree, crape myrtle, quinces, a ginkgo tree and an exquisite red little Japanese maple he planted for my sister. My beloved tree was a weeping willow, which invaded the septic system and practically the whole of the back yard! There were great oak trees in residence but hurricanes in my childhood felled all but one beauty, beloved by us all.

Our world was full of marvelous people. My parents gave frequent dinner parties, which I loved eavesdropping on when I was young, and being a delighted attendee later on. The conversations—the arguments—among all these brilliant, passionate, creative people were wonderful! My father used the I Ching regularly for himself, family and friends who would request a reading (Lee Krasner and Alfonso Ossorio). He enjoyed the Oracle's language and would consult it for serious guidance. He used the two-volume Wilhelm-Bynes edition published by the Bollingen Foundation in 1950. I still have the three silver dimes he used and many of the reading notations he made. "Perseverance furthers" so perfectly describes his character.

I see him standing before a canvas supported on his big paint-spattered easel in the big barn studio lit by the immense north window. Standing, left arm bent across his chest, left hand clutching his right arm, dangling paintbrush held in his right hand. Standing and absorbing and studying the canvas before him for what seemed hours, then step forward... a brush stroke applied to the canvas... step back, and more contemplation... more study."



*Image from the Sea, 1954*  
mixed media assemblage  
96 x 48 inches

Collection of Parrish Art  
Museum, Watermill, NY  
Exhibited: Guild Hall, 1982,  
Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY

see page 9



**In** 1955 John Little was the subject of a film, *John Little: Image From the Sea*, a short documentary made by Paul Falkenberg and Hans Namuth. Shot in gritty black and white, it records the making of a large assemblage from materials gathered along the Montauk beach and finished in Little's Duck Creek studio, the site of this current exhibition. The piece is now in the collection of the Parrish Art Museum (see pg. 5). In 1951, Namuth had notably documented Little's famous neighbor Jackson Pollock dripping on a canvas in his own backyard.

Born in 1907, John Little's road to becoming the subject of an art documentary began in Alabama where he spent his childhood on a family farm. His father, Ira and mother, Mary Ferguson, who died when he was seven, were of Scottish descent, which was always a source of great pride to John. As a child, he became interested in art when he watched a neighbor's daughter paint watercolor landscapes. He spoke of coming upon her ensconced on a stool before her easel, which was set up on the bank of one of his favorite fishing streams. He was fascinated and it set his course.<sup>1</sup> In 1921, at age 14, John left home for Buffalo, New York with the intention of studying art at the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, which was associated with the Albright Art Gallery. In need of money for his education he first worked as a stevedore on the docks there and finally enrolled as a student in 1924. Initially he studied applied design but soon switched to fine arts and in his second year received a scholarship.

At the academy a formative moment came in 1927 when the Société Anonyme collection was exhibited at the Albright Art Gallery. Formed in New York in 1920 by Katherine Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray, the Société Anonyme collection of modern art was shown in more than 80 exhibitions around the country in the 1920s and 1930s. Its purpose of promoting modern art was well served, for when Little saw works by avant-garde artists from both Europe and the United States, and heard Dreier's lectures, he was profoundly affected.<sup>2</sup> In Buffalo, Little also first learned about a German teacher and proponent of modern painting named Hans Hofmann, whose academy was in Munich at the time. Little's involvement with Hofmann would come later.

While studying art in Buffalo Little discovered he had a talent for singing and he began to study voice seriously. In 1927 he moved to New York City where he continued with his vocal work, including the study of operatic literature, for another three years. It was in New York that Little stumbled upon a means of earning money that for some years diverted his time from painting. Through a friend he was introduced to the owner of a textile design business. He began by doing odd jobs but showed an aptitude for the work and was soon free-lancing with his own, independent projects. By 1929 he had opened the John Little Studio: Fabric and Wallpaper Design, which continued in business until about 1950.

The decade of the 1930s was an important and formative period for John Little. In 1933 he resumed his study of painting at the Art Students League under George Grosz. In this period the paintings he did for himself were mainly "landscapes that reveal an incipient modernism."<sup>3</sup> In 1982 he spoke with Marion Harmon who writes: "A natural abstractionist, [Little] sat in front of landscapes as a young artist, but after years of painstaking work and thought, he concluded that a landscape is not a landscape. It is an illusion. 'You see plains and valleys. In reality, these are merely complexes of light and form and color. To copy them is simply—paint! A pigment is a pigment. Let it be what it is!'"<sup>4</sup> Around 1934 Little made his first visit to the sleepy village of East Hampton on Long Island's East End, where he would eventually settle. In 1937, he traveled to Paris for a few weeks to study historical textile design at the excellent library of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and while there saw exhibitions of works by Picasso and other European modernists. Back in New York he accepted a part-time job in 1938 teaching textile design at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Despite the economic depression, Little made a good living throughout the 1930s from his design business and never needed to work in the

*A solitary figure appears in grainy black and white, walking alone down a rugged and rock strewn beach. The menacing sea on his left and the bleak, craggy landscape on his right, he trudges away from the camera. Bracing a gunny sack over his shoulder, he leans forward to manage the weight of it. Momentarily the figure stops, bending to pick up, examine and discard a bit of detritus—some piece of flotsam deemed unsuitable for some as-of-yet unknown purpose....*



Stills from the Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg film, *Image From the Sea*, 1955. John Little is seen gathering beach detritus from Montauk beach for assembly back in his studio into a finished artwork (see page 7).

WPA which supported so many of his artist friends. In the late 1930s Little hired a young woman named Josephine Watkins who had just graduated from the Maryland Institute of Art—the future Mrs. Little.

It was 1937 when Little also began studying with Hans Hofmann, who had opened schools in New York and Provincetown, Massachusetts. He attended winter evening sessions five nights a week in New York and spent the summers of 1939 and 1942 at the Provincetown branch.<sup>5</sup> As Little told Judith Wolfe: “There were so many things that I needed that were available from Hofmann ... His color theory was exactly what I was searching for ... I think it’s most fortunate that I studied with him.”<sup>6</sup> Hofmann, through his first-hand knowledge of European modernism, formulated his own theory and methodology, which he sought to pass on to his students and Little was able to absorb Hofmann’s essential idea: painting is an abstraction of what the artist views directly in nature. On the canvas the forms are defined and separated by a strong, linear framework. Color is used to further a spacial sense through a warm/cool interrelationship, exemplifying Hofmann’s “push-pull” theory in which three-dimensional nature is translated into two-dimensional painting by means of tensions between space, form, and color.

Little stopped attending classes in 1942 just as the United States entered World War II. In 1943 he joined the U.S. Navy where he trained as an aerial photographer at the naval base in Norfolk, Virginia. He was never deployed into combat and he recalled that though he tried to keep working, mainly by drawing, this was generally an unproductive period. He did feel that his training, in particular the physics of photography, was quite helpful later in his painting.<sup>7</sup> During the war Josephine went to work for Grumman, the defense contractor, as a draftsman. After the war Little returned to New York where he resumed painting, managing his textile business, and spending summers in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. Josephine returned to the design firm. In New York he lived for a time in the Hofmann’s 8th Street studio, which was located in the same building where Lee Krasner and her husband Jackson Pollock also lived and worked. At the age of 38, Little found himself living in the midst of the growing community of downtown artists, those who would become known as Abstract Expressionists.

In 1946 Little started to work on a series of colorful paintings of interlocking forms in cubist-inspired compositions with mythic titles. He submitted one of these to a group show in San Francisco, at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, which resulted in an invitation to his first solo exhibition, opening there in November of 1946. One of the oils included was Pagan Ritual (now in the collection of the Greenville County Museum of Art) an angular abstraction typical of these experimental works. Little spoke to Judith Wolfe about creating this powerful work, which he painted in Wellfleet: “The beach was just loaded with birds. When I went there they’d follow and squeak. It sort of penetrated my imagination and I thought I would try to express it. It related, I thought, to Surrealism in a way. It wasn’t a dream, it was a reality, but a very persistent reality, like a very persistent dream...”<sup>8</sup>

In 1948, the year he bought the Duck Creek property, Little again found success in California where he was awarded first prize in the Annual Exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association. That same year he had a one-man show at the Betty Parsons Gallery, his first in New York. About 1950, after twenty years in business and with a move to the East End imminent, he closed his textile design studio. In March of 1951 he married Josephine and the couple settled as full-time residents in East Hampton. Little maintained a New York studio, in Carnegie Hall, into the 1970s. John and Josephine soon started a family with daughters Abigail and Jacqueline born in 1952 and 1953.<sup>9</sup>

The Littles began their life in East Hampton against the backdrop of a changing art world—one in which abstract art and the members of New York’s emerging scene began gaining recognition, credibility, and even a bit of commercial success. Little noted that a decade earlier, “No one ever thought of selling paintings... or even showing paintings.”<sup>10</sup> As the downtown scene in New York continued to change and grow many artists were lured to the Hamptons—some choosing to live year round and others making regular working-visits. Besides Pollock and Krasner the roster includes a who’s who of the Abstract Expressionist group including Perle Fine, Mary Abbott, Alfonso Ossorio, David Budd, David Slivka, Esteban Vicente, Wilfrid Zogbaum, Ibram Lassaw, James Brooks, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Herman Cherry, Robert Richtenburg, Robert Motherwell, Norman Bluhm, Franz Kline, Grace Hartigan, Adolf Gottlieb, Michael Goldberg and countless others. While the Hamptons had been an artist’s destination for over a century, in the 1950s it truly became something of an outpost for New York’s avant-garde. Helen Harrison has written about this and notes, “Compared to the city, where liquor and like-minded companions were plentiful, East Hampton offered a respite from the social and professional pressures that literally drove Pollock to drink...”<sup>11</sup>

As Little moved his life to the East End he also shifted his approach to art making. In 1949 he began a series of compelling assemblage constructions created from debris combed from the beach as featured in the Falkenberg/Namuth film. He first went to the Montauk beach with the sculptor Wilfrid Zogbaum for the surf fishing and they both began gathering curious driftwood, stones and beach litter for use back in their studios. The resulting constructions resonate with a sophisticated symbolism rooted in the tenets of Surrealism. Phyllis Braff wrote about these works when she reviewed Little’s 1982 retrospective at Guild Hall: “The wood construction *Image from the Sea* is an example of a figurative form dislodged from the subconscious, and justified as evidence of how the mind works—the new, central subject matter and source... Mr. Little’s work testifies to the importance of questioning, of pushing the medium and the mind to bring new forces into the painting.”<sup>12</sup>

Little began a stylistic change in the early 1950s that is a dramatic shift both a summation of the things he learned from Hofmann and a harbinger of a fuller, more self-confident style of gestural abstraction and all-over compositions that would follow. A total transformation is obvious by 1955. Little is working comfortably with highly energized fields of color and thickly applied brush strokes. The linear structure from his days as a Hofmann student has been buried beneath surfaces of painterly richness. The oils of the middle to late fifties exhibit an accomplished understanding of plastic medium. He begins using a palette knife, even squeezing paint directly from the tube onto the canvas. “I was trying to get away from drawing,” Little said, “to let form and color carry the idea rather than line.”<sup>13</sup> While he allowed for a sense of spontaneity he did not think of himself as an action painter. He might wait days or weeks for a canvas to resolve itself but he always sought to “control from the beginning... the formal unity in painting.”<sup>14</sup>

One of John Little’s important contributions to the development of Abstract Expressionist painting involved no paint and canvas, at least not his own—he was a partner in an important gallery venture that was ahead of its time. By the mid-1950s, while more and more artists were living or visiting the East End, there were no real art galleries in which to exhibit. Little, along with his friends Alfonso Ossorio (1916-1990) and Elizabeth Parker (1893-1975),

decided it was time the village had a place to exhibit the work of contemporary, abstract artists. East Hampton had long been home to artists but mainly of a more traditional variety. The residents were themselves, for the most part, rather conservative and not thrilled at the prospect of a modern art gallery. Nevertheless, the trio forged ahead with their idea and the Signa Gallery opened at 53 Main Street on the evening of July 13, 1957. For the next four summers the directors of East Hampton's first commercial art gallery produced a series of compelling and important exhibitions of current art. Certainly Guild Hall had, from time to time, shown difficult modern art but this was something different—a permanent outpost for what could normally only be seen in New York. Dore Ashton had this to say: “By selecting carefully from the hundreds of galleries in New York City, the directors managed to offer a surprisingly accurate reckoning of what was significant. In addition—and this was perhaps its most unusual function—the Signa judiciously selected works by artists who were not always featured in the galleries of the city but who were, nonetheless, of great interest to discerning eyes.”<sup>15</sup>

In the 1960s Little began to shift once again the structure and surface treatment of his painting. He turned to open, broad planes of color juxtaposed one against the other. While retaining the gestural energy of the 1950s work, he did not apply the paint as thickly and refrained from vigorous gradations created within the brush strokes. His palette became more vivid, with striking combinations of red, blue, green, yellow and magenta that twist, turn and thrust across the canvas. “I’ve always been intrigued by the inter-vibration of one area of color against another which is separated from it.”<sup>16</sup> Critic Rose Slivka wrote in 1997 about these works: “With Mr. Little... we feel the searching, restless brushwork and lilting color, the plunge and splash of Abstract Expressionist temperament, the surge of original discovery, each and every time as if for the first time.”<sup>17</sup> Another compositional feature of the mid to late 1960s is the appearance of curved shapes—segments of arcs and orbs—that Little attributed, in part, to his interest in lunar exploration and stunning photographs published at the time. He worked on a series of moon-related works with this circular motif that included collages and paintings in egg tempera. Critic Phyllis Braff wrote about these paintings in 1981: “The dense, expressionist surfaces are among the most compelling within the Abstract Expressionist tradition... A consciousness of movement and texture is everywhere. Diverse concepts of color action occur within each work, and many within specifically marked-off larger forms. The arc shape is a frequent definition.”<sup>18</sup>

Little remained quite active until his death in 1984. Always painting, he also took an interest in silkscreen printing, which he had learned in the late thirties, producing small editions of lavishly colored prints that faithfully related to his canvas work (pp. 54 and 57). He also lavished attention on his beloved garden. In 1982 he was honored with a retrospective at the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton. In the late 1970s he suffered from heart and pulmonary problems, brought on, his daughter feels, from years of exposure to solvents and his ever-present pipe. John Little died on July 30th, 1984. Gallery owner Elaine Benson wrote of his passing: “Another meeting of the ‘clan’ took place last Thursday at Green River Cemetery in Springs. John Little, 77, gave up a long, brave battle with illness, and joined his many artist friends in the celebrated little cemetery that is running out of space... Friendships were among John Little’s long suits. He and Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner were close... John and the [other] artists were close. He was one of them, respected and admired... As a painter John Little was a fine colorist, whose work was all of a piece... I was particularly fond of this thoughtful, reflective, talented man. John Little stood tall, and he reached out to his many friends with benign and gentle authority.”<sup>19</sup>

Writing in *The New York Times* in 1981, Helen Harrison summed up Little’s place in the art world: “Perhaps no other artist active today better illustrates the direct application of Hofmann’s theories than John Little... [he] is not among the best known of the first-generation Abstract Expressionists, but his art has remained true to the original principles of the movement...”<sup>20</sup> At Little’s funeral his old friend and colleague Alfonso Ossorio remembered him purely in terms of a good neighbor: “... just knowing that John and his family were living and working in their beautiful farm house and studio was a comforting thought over the years.”<sup>21</sup>

Tom McCormick, Chicago

#### Notes

1. Telephone interview with Abigail Tooker, January 6, 2008.
2. Judith Wolfe, *John Little, A Retrospective Exhibition of Works from 1934 to 1982*, Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, NY, 1982, p. 5.
3. *Ibid*, p. 6.
4. Marion Harmon, “John Little Strikes Again,” *The Hamptons Magazine*, Bridgehampton, NY, August 20, 1982, p. 17.
5. Hans Hofmann first came to the United States in 1930, when he accepted a teaching position in California. In 1932 he moved to New York, where he taught at the Art Students League and eventually opened his own school, which changed locations within the city several times until 1938 when it remained for twenty years at 52 West Eighth Street. In 1935 Hofmann opened a branch in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Reference source: [www.hanshoffman.org](http://www.hanshoffman.org).
6. Wolfe, p. 8.
7. *Ibid*, p. 8.
8. *Ibid*, p. 10.
9. Tooker interview: The old barn which Little purchased for use as a studio was quite large and moved to his property in sections. He was helped in the job by many of his artist neighbors and Jackson Pollock documented their progress in a series of snapshots. During the summer of 1957 Franz Kline rented space in the barn, paying with a painting that was later sold to finance Abigail and Jacqueline’s educations. The house and property was sold in 2003 to the designer Helmut Lang who subsequently sold it to the village of East Hampton in 2005.
10. Wolfe, p. 7.
11. Helen A. Harrison, “From Barbizon to Bonac: East Hampton as Art Colony,” *East Hampton Star*, East Hampton, NY, May 14, 1998, p. II-3.
12. Phyllis Braff, “From the Studio,” *East Hampton Star*, East Hampton, NY, August 26, 1982.
13. Wolfe, p. 14
14. *Ibid*, p. 14
15. Dore Ashton, *East Hampton Avant-Garde—A Salute to the Signa Gallery, 1957–1960*, Guild Hall Museum and East Hampton Center for Contemporary Art, 1990, p. 10.
16. Wolfe, p. 18
17. Rose C.S. Slivka, “From the Studio,” *East Hampton Star*, East Hampton, NY, July 31, 1997, p. III-7.
18. Phyllis Braff, “John Little, Work of the 1970s: A Selection at the Arts Center, State University of New York at Stony Brook” (exhibition review), *East Hampton Star*, East Hampton, NY, July 16, 1981.
19. Elaine Benson, “elaine k. g. benson: her column,” *Dan’s Papers*, Bridgehampton, NY, August 10, 1984, p. 12E.
20. Helen A. Harrison, “An Abstract Expressionist Still Makes ‘Discoveries,’” *The New York Times*, July 19, 1981.
21. *East Hampton Star*, East Hampton, NY, August 9, 1984, p. II-2.



## COLOR PLATES

Following are twenty-two paintings from the estate of John Little (1907-1984) spanning four decades of his life and arranged in chronological order. Eleven of these are included in the exhibition at the Art Center at Duck Creek and are marked accordingly.

*Prophet*, 1946  
oil on canvas  
78 x 36 inches







*Suspended Form*, 1947  
oil on canvas  
30 x 40 inches



*Untitled*, 1948  
oil on canvas  
42¼ x 52 inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition





*Black Spot*, 1953  
oil on canvas  
45 x 49½ inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition



*Color Architecture*, 1955  
oil on canvas  
36 x 42 inches





*Untitled*, 1958  
oil on canvas  
81¼ x 27 inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition

*Untitled*, 1959  
oil on canvas  
40 x 40 inches



*Alaska*, 1959  
oil on canvas  
42<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 51<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition







*Untitled, 1959-60*  
oil on canvas  
96 x 42 inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition

*Untitled, 1960*  
mixed media assemblage  
48 x 36 inches





*Tropic of Cancer II*, 1960  
oil on canvas  
60 x 76 inches



*White Tensions*, 1960  
oil on canvas  
18 x 16 inches





*Starbird*, 1961  
oil on canvas  
43 x 36 inches



*Untitled #23*, undated  
oil on canvas  
30 x 30 inches



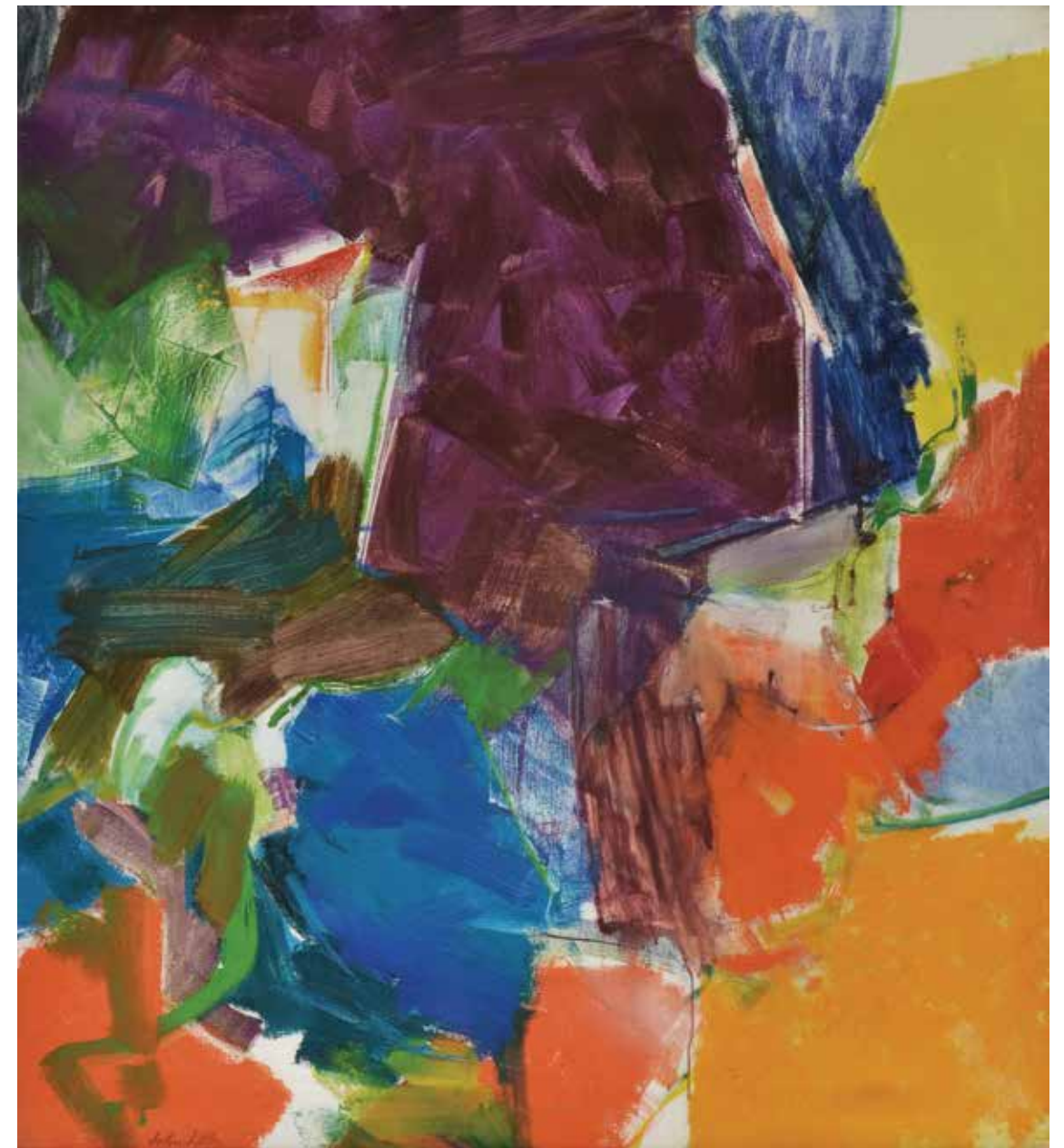


*Yaphank*, 1964  
oil on canvas  
75 x 115 inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition





*Langrenus, 1968*  
oil on canvas  
56- x 51 inches



*Nubium Sea, 1969*  
oil on canvas  
48 x 43 inches





*Tycho (Crater)*, 1969  
oil on canvas  
76 x 108 inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition





*Royerus, 1970*  
oil on canvas  
61 x 55 inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition



*Partain, 1973-74*  
oil on canvas  
95 x 75½ inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition





*Arago*, 1974  
oil on canvas  
60 x 46 inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition



*Blue Hemisphere*, 1978-82  
oil on canvas  
60 x 52 inches  
Shown in Duck Creek exhibition



## Chronology – John Little (1907-1984)

- 1907 March 18, born in Jones Mill, Monroe County, Alabama to parents of Scottish descent, the only boy in a family of six children. He grew up on a large family farm and his father was an agricultural expert.
- 1914 His mother, Mary Ferguson Little, dies.
- 1921 Leaves home for Buffalo, NY where he works as a stevedore.
- 1924 Enrolls at the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy where he studies design and fine arts.
- 1925 Receives scholarship to continue studies at the Academy
- 1927 Société Anonyme collection of modern art exhibited in Buffalo at the Albright Art Gallery. Becomes interested in singing and studies voice.
- 1927-29 Moves to New York City where he continues serious vocal and operatic studies. Begins working in the textile design business, eventually opening his own fabric and wall paper design studio.
- 1933-37 Resumes his interest in painting and begins attending classes at the Art Students League where he studies painting with George Grosz and anatomy with George Bridgman. Visits East Hampton. Spends time painting landscapes in the Woodstock, NY area. Travels to Mexico and visits the Yucatán region.
- 1937 Travels to Paris where he studies period textile styles at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.
- 1937-42 Studies with Han Hofmann at his school in New York on West 8th Street. Spends summers of 1939 and 1942 at Hofmann's Provincetown, MA school. Teaches textile design at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Learns silk screen printing with Harry Gottlieb.
- 1943-45 Service during WWII in the U.S. Navy where he learns aerial photography.
- 1945-46 Returns to New York City where he resumes painting and his textile business. Given his first solo exhibition at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco. Meets Clyfford Still. Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner move to East Hampton.
- 1947-48 Purchases Duck Creek Farm in East Hampton, New York and begins renovation of the 17th-century house. Wins first prize at San Francisco Art Association exhibition with his work *Personage and Serpent*. First solo show in New York at the Betty Parsons Gallery. Published in feature article, "Abstract Design Is Good Design" in *Retail Home Furnishings*. His father, Ira Little, dies.
- 1949 Visits Ditch Plains beach in Montauk with Wilfrid Zogbaum and begins a series of constructions from material gathered on the beach.
- 1951-53 Marries Josephine Watkins in March of 1951 and the couple begins living year-round in East Hampton. Daughters Abigail and Josephine are born.
- 1954-55 *John Little: Image from the Sea*, a 14 minute black and white film is made by Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg. Exhibits a group of the constructions in a two-man show with Jackson Pollock at Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton, NY.
- 1956 Jackson Pollock dies.
- 1957 With Elizabeth Parker and Alfonso Ossorio, Little opens the Signa Gallery in East Hampton. Solo exhibition in New York at Bertha Schaefer Gallery. Franz Kline spends summer in East Hampton renting space in Little's studio.

*"I disturb a perfect two-dimensional equilibrium when my brush first strikes the new canvas. This in itself is a physical act, but in no way has it to do with action painting in as much as the formal unity in painting is controlled from the very beginning, nor does the art I create have to do with so called "Expressionism," it is a highly controlled formal art. My intention in destroying this two-dimensional space is to create a new three-dimensional equilibrium."*

**John Little**

- 1958 Second season at Signa Gallery. Teaches at his own summer art school in East Hampton. Second solo exhibit at Bertha Schaefer Gallery. Shows in Japan at the Osaka Festival.
- 1959 Third season at Signa Gallery. Teaches a second summer of art classes.
- 1960 Final season at Signa Gallery which closes at the end of the summer. Makes the last of his beach constructions.
- 1961 Begins experimenting with sculpture. Included in group shows at Galerie Beyeler in Basel, Switzerland, the Carnegie Institute and Yale University.
- 1962 \$1000 purchase prize from the Longview Foundation.
- 1963 Visiting lecturer in painting, University of California at Berkeley. Solo exhibition there at the Worth Ryder Gallery.
- 1966 Begins series of architectural sculptures.
- 1967 Guest lecturer in painting at Southampton College, Long Island University.
- 1984 John Little dies from heart and pulmonary ailments and is buried in Green River Cemetery on Accabonac Road in the Springs section of East Hampton.
- 2003 Duck Creek property purchased by designer Helmut Lang
- 2004 Lang sells the property to the village of East Hampton
- 2005 McCormick Gallery in Chicago begins representation of the John Little estate with his daughter Abigail Tooker and her family.
- 2007 Vallarino Fine Art in New York begins co-representation of the Little estate.
- 2018 The Arts Center at Duck Creek begins its first full season of programming.
- 2020 The Parrish Art Museum in Watermill, NY, acquires Little's seminal work, *Image of the Sea*.



# John Little, *home again*

June 12 – July 18, 2021

## **The Arts Center at Duck Creek**

127 Squaw Road  
East Hampton, NY 11937  
[www.duckcreekarts.org](http://www.duckcreekarts.org)  
A New York State 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation

The Estate of John Little is represented and this exhibition organized by:

### **McCormick Gallery**

835 W. Washington Blvd., Chicago, IL 60607  
[www.thomasmccormick.com](http://www.thomasmccormick.com)

### **Vallarino Fine Arts**

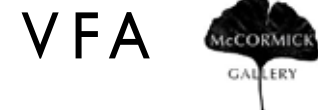
222 E. 49th St., New York, NY, 10017  
[www.vallarinoart.com](http://www.vallarinoart.com)

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Catalog design by Thomas McCormick, printed by Permanent Printing, Hong Kong.

On the cover:

*Nasashom*, 1970-77  
oil on canvas, 50¼ x 44½ inches



Inside front cover:

*John Little*, photo by Abigail Tooker

Title page:

Duck Creek Farm, house and studio  
c. 1951, photographer unknown



*“These are abstractions in the grand style. They have the impact of a cannon-shot, the intricacy of some astronomical phenomenon, and the rhythm of a juggernaut car. With few exceptions they are esthetically ruthless. . . most of them grab you by the throat and shake you right down to your shoes.”*

Alfred Frankenstein, San Francisco Chronicle, 1946

**McCormick Gallery • Chicago**  
**Vallarino Fine Art • New York**