

Jackson Pollock & Tony Smith Sculpture



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Sculpture

An exhibition on the centennial of their births

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY



Jackson Pollock & Tony Smith Speculations in Form

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In the summer of 1956, Jackson Pollock was in the final descent of a downward spiral. Depression and alcoholism had tormented him for the greater part of his life, but after a period of relative sobriety, he was drinking heavily again. His famously intolerable behavior when drunk had alienated both friends and colleagues, and his marriage to Lee Krasner had begun to deteriorate. Frustrated with Betty Parsons's intermittent ability to sell his paintings, he had left her in 1952 for Sidney Janis, believing that Janis would prove a better salesperson. Still, he and Krasner continued to struggle financially. His physical health was also beginning to decline. He had recently survived several drunk-driving accidents, and in June of 1954 he broke his ankle while roughhousing with Willem de Kooning. Eight months later, he broke it again. The fracture was painful and left him immobilized for months.

In 1947, with the debut of his classic drip-pour paintings, Pollock had changed the direction of Western painting, and he quickly gained international praise and recognition. Four years later, critics expressed great disappointment with his black-and-white series, in which he reintroduced figuration. The work he produced in 1953 was thought to be inconsistent and without focus. For some, it appeared that Pollock had reached a point of physical and creative exhaustion. He painted little between 1954 and '55, and by the summer of '56 his artistic productivity had virtually ground to a halt. Perhaps to

Fig. 1. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, 1956. Plaster, sand, gauze, and wire, 9 x 12 x 5 inches (two views)

alleviate his despair, Pollock returned to his original interest, sculpture, during what would be final weeks of his life. On one particular occasion, he worked side by side with his closest friend, Tony Smith, in a short yet intense artistic dialogue, to complete what would be his last work before his fatal car crash. The sculptures they produced on a July afternoon are a record both of their artistic interchange and of the depth of their friendship. They also bring to light Pollock's interest in sculpture—an important, though surprisingly little-known, aspect in the work of one of the most celebrated artists of modernism. [Fig. 1]

Tony Smith was an enigmatic figure, a twentieth-century Renaissance man, an architect, designer, and sometime poet. His original ambition was to be a painter, and painting was the one medium that he returned to over and over again. However, during the last twenty or so years of his life, from the late 1950s until his death in 1980, he focused primarily on making sculpture, the work for which he is now most celebrated.¹ His reductive, black-painted, often large-scale forms appeared to correspond with Minimalism, and the art world embraced him as a Minimalist, which he was not. The 1960s generation acted as if Smith were their discovery, but in truth, during the 1940s and '50s he was already involved with the art world and friends with most of the leading postwar painters—Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, and Clyfford Still—whom he had met in New York. But it was Pollock with whom he became especially close, just at the moment when Pollock was making his most important paintings. [Fig. 2] The artist Fritz Bultman, who had brought the two together in the late 1940s, recalled, “Tony was the man I feel I handed Jackson over to when I introduced them . . . he was the perfect person for Jackson.”²

Smith and Pollock were born the same year, 1912, and shared a love for things as varied as Native American sand painting, modern architecture, ancient monuments, dream interpretation, and James Joyce. Pollock was a painter who loved to sculpt, and Smith, who had always engaged with three-dimensional form, was passionate about painting, including Pollock's. While their work shares no stylistic affinities, presumably Bultman recognized that they would draw strength and inspiration from each other and each other's work. He was right. As Smith's wife, Jane, remembers, Pollock and her husband worked together on their sculptures in the backyard of the Smiths' New Jersey home during a July weekend in 1956 when Pollock found some respite from his difficulties. Over this weekend, Pollock completed the last sculptural works of his life, and Smith one of his first.



Fig. 2. Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, and Tony Smith at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1951. Photograph by Hans Namuth

The Greatest Painter and the Greatest Sculptor

Pollock's total sculptural output was not great—a dozen extant works, both figurative and abstract, in a variety of materials including black basalt, bronze, cow bone, terra-cotta, papier-mâché, and plaster-dipped wire. Yet his interest in sculpture was foundational. It dated as far back as January 1930, when he was eighteen years old and took a clay-modeling class at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. In September 1930 he moved to New York because (as Smith later wrote of his friend) “he had wanted to become a great sculptor ‘like Michelangelo,’” and began taking clay-modeling and stone-carving classes at Greenwich House, located in Greenwich Village.³ There he studied under, and later apprenticed with, Ahron Ben-Shmuel, a sculptor who specialized in direct carving, a method introduced by Constantin Brancusi that involves cutting directly into the stone without using a model, maquette, or drawing as a guide. Ben-Shmuel was known for his exceptional skill at carving into great blocks of granite, the most resistant of sculptural materials. Pollock made his first known sculpture under Ben-Shmuel's influence—*Untitled* (1930–33), a four-inch masklike visage cut out of black basalt.⁴

At the suggestion of his older brother Charles, who would become a distinguished artist in his own right, Pollock began a formative period of study with the Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton at the Art Students League in late September of 1930. Benton's influence on Pollock has been well established, but what is little known is that Pollock sought him out not to learn painting but sculpture. Charles, who had been under Benton's tutelage since 1926, felt that Jackson could learn more about sculpture from Benton than from anyone else teaching at the League at that time.⁵ He had in mind the dioramas Benton often made as guides in planning his more complicated mural paintings. The clay figures he modeled enabled him to visualize each composition's figural arrangements as well as determine a realistic depiction of the fall of light and shadow. Benton based his forms on those of Pollock's early hero, Michelangelo.⁶ Although no sculptural work survives from Pollock's period of study with Benton, Michelangelo's influence can be seen in the figures of his early paintings. The continuing influence of Benton's dioramas on Pollock can also be seen in the Michelangelesque figures that would appear in a series of reliefs he made in the summer of 1938, while undergoing treatment for alcoholism at the Bloomingdale Asylum in White Plains, now the Weill Cornell Medical College. [Fig. 3] Pollock's physicians encouraged his art making for its therapeutic value in training the brain to shift to new patterns of thought, which they hoped would have a curative effect on his alcoholism. While there, Pollock devoted himself to metalwork in copper rather than painting or drawing. He sculpted copper bowls, which he shaped with a hammer, and made plaques with special anvils to create the raised figures.



Fig. 3. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, 1938. Oxidized copper, Diameter 18 inches, Private collection

Pollock's choice of sculpture over painting and drawing in 1938 echoed his decision in 1933 to abandon the drawing and painting classes he had been taking and devote himself to sculpture. He would not resume painting for almost a year. “Cutting in stone,” he wrote his father, “holds my interest deeply. I like it better than painting.”⁷ At twenty-one Pollock was most enthusiastic about sculpting and ready to make a serious commitment to it. After enrolling in Robert Laurent's clay-modeling class at the Art Students League, Pollock wrote his father, “I think I'll like it. . . . If I'm able to learn anything about it I'll take it full day and stick with it for three or four years—and then the rest of my life.”⁸ Pollock also experimented with abstract clay and wax sculptures while assisting with a mural for the WPA's Federal Art Project. All told, throughout his first five years in New York, he spent a considerable amount of time sculpting. Pollock himself considered his study of sculpture in these formative years significant, which he later conveyed to Smith. When questioned in the mid-1960s for a biographical article on



Fig. 4. Tony Smith, *Mural*, c. 1949–52. Oil on four Masonite panels, 8 x 13 feet, overall, Collection of the Newark Museum, NJ. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Salvatore Salibello, 1978

Pollock, Smith stressed what he thought was a critical piece of information. He told the interviewer, “You really ought to mention that Jackson came to New York with a desire to study sculpture.”⁹ It was not a passing fancy or schoolboy’s aspiration. Reuben Kadish, an artist and close friend of Pollock’s since high school, had known that “from the start, Jackson’s idea was to do sculpture that was going to be greater than David Smith’s . . . so that he could be both the greatest painter and the greatest sculptor.”¹⁰

The Friendship

While Pollock was absorbed with sculpture, Smith was studying painting at the Art Students League, from 1934 to 1936. Of all his instructors, the modernist Vaclav Vytlacil had the most definitive and lasting effect on him. Vytlacil lectured on the structural aspects of modern art, and his ideas would manifest themselves not only in Smith’s

paintings but in his architecture and sculpture as well. In 1937, inspired by the Museum of Modern Art’s 1932 landmark exhibition “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,” Smith left New York for Chicago’s newly opened New Bauhaus. Smith hoped to design like Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, and he went to Chicago to study modernist design and architecture under the tutelage of László Moholy-Nagy, but after a year he left the Bauhaus and completed a brief apprenticeship with Frank Lloyd Wright. By 1942 he was working as an independent architect. Two years later he moved to California, where Jane pursued an acting career. In 1945 they settled in New York, which was rapidly becoming the epicenter of vanguard art. Smith’s return coincided with the rise of Abstract Expressionism, with which he was actively involved during its most important years.

Pollock’s and Smith’s friendship solidified in 1948 when Smith helped install seventeen of Pollock’s new paintings for the artist’s first show at the Betty Parsons Gallery. The groundbreaking exhibition featured his new “allover” drip style and included some of his greatest works, *Alchemy*, *Cathedral*, and *Lucifer*, all from 1947.¹¹ Smith and Pollock began to spend a great deal of time together, visiting Fifty-Seventh Street galleries, occasionally dropping by The Club on East Eighth Street, and of course drinking at the Cedar Street Tavern, which was a favorite hangout for many of the Abstract Expressionists. Pollock had moved with his wife, Lee Krasner, to the Springs on the South Fork of Long Island in 1945, but Smith drove out to their home almost every weekend where, as one of the few people whom Pollock allowed to watch him paint, he spent long hours with him in his studio.¹² Although Smith had begun to develop his own painting style, Pollock’s influence is apparent in a 1949–52 mural Smith produced for a private residence he was designing. At approximately eight by thirteen feet, *Mural* is similar in size, scale, and style to what Pollock had completed four years earlier for Peggy Guggenheim’s new residence. It also incorporates instances of Pollock’s “drips” and metallic silver paint, a technique and material that Pollock had begun to employ quite regularly by 1947–48.¹³ [Fig. 4]

“Pollock Wanted to Do Sculpture”

Pollock and Krasner had moved out of their small apartment on East Eighth Street in the hope that the bucolic setting and semi-isolation of the Springs would ease Pollock’s emotional problems and temper his alcoholism, which had been worsening. The city had become increasingly stressful, and Krasner knew that leaving it would be restorative, but she also sensed another important reason for moving to the open space of Long Island. “Pollock,” she later revealed, “wanted to do sculpture.”¹⁴



Fig. 5. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, c. 1949–50. Painted terra-cotta, Length 8 inches, Private collection

An upstairs bedroom served as his studio their first year in the Springs, although it was too small for him to resume his sculptural experimentations while also continuing to paint. However, the new environment offered other options. Natural forms had always fascinated Pollock, and on his frequent walks with Krasner he began to collect driftwood, rocks, and fallen branches, from which he made sculptural objects. In one instance, he transformed a collection of dead twigs and branches into a compelling sculptural abstraction. He also turned to more traditional means and materials in the spring of 1949, when he worked in the studio of his East Hampton neighbor Roseanne Larkin, a ceramicist who taught him how to use a potter's wheel. That spring and winter he made a series of gestural sculptures by first shaping the clay on the wheel, then manipulating the drying but still pliable clay with his fingers, and finally firing and painting the forms. Roseanne's husband, Lawrence, recalled that Pollock worked "instinctively," and that what he seemed to enjoy most was modeling the clay with his "expressive hands." Lawrence regarded these terra-cotta pieces as Pollock's "attempt to make abstractions in pottery, an attempt to get two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional piece."¹⁵ [Fig. 5]

He gave one of his terra-cotta sculptures, *Rape of Europa* (1949–50), to his friend de Kooning. The artist Alfonso Ossorio, an heir to a Philippine sugar fortune as well as a friend, neighbor, and early patron, offered Pollock a monthly stipend in exchange for a selection of his work. Ossorio wrote to him in early 1951, "We've no particular painting (or sculpture) in mind."¹⁶ Pollock also exhibited his sculptures, beginning with a show at

the Museum of Modern Art; MoMA also included one of his recent painted terra-cotta works in its traveling exhibition "Sculpture by Painters," which went to twelve North American cities between November 1949 and May 1951. That sculpture was complemented in the show by *Drawing Number 4*, 1948, as if in confirmation of Lawrence Larkin's observation of the consonance between Pollock's three-dimensional work and his two-dimensional painting. When the terra-cotta was shown a second time, in 1958 at Galerie Chalette, alongside sculptures by Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso, one reviewer noted that it was possible to discern the painter's style in the "writhing and intricate mass of Jackson Pollock's small terracotta."¹⁷

Following the MoMA exhibition, Pollock created a papier-mâché sculpture specifically for a 1951 show—also titled "Sculpture by Painters"—at the Peridot Gallery by layering Rivet glue and a stack of colored ink drawings on Japanese rice paper that Smith had given him over an armature of chicken wire to create a five-foot-long amoeba-shaped mass. He then mounted it on a wooden door and exhibited the sculpture directly on the floor (anticipating a Minimalist tactic). [Fig. 6] Smith later described

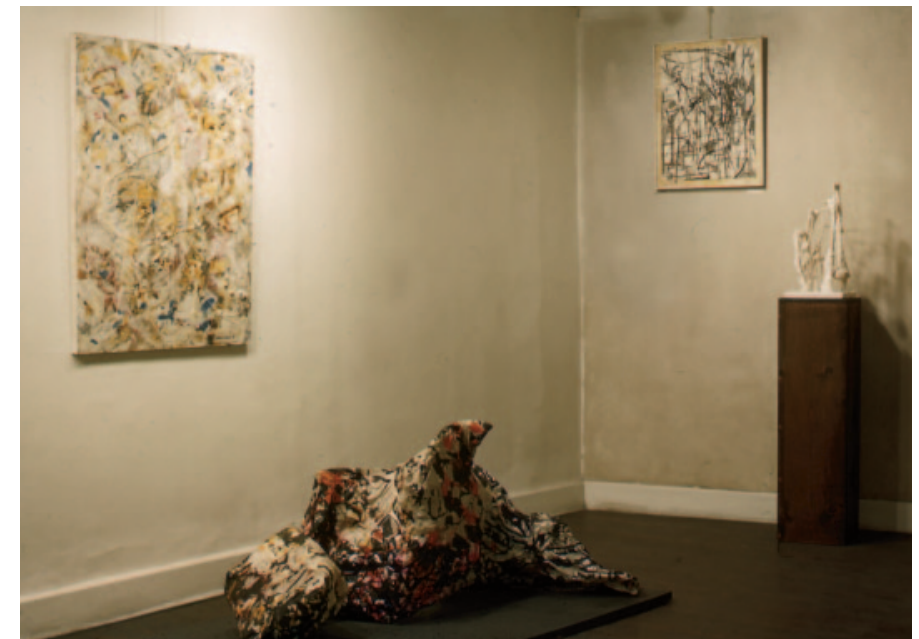


Fig. 6. Installation view, Peridot Gallery, New York, "Sculpture by Painters," March 27–April 21, 1951. At center is Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, c. 1951. Ink on rice paper drawings soaked in Rivet glue over chicken wire mounted on wooden door, Length approximately 60 inches, Destroyed



Fig. 7. Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, 1956. Plaster, sand, gauze, and wire, 12¼ x 12 x 17½ inches (two views)

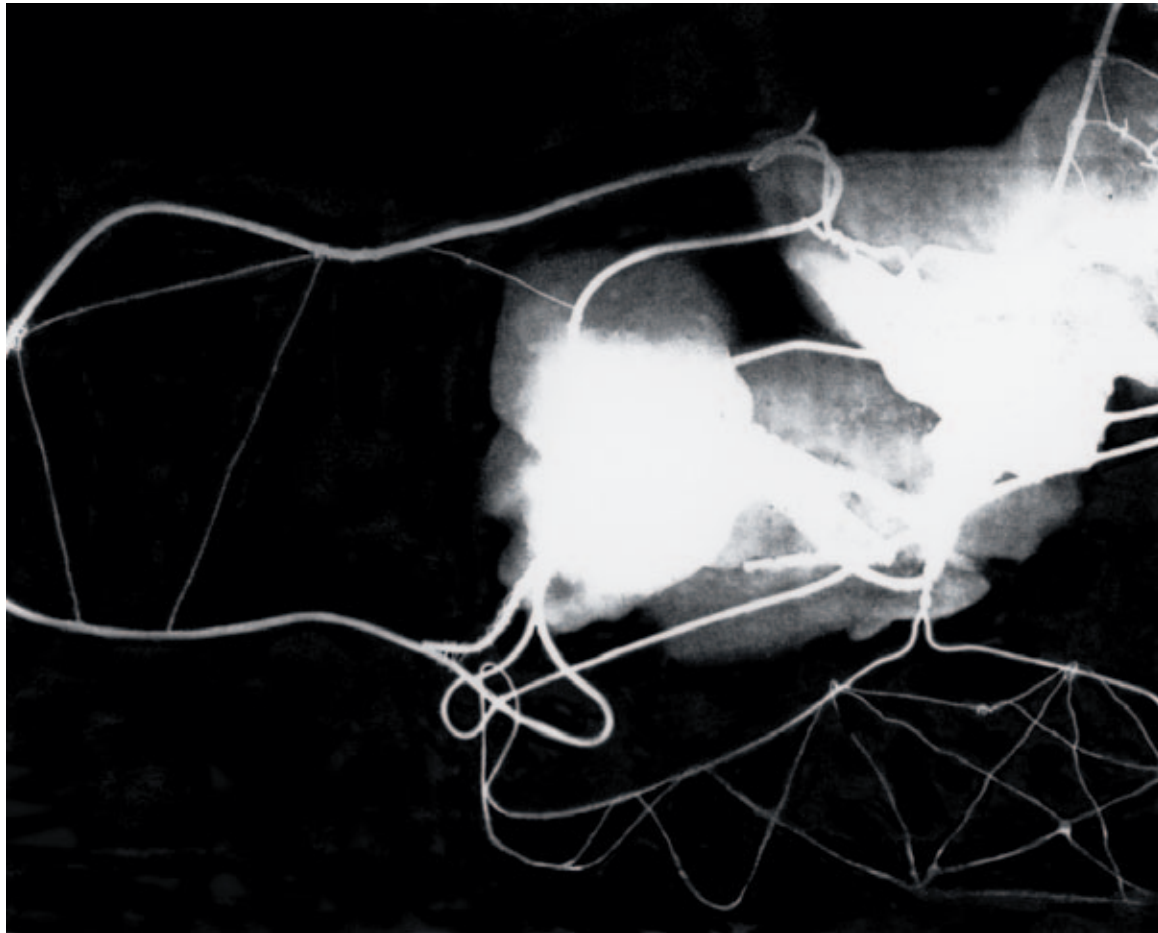


Fig. 8. X-radiograph of Jackson Pollock *Untitled*, 1956. Plaster, sand, gauze, and wire, 12¼ x 12 x 17½ inches

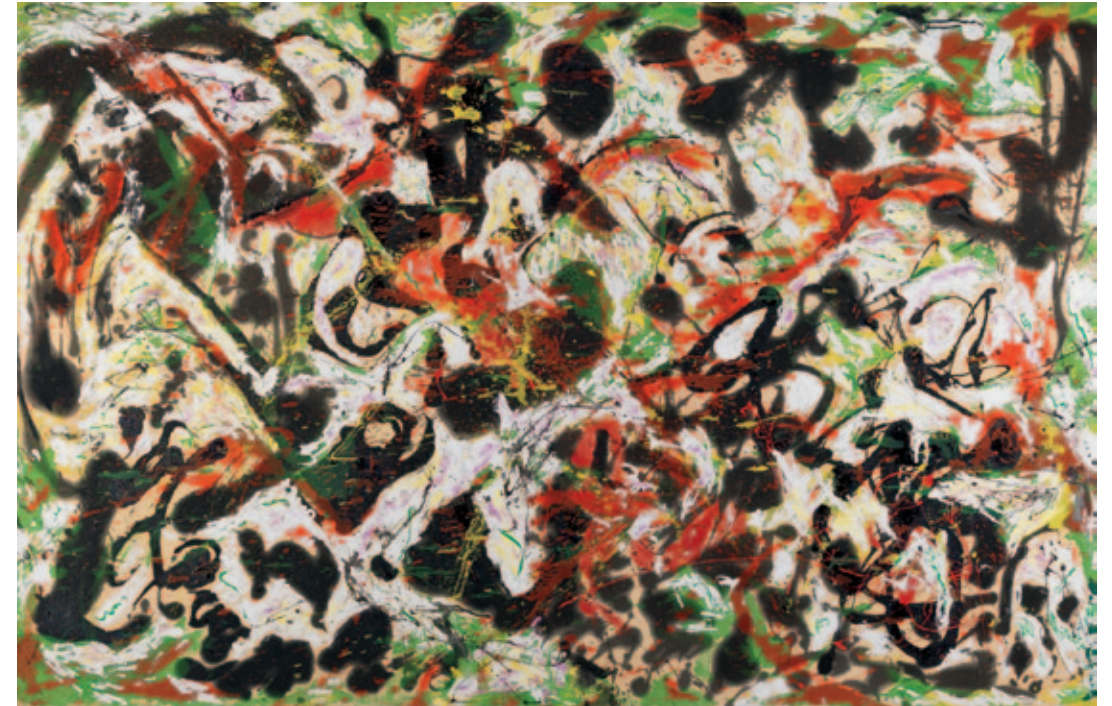


Fig. 9. Jackson Pollock, *Search*, 1955. Oil and enamel on canvas, 57½ x 90 inches, Private collection

the work as a mother goddess and noted a similarity to the boulders that Pollock had collected on his property.¹⁸ Pollock created a two-dimensional companion piece to the sculpture, *Number 2*, 1951, also fabricated from collaged Japanese paper soaked in Rivet glue with the addition of pebbles, lengths of thick twine, wire mesh, newsprint, and oil paint.¹⁹ The paint, which Pollock poured in successive sessions, acted as a binder that affixed the accumulated materials to the support. The dense web of material increased the tactility of the surface to such a degree that the “painting” can best be described as sculptural. This was not an unusual tactic. Pollock’s penchant for a materially dense canvas is evidenced by quite a few of his paintings. A more familiar example is one of his earliest drip paintings, *Full Fathom Five* (1947), which the Museum of Modern Art describes as “oil on canvas with nails, tacks, buttons, key, coins, cigarettes, matches, etc.” Although still more a painter than a sculptor, Pollock clearly enjoyed making canvases that were frankly sculptural.



Fig. 10. Tony Smith, *Louisenberg #4*, 1953–54. Oil on canvas, 39½ x 55¼ inches, Private collection

Smith in Germany: A Period of Intense Productivity

In the spring of 1953, Smith left New York to join Jane in Germany, where she had a successful career as an opera singer. Smith found himself isolated there. He did not speak the language, could not find a job, and was unable to locate the kind of artistic community in which he had been so active in New York. He stayed for two years and it proved to be a period of intense productivity for him. He was busy drawing, painting, working on architectural designs, and developing ideas for sculpture.

It was in Germany that he initiated a series of paintings and drawings based on an abstract grid, which he titled the *Louisenberg* series (1953–54), after a geological site near Bayreuth. [Fig. 10] He began the series by executing twenty-seven drawings on graph paper, of circles and peanut-shaped modules placed within an assortment of



Opposite: Fig. 11. Tony Smith, *Untitled*, 1953–55. Wood, 21⅜ x 20½ x 12 inches

rectangles and squares. Smith's method was systematic, as if he were using a template, even if somewhat loosely. The two dozen paintings that evolved from the drawings include similar permutations of complex configurations of variously colored circles and modular units spread evenly across the surface, which emphasize the canvas's two-dimensionality. They suggest a structured, methodical version of Pollock's allover paintings, and their allegiance to Abstract Expressionism is in Smith's treatment of surface and space.

Smith's sculptural ideas began as a private and experimental pursuit, but they would evolve into the large-scale, and often public, sculptures for which he would become best known. *Untitled* (1953–55), which he completed while in Germany, represents one of Smith's earliest explorations in sculptural form. [Fig. 11] Like an assemblage artist, he fabricated the approximately two-foot-high piece from boards of rough-hewn wood, all of varying lengths and widths, which he arranged in a carefully calibrated yet improvisational manner, which gives the work a dynamic quality. The vertical, horizontal, and diagonal boards evoke the spontaneity of Franz Kline's bold, expressionistic brushstrokes made with a simple housepainter's brush. Although the sculpture evidences the artist's care and attention to detail, it feels light and unlabored. As Smith once told an interviewer, "Sculpture comes together by some sort of spontaneous invention."²⁰

Smith was pleased with his sculptural endeavors and wrote to Pollock about what he had been working on. On August 23, 1954, he reported, "In the winter I did one little piece of sculpture and since I still like it I may do some more. I think these desires must come from the emptiness I feel around me . . . but it may be more because to some extent I have always fooled around a little bit on my own as well as being passionately moved by the work of others."²¹

Exchange and Discussion

Smith returned to New York in May 1955 to a changed art world. In the mid-1950s, as many of the Abstract Expressionists began to receive greater recognition and critical attention, artists became more competitive with one another, which resulted in quite a few severed friendships. Betty Parsons, who represented Newman, Rothko, Reinhardt, and Still, in addition to Pollock, watched several of these artists' friendships devolve "from love to hate."²² Unique among his peers, Smith maintained lifelong friend-

ships with them all, including Pollock, and Smith's friendship proved invaluable to the development of Pollock's work. According to Smith, it was he who inspired Pollock to paint on glass in the now famous Hans Namuth film. In the late 1940s, at the request of Katharine Ordway, who had purchased Pollock's *Number 4, 1949*, Smith experimented with Thermopane, a brand of double-paned glass, to determine whether it could protect the Pollock Ordway wanted installed on the outdoor patio of her Connecticut estate. After Smith had concluded that Thermopane would not work, his sister showed him a children's painting-on-glass kit that she had bought. She left it with Smith, who in turn gave it to Pollock.²³

In 1950 Pollock began a pivotal set of ink drawings on Japanese rice paper that Smith had given him, the same paper Pollock had used in his 1951 sculpture. The drawings led to Pollock's 1950–51 series of black-and-white paintings—drawing-like paintings made solely in black enamel paint on unprimed canvas—and with them, the introduction of vague figurative elements within the tangled skeins of paint. Smith persuaded Pollock to create a set of screenprints based on six of the black-enamel paintings, which resulted in Pollock's only portfolio of prints.

With the idea of future commissions in mind, Smith may also have encouraged Pollock to increase the size of his paintings. He "exhorted [Pollock] repeatedly to 'think big,'" arguing that "great art demands an appropriate scale," which may well have spurred Pollock to create *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952*, one of his largest paintings.²⁴ There is a long-held story that Smith and Newman participated in the initial stages of *Blue Poles*. There is probably some truth to this, although it was most likely a matter of Smith and Newman simply squeezing some paint from the tube onto the canvas rather than making any real aesthetic or compositional contributions.

The date of *Blue Poles* nearly coincides with one of Smith's most masterful architectural projects, the Fred Olsen Sr. House in Guilford, Connecticut, which Smith completed in 1953. Smith may have had Pollock's seven-by-eighteen-foot canvas in mind for the gallery pavilion he designed to adjoin Olsen's new home, and the painting indeed was installed there after Olsen purchased it from the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1955.

Pollock and Smith did make at least one attempt to formally collaborate on a project. In 1951 Smith was poised to design a Roman Catholic church that would feature a group of Pollock's paintings as integral to its design. Although its initial supporters championed Smith's concept, they ultimately decided that the church's larger constituency would not approve it. The Smith/Pollock church project never developed beyond the stage of drawings and a preliminary model. [Fig. 13]

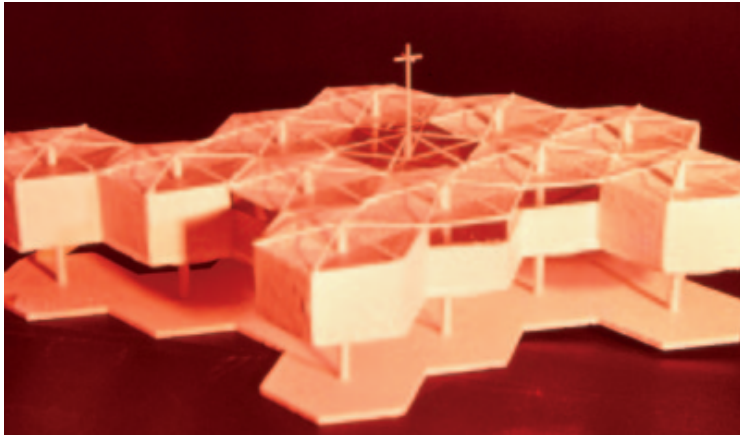


Fig. 13. Tony Smith, *Church (model)*, 1951. Wood and cardboard with paint and plaster, 6¾ x 29 x 18¼ inches, Tony Smith Estate

Painting into Sculpture

Smith had become increasingly more interested in sculpture upon his return from Germany, so it was not unusual that he would be occupied with sculpture in July 1956, when he and Pollock spent a weekend together working in Smith's backyard.²⁵ And given Pollock's renewed interest in working in three dimensions, it is not surprising that the two artists would both be at work on sculptural ideas that weekend. Smith, who was concerned for his friend, may well have known that Pollock had found relief in making sculpture when he was hospitalized in 1938. Perhaps he had this curative benefit in mind as he and Pollock set off on their explorations of three-dimensional form.

Working alongside Pollock, Smith poured a mixture of soupy, fine-grade concrete into a cardboard egg carton and laid it in a bed of sand until it solidified and reached rock-hard strength. The result was *Untitled* (1956). [Fig. 14] The circumstances of its fabrication suggest that he improvised and made use of whatever was at hand, but Smith also loved working with building materials and was familiar with concrete's versatility from Frank Lloyd Wright, who made innovative use of concrete blocks in his Usonian houses, a number of which Smith had worked on as a construction calculator in the late 1930s.²⁶ As for the egg carton, Smith had used cardboard boxes in



Opposite: Fig. 14. Tony Smith, *Untitled*, 1956. Concrete, 3¾ x 8⅝ x 6⅝ inches (two views)

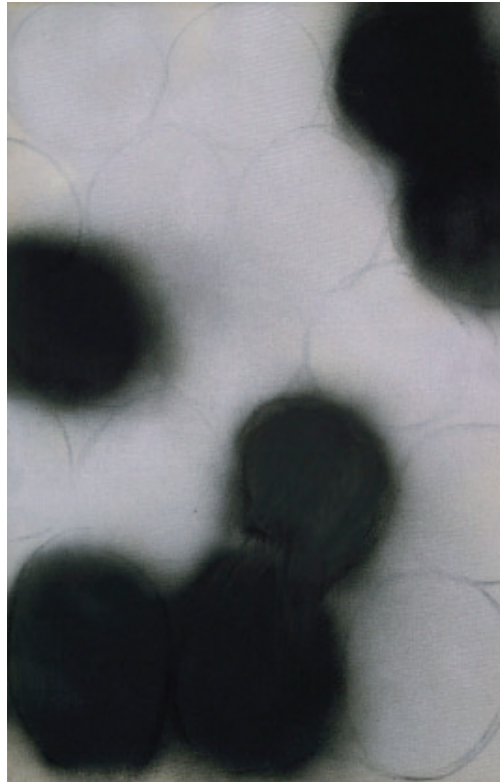


Fig. 15. Tony Smith, *Untitled*, 1956. Oil on canvas, 36 x 24 inches, Tony Smith Estate

his model-making since childhood and later experimented with Alka-Seltzer boxes, milk cartons, and Parliament cigarette packs to create modular geometric models, many of which were predecessors to his monumental sculpture.

The egg carton provided a ready-made grid, a sort of three-dimensional graph paper, with which he could create an ordering principle similar to the modular system he had worked out with the Louisenbergs. The nodules in the concrete sculpture, all of the same scale and shape, evoke his earlier circular forms, yet here they protrude from the ground plane and enter into space. The modular forms also derive from the hexagons Smith favored in his architectural designs, such as his proposed church, because they provided a flexible design element. The configuration of three nodules in a row and three at a right angle suggests a quasi-three-dimensional Louisenberg painting, but now with a more cell-like structure, similar to the organizing motif in the paintings he was making in 1956. [Fig. 15] In this concrete sculpture, he intentionally eliminated six of what would have been a dozen nodules in a one-two-three progression to create

a seemingly irregular distribution of forms that emphasizes the creation of negative space. Smith was fascinated with the concept of negative space. Here he subtracted volume to underscore mass and void, a strategy that unites his architecture, painting, and sculpture.

While Smith worked in concrete, Pollock used wire, gauze, and plaster to create two separate constructions of variously sized lobelike elements. [Figs. 1, 7] He connected these elements with wire filaments, which provided him with a degree of flexibility in their positioning. Each sculptural abstraction measures approximately one foot in length. Recalling ancient dolmens, they appear precariously balanced—in the smaller of the two he has incorporated a stabilizing rod. Their abstract shapes, alternately smooth and granular surfaces, and earthy color give them an organic, sun-bleached and sea-washed quality similar to that of the natural objects Pollock was fond of collecting near his home in Long Island.

As with his paintings, Pollock used a process-oriented method to make these abstractions. He created his elements by sand casting, which involved cutting a negative space into a bed of damp sand, pressing the metal clothes hanger he used as an armature into the depression, and pouring damp plaster into the newly created mold. Plaster-soaked gauze provided additional support. Pollock would have had a number of reasons for choosing this technique. Sand casting leaves a gritty finish where the plaster meets the sand, which creates the expressive, heavily textured surface that he often sought in his paintings, such as *Full Fathom Five*. Once partially set, the plaster acquires a semisolid consistency, which allowed him to model the material and shape it with his hands. Accidental, improvisational shapes evolved in the process, evidencing a tension between chance and control, accident and discipline, a mainstay of Pollock's work and Abstract Expressionism in general.

Pollock was likely familiar with sand casting from Constantino Nivola, a friend and East Hampton neighbor, who had perfected the technique to the degree that in 1954 Olivetti commissioned him to create a seventy-five-foot-long wall relief for its Fifth Avenue showroom. Pollock also would have associated sand casting with Navajo sand painting, which was practiced as a therapeutic ritual. His emotional connection with Native American culture in general ran deep, and he had incorporated sand in a number of paintings. [Fig. 16]

Pollock had used plaster as early as 1943 with *She-Wolf*, in which he also mixed oil and gouache. He had also used it in 1949 to fabricate three small plaster-dipped wire "sculptures" for a model by the architect Peter Blake of an "Ideal Museum" designed around Pollock's work. He had spattered these sculptures with paint to simulate a three-dimensional interpretation of his drip paintings. [Figs. 17, 18] The model also included miniaturized versions of Pollock's paintings, but according to Blake, Pollock only seemed



Fig. 16. Jackson Pollock gathering sand, 1949.

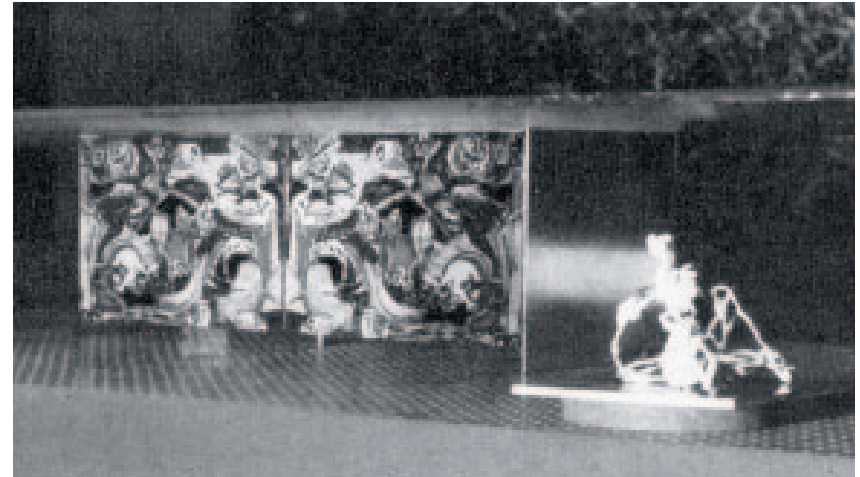


Fig. 17. Mirrored reproduction of Jackson Pollock's painting *The Key*, 1946, and untitled wire sculpture in Peter Blake's original "Ideal Museum" model at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1949. The wire sculpture is now lost.



Fig. 18. Jackson Pollock, Untitled, c. 1949. Plaster and paint on wire, $2\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{11}{16} \times 3\frac{1}{16}$ inches, Collection of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of Louisa Stude Sarofim in memory of Alice Pratt Brown

to take interest in the project when Blake asked him to make the sculptures.²⁷

Pollock was aware of Barnett Newman's use of plaster in his sculpture *Here I* (1950), composed of two narrow freestanding eight-foot-high columns to which he applied damp plaster, wire mesh, and a gauzelike fabric. [Fig. 19] When Newman included the sculpture in his 1951 exhibition at Betty Parsons, it was at Pollock's urging.

Here I's vertical shafts are regarded as the three-dimensional equivalent of Newman's "zips," the single or multiple bands so emblematic of his paintings. Pollock's sand-cast works also appear to be translations of his poured paintings into three-dimensional form. X-radiographs have revealed that Pollock twisted and shaped the wire armature into loops that resemble the skeins so prevalent in his classic paintings. [Fig. 8] It requires little imagination to envision the connecting filaments as thinly drizzled cords of paint, the ovoids as his ellip-



Fig. 19. Barnett Newman, *Here I*, 1950, and *The Wild*, 1950. Installation view, Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1951. Photograph by Hans Namuth

tical loops, and the more solid, irregular shapes as coalesced puddles of enamel or Duco. These shapes appear in many of his post-1948 paintings, including *Number 29*, 1950, which became a three-dimensional work in its own right after Smith devised a support by which it hung suspended in space. In density these two plaster works closely resemble the heavily worked *Search* (1955) [Fig. 9], one of his last paintings. “He exploded the easel painting,” Betty Parsons once claimed, and, indeed, in these two final works it is as if his loops, whorls, and skeins have been flung off the canvas to be materialized in plastic form.

Opposite: Fig. 20. Tony Smith, *Untitled*, c. 1956. Wire and canvas, 47½ x 12½ x 12 inches. When Smith returned from Germany in 1955, he found he could not rely on architectural commissions to support his young family. He took a number of teaching jobs, and at the same time turned increasingly toward sculpture in his own work. *Untitled* marks this transition. Smith composed the work by stretching canvas over a configuration of nine individual triangular shapes formed from wire clothes hangers. He then coated the stretched canvas with plaster. The elongated triangular modules likely derive from Alexander Graham Bell’s tetrahedral kites, which Smith had first seen in a 1947 article in *National Geographic*. Bell employed the tetrahedron in building kites, gliders, and towers because of its superior strength-to-weight ratio. This made an object structurally very strong but at the same time lightweight, a quality that Smith’s sculpture also conveys. Throughout his life Smith remained fascinated with the range of sculptural permutations offered by the tetrahedron. He continued to explore its possibilities in two other early plaster sculptures, *Tetrahedron* (1961) and *Wingbone* (1962), which both appear to descend directly from *Untitled*. Tetrahedral structure would also become a regular component in many of his large-scale sculptures, such as *Spitball* (1961), *Moondog* (1964), and *Eighty-One More* (1970).



“Pollock Sculpture—What Became of It?”

When he left them that July weekend, Pollock gave the two plaster works to his dear friends Tony and Jane. After his sudden death in August, these objects must have become even more precious to them. But Smith, whose career took off soon after, seems to have had a difficult time keeping track of things, as evidenced by his note: “Pollock Sculpture—What became of it?”

Tony Smith died in 1980. In 1983 Jane moved to Manhattan, and among her belongings were the two plaster works Pollock had made almost thirty years earlier, carefully packed in individual boxes. She placed them in a closet, where they remained for twenty years. At the time, Jane did not recognize their artistic importance beyond their personal value, especially compared with other works in their collection, including Newman’s *Onement II* (1948), Still’s *Number 5* (1951), and Rothko’s *No. 19* (1948–49), not to mention Pollock’s paintings *Number 9* (1949) and *Number 24* (1951), which the Smiths also owned. And the fact is that in the hierarchy of postwar modernism in New York, the value of painting has long overshadowed sculpture. Perhaps this, too, accounts for these two works’ long entombment in their boxes.



Fig. 21. Jackson Pollock, *Number 7*, 1952. Enamel and oil on canvas, 53 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 40 inches, Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Emilio Azcarraga Gift, in honor of William S. Lieberman, 1987

Number 7 (1952) is a portrait of Jane Smith, Tony Smith’s wife. It is one of the very few portraits Pollock painted. Pollock’s intensity made it difficult for him to maintain relationships, romantic or otherwise, but he was especially fond of Jane and she of him. They often celebrated their birthdays together, which were within a week of each other (Pollock’s on January 28 and Jane’s on February 3). Pollock wanted to give Jane the magisterial *Blue Poles: Number 11*, 1952, but she considered it too large and valuable a canvas to accept.²⁸ Perhaps it was in consolation that Pollock painted her portrait.



Fig. 22. Jackson Pollock, *Number 9*, 1949. Oil on canvas, 44 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 34 inches, Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. Gift of Tony Smith in 1967

In the spring of 1956, with the help of a friend and neighbor, Jeffrey Potter, Pollock excavated a selection of granite glacial boulders from his property and piled them up behind his house. He had told friends that he was going to carve them, but depression and alcoholism had virtually put an end to his artistic activity. The boulders remained uncarved in his backyard, although he was obsessed with them and had told Lee, “One of these days I’ll get back to sculpture.” He died on August 11, 1956. Krasner wanted “something with texture and form that would speak of Jackson” for his headstone, so she selected one of the boulders he had intended to sculpt and had it placed to mark his grave.²⁹ It was later that same year that Smith would construct a maquette of his first titled sculpture, *Throne* (1956–57). He went on to create some of the most significant sculpture of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. During the twenty years that Smith worked as an architecture designer, he produced some fifteen buildings, designed perhaps twice as many unbuilt projects, and made approximately one hundred paintings, as well as hundreds of sketches and drawings that were independent of his building projects.

2. Fritz Bultman, in Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1985), 123.

3. Tony Smith in an undated (c. January 1975) draft of a letter to Robert Peter Miller, André Emmerich Gallery, New York. Tony Smith Estate Archives (hereafter cited as TSEA). The letter concerns the authentication of Pollock's c. 1934–35 cast bronze sculpture now in Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 4:158 [no. S/a] (hereafter cited as *JPCR*).

4. *JPCR*, 4:118 (no. 1042). In 1963 Reuben Kadish had the sculpture cast in bronze in an edition of seven.

5. Tony Smith to Robert Peter Miller, André Emmerich Gallery, New York. TSEA.

6. Occasionally Benton used live models, as when Pollock posed as a steelworker for Benton's first mural commission, a nine-panel production titled *America Today*, completed in 1931 for the walls of a boardroom at the New School for Social Research.

7. Jackson Pollock in a letter to Roy Pollock, March 25, 1933, in Steven W. Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1989), 243 (hereafter cited as Naifeh/Smith).

8. Jackson Pollock in a letter to Roy Pollock, February 3, 1933, as quoted in *JPCR*, 4:120.

9. Tony Smith in a draft of an undated (probably mid-1960s) interview with James Valliere, TSEA.

10. Reuben Kadish quoted in Naifeh/Smith, 608.

11. The tradition at Parsons Gallery was to have gallery artists hang each other's shows, and it was customary for Smith to help. According to Smith, he assisted with every gallery exhibition at Parsons from its debut show, "Northwest Coast Indians," September 30–October 19, 1946, through the gallery's tenth anniversary group show in December 1955. Tony Smith, interview by Calvin Tomkins, October 9, 1974, Tomkins Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives, 3.

12. Buffy Smith in Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave*, 123. See also Phyllis Tuchman, "Tony Smith, Modern Master," *New Jersey Monthly*, January 1981, 125.

13. Smith designed the house for Henry and Betty Stone in Bernardsville, New Jersey. It has since been renovated and can no longer be considered of Smith's design. The Stones gifted *Mural* to the Newark Museum in 1978; it remained in storage there until the spring of 2009, when it was placed on view in one of the museum's galleries.

14. Lee Krasner, interview by Francine du Plessix and Cleve Gray, in "Who Was Jackson Pollock," *Art in America* 55, no. 3 (May/June 1967). Reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, Reviews*, ed. Pepe Karmel (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 32.

15. Naifeh/Smith, 607.

16. Alfonso Ossorio in a letter to Jackson Pollock, January 21, 1951, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner Papers, c. 1905–1984, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter cited as AAA).

17. Unsigned, "Sculpture by Painters," *Arts* 33, no. 2 (November 1958): 36.

18. Tony Smith in undated "Draft for *Art in America* 'Who Was Jackson Pollock?'" (subsequently published in May/June 1967), TSEA. In the few instances where the 1951 Peridot papier-mâché sculpture is mentioned, it is usually reported that Pollock was so dissatisfied with the work that he left it outdoors to perish. Kirk Varnedoe writes that Pollock "let it fritter outdoors and never pursued that vein of work." Alfonso Ossorio reports that Pollock was so displeased with the sculpture that at the close of the exhibition, he carelessly damaged it while putting it into the car trunk and then left it outside. Tony Smith makes it quite clear that the sculpture was "like a rock, like a primordial thing" and that Pollock left it outdoors because it was "returning to the earth, of which it was an image." See Kirk Varnedoe, "Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work," in *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 63; Alfonso Ossorio in Francine du Plessix and Cleve Gray, "Who Was Jackson Pollock," *Art in America* 55, no. 3 (May/June 1967), 58; and Tony Smith in undated "Draft for *Art in America* 'Who Was Jackson Pollock?'" TSEA.

19. *JPCR*, 4:114–15 (no. 1039).

20. Tony Smith, interview by Renée Sabatello Neu, 1968, sound recording, Museum of Modern Art Archives.

21. Tony Smith in a letter to Jackson Pollock, August 23, 1954, TSEA.

22. Betty Parsons, interview by Gerald Silk, June 11, 1981, AAA.

23. Tony Smith in an undated letter to Brydon Smith, TSEA.

24. Naifeh/Smith, 613.

25. Steven Naifeh and Gregory Smith report incorrectly that this sculpture-making visit took place in the winter of 1956, but Jane Smith clearly recalls that her twin daughters, Seton and Beatrice, who were born in July 1955, were exactly one year old the weekend Pollock and her husband worked together in their backyard.

26. Wright's acclaimed 1924 Ennis House, for example, is constructed primarily of concrete blocks.

27. Peter Blake, untitled brochure published by the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center to announce Blake's replication of the Ideal Museum, 1995.

28. Tony Smith in a letter to Jane Smith, May 28, 1952, TSEA.

29. Months later, Krasner decided to mark Pollock's grave with an even larger boulder. The original boulder now serves as Krasner's headstone.

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— Eileen Costello

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