

[Morris Louis Estate and Archive website](#)

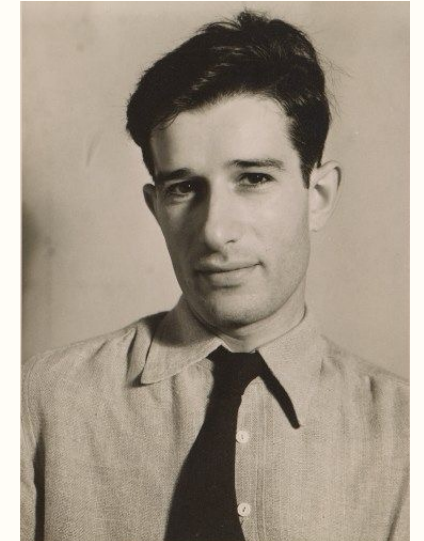
Morris Louis [Estate Papers](#) and [Photographs](#)

Artist Resources – Morris Louis (American, 1912-1962)

1986 saw Louis' [first full-career retrospective in New York](#) (the second in the United States), at MoMA, which traced his short but prolific career from 1954 until his passing in 1962 with forty-five paintings. A complete [PDF of the original catalogue](#) can be downloaded as part of an archive of digital resources.

[Archival footage](#) captures Louis' widow, Marcella Brenner, and art critic Clement Greenberg discussing Louis' idiosyncrasies, his relationship with friend and fellow painter Kenneth Noland, and his entry into D.C. galleries, shepherded by Greenberg. Helen Frankenthaler also recalls the infamous 1953 studio visit in which Greenberg, Noland, and Louis were introduced to her innovative soak-stain technique. "Very few people who had seen these pictures responded at all...they'd say 'what is this girl about?'," she reflected. "Both Ken and Morris did get it, or if they didn't get it, felt they wanted to."

Louis' career received its first major museum survey in twenty years in the Hirshorn's 2006 [Morris Louis Now: An American Master Revisited](#), a renewed look at his brief, but prolific practice organized with the artist's widow and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. Art historian Alexander Nemerov gave a [lecture in Atlanta](#) about Louis' career in relation to the Kennedy White House in D.C. and the [1960-1 painting Alpha Tau](#). "Louis' paintings are a re-manifestation of history painting, of its grand scale and size. A re-manifestation emerging really out of nowhere, in a flash from the past, in response to the exigencies of a cultural situation in the 1960s structurally similar [to the past]," Nemerov reflected. "A situation calling for, even demanding, grand displays of ritualized emotion designed to celebrate state power."



Louis, ca. 1940



Louis, ca. 1960

Harry Cooper, curator at the National Gallery of Art, discussed Louis' [1959 painting, Seal](#), in a [2011 talk](#) about the artist's life in Washington, where he painted *Seal*, and his process, aesthetic goals, and methodical techniques displayed in the artist's work at [The Phillips Collection](#) in D.C.

Louis was celebrated with fellow Color Field painters Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, and Frank Stella at [Mitchell-Inness & Nash in 2012](#).

New York's [Mnuchin Gallery](#) debuted the first solo show focused exclusively on Louis' series of [paintings known as veils](#) in 2014, with nine works showing the [development of the series](#) over ten years of activity.

In 2014, [the Baltimore Museum of Art](#) also honored Louis, in his hometown, with a [critically praised survey](#) of twenty-five rarely seen paintings.

A selection of major works from Louis' most significant series were on view in New York's [Yares Gallery 2018 exhibition](#). Paintings from the lesser-known [Themes and Variations](#) from the late 1950s, and [Stripes](#) from the early 1960s, were included with Louis' more iconic [Veils](#) and [Unfurled](#) pieces.

[Docents discussed Louis and his practice](#) in 2020, investigating his [1959 painting Dalet Kaf](#) (titled for the fourth and eleventh letters in the Hebrew alphabet, respectively – a nod to Louis' Jewish heritage) for the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.



Morris Louis (American, 1912-1962)

Infield, 1962

Magna on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:20.3

In the last year of his life, Morris Louis ventured into one of his most acclaimed periods, in which vivid stripes stretch vertically down tall, slender canvases in a celebration of pure color. Born in Baltimore, Maryland, as Morris Louis Bernstein, Louis painstakingly crafted a generation-defining career from early jobs with the mural and easel departments of the Works Progress Administration and years as a teacher in local workshops and state colleges. He became a regular of the gallery scenes in Maryland, Washington D.C., and New York in the 1950s, buoyed by influential friendships with fellow painter Kenneth Noland, modern art critic Clement Greenberg, and a fateful visit in 1953 to the studio of abstract expressionist painter Helen Frankenthaler. Louis would build on Frankenthaler's soak-stain technique in his tenure as a leader of the Color Field Painting movement, using turpentine-thinned acrylic resin paint—Magna, his chosen paint beginning in 1948—to stain unprimed canvases. Louis created works like **Infield** by securing a canvas to his studio wall and pouring paint so it dripped down from a single anchor point at the top, directed only by gravity and chance.

On view May 26 – August 28, 2021