

Artist Resources – Fairfield Porter (American, 1907-75)



Porter in his Southampton, New York, studio, ca. 1955
Photograph: Ellen Auerbach

“An artist always brings you back to the concrete thing, to what is really experienced...and what your experience is, only you as a specific individual know... What is interesting to an artist is that everybody is different, and everything is different, that distinction is what counts,” Porter explained in a [1963 lecture](#) at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

In an [oral history with Smithsonian Archives of American Art](#) conducted in 1968, Porter reflected on his work as an art critic: “the reason I was good was that I would try as much as possible, when looking at something that I had to review, to cease to exist myself and simply identify with this so that I could say something about it...the best criticism is simple the best description.” The Smithsonian has also digitized a selection of the [Fairfield Porter Papers](#).

CBS News produced [a biographic film](#) of Porter’s summertime experiences in Great Spruce Head Island, Maine, with artwork, archival footage, short interviews with his wife and family, and sitters.

[2016 exhibition of landscapes and interiors](#) at the Tibor de Nagy gallery, Porter’s home gallery, which gave him his first solo show in 1952. [Review of Tibor de Nagy exhibition.](#)

In 2019, the [Betty Cunningham Gallery](#) in New York displayed eight late oil studies painted by Porter when he was teaching at Amherst College in 1969-70. [Review of Cunningham Gallery exhibition.](#)

In fall 2019, [Parrish Art Museum](#) in Water Hill, New York, re-opened a [2010 exhibition](#) featuring a selection from the artist’s estate’s 1980 gift of 250 works. The show featured Porter’s experimentations in painting on Masonite and aluminum, as well as many unfinished works. Curator Alicia Longwell discusses Porter’s life, painting, and writing in a video presentation.

[New York Times Obituary](#)



Porter, ca. 1962
Photograph: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Smithsonian Archives



Fairfield Porter (American, 1907-75)

Jerry, 1955

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:30.3

American painter and art critic Fairfield Porter was born into an affluent artistic family—his mother was a poet and father an architect—and attended Harvard University before continuing his training at the Art Students League in New York. As a critic, Porter wrote for *ARTnews*, *Art in America*, and *The Nation*, reviewing the work of his predecessors, contemporaries, and the next generation of artists with a scientist’s eye for detail and a poet’s sensitivity. As a painter, Porter was deeply influenced by the intimate decorative interiors of turn-of-the-century European masters like Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard. Though he had close relationships with many artists at the heart of post-war American modernism, he rebelled against the vivid action of Abstract Expressionism in preference for sensitive portraits, evocative landscapes, and subtle domestic still lifes. This depiction of his son Jerry demonstrates Porter’s affection for pattern, personality, and the impressionistic value of light and color.

On view May 13 – August 16, 2020