

[The Pollock-Krasner Foundation](#)

Artist Resources – Lee Krasner (American, 1908-1984)

In 1965, London’s Whitechapel Gallery mounted the first survey of Krasner’s career, which toured the U.S. after leaving Britain. View the Smithsonian Archives [scrapbook of the exhibition](#), including newspaper articles, reviews, and installation views.

“I wouldn't know what my next painting is going to look like...I like to surprise myself. I have to be interested in what I'm doing. Surprise, for me, is as important as it is to anyone that views it once it becomes a painting,” Krasner told the Smithsonian Archives of American Art in an [extensive oral history](#) of her childhood, education, professional inspirations, ambitions, and personal life taken between 1964 and 1968.

Krasner [spoke in 1978](#) about her early years working in New York under Hans Hoffman and her working relationship with Pollock.

The first complete survey of Krasner’s career since her death traveled nationally from 1999-2001 to [LACMA](#), and the [Akron Art Museum](#), as well as [The Brooklyn Museum of Art](#), among other institutions. Over 60 paintings, drawings, and collages showed the development of her early figurative work in the 1930s before studying with Hans Hoffman, followed by forty years of expressive exploration through abstraction.

In 2014, the [Jewish Museum in New York](#) showcased the marginalized work of Krasner and African American painter Norman Lee, focusing on each painter’s modestly-scaled abstractions, which conveyed threads of personal reflection and cultural commentary.

Krasner entered one of her most ambitious and creative periods after Pollock’s death in 1956, taking over his paint-splattered studio in their barn in Warm Springs, New York. From 1959 to 1962 she channeled emotional turmoil and chronic insomnia into the seminal [Umber Paintings](#), which were showcased in an exhibition at the [Kasmin Gallery, New York](#), in 2018.



Krasner at Hofmann school, 1939



Krasner, 1969 Photograph: Mark Patiky

[The Barbican Centre](#) in London debuted the first major retrospective of Krasner’s work in Europe in 50 years, a traveling exhibition that also reached the galleries of [Schirn Kunsthalle](#) in Frankfurt and the [Guggenheim Bilbao](#). Nearly 100 paintings, drawings, and collages traced the artist’s prolific and impactful career from the 1940s until her death in 1984.

The Barbican’s exhibition resources include an [in-depth biographical essay](#) with archival photographs; a series of interviews and studio visits with three contemporary women artists – [Chantal Joffe](#) and [Flora Yukhnovich](#), as well as [Jadé Fadojutimi](#) – responding to Krasner’s impact; and [a compilation of interviews](#) in which Krasner reflects: “I insist on letting it go the way its going to go rather than forcing it. That kind of thing I hold on to zealously, I think that’s the essence...Don’t will it, don’t force it, let it come through in its own terms.”

[The Guardian](#) honored Krasner’s life and career with a detailed profile in conjunction with the 2019 retrospective, and the publication of [the first full length biography of the artist](#), by Gail Levin. Krasner was also given prominent placing in Mary Gabriel’s [Ninth Street Woman](#), an epic account of five women at the heart of Abstract Expressionism.



Lee Krasner (American, 1908-1984)
Cosmic Fragments, 1962
Oil on cotton duck

Private Collection; L2021:20.5

Lee Krasner always knew she was going to be an artist. As a teenager, she enrolled in New York City's Washington Irving High School for Girls because it offered art majors for women. In her six-decade career, Krasner produced a significant body of Abstract Expressionist and collage-based paintings. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Krasner was suffering from chronic insomnia and grieving the loss of both her mother, Chane Krasner, and her husband, Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). **Cosmic Fragments** was painted towards the end of her *Umber Paintings* series of that period, which was largely produced under artificial light conditions at night. The works feature dynamic brushstrokes and neutral colors on large-scale canvases. When asked about this series in 1973, Krasner said: "My painting is so biographical, if anyone can take the trouble to read it."

On view August 11 – November 14, 2021

Lee Krasner (American, 1908-84)

Sunspots, 1963

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:88.6

Lee Krasner (born Lena Krassner) graduated from the only public high school in New York offering art classes to girls, attended the Art Students League, painted murals for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and studied under European modernist Hans Hoffman. She was one of the founding generation of the Abstract Expressionist movement in the 1940s. Though her career has been overshadowed in the art historical canon by her male contemporaries, including her husband Jackson Pollock, Krasner thrived in the mutually supportive creative community of post-war abstraction and indulged in the problematic freedom that resulted from being disregarded as a woman artist. Krasner's ever-shifting artistic proclivities expanded in the 1950s to include collages made from her own paintings, mosaic work, and an enduring interest in art as an exercise in catharsis. Unrestricted expression utilizing the full breadth of experience and consciousness formed the foundation of her oeuvre. As she reflected in 1967: "I think it's more exciting to pursue a total person, a total experience if you can reach it. So I say, you've got to let all parts of you work, not one part."

On view October 7, 2020 – January 10, 2021

