

Betty Parsons

b: New York, 1900 - 1982

American artist, art dealer, and collector



At the age of 13, in 1913, Betty Parsons (née Betty Bierne Pierson) attended the Armory Show in New York, a landmark exhibition that, for many, provided an introduction to modern American art. 'I knew then that I wanted to be an artist,' Parsons said. 'That I was an artist! It took a long time to get free. But, you see, I've always had this great energy and I believe in the expanding world.'

Throughout her storied career as a gallerist, she maintained a rigorous artistic practice by creating works in a variety of media including paintings, sculpture, and works on paper.

**BETTY PARSONS:
THE EXPANDING WORLD
Online Exhibition
1 July – 31 August 2021
<https://alisonjacques.com/exhibitions>**



Parsons begged her parents to enrol her in a women's liberal arts college in Pennsylvania; instead, she was registered at the finishing school of Mrs Randall MacKeever. In response, Parsons initiated a charmingly adolescent form of protest, locking herself in her room, refusing food and speaking to no one. 'When she emerged, Lee Hall recalls, 'she wore trousers, she had slicked her hair to one side, she dangled a cigarette from her mouth'. Her father conceded; Betty supplemented her education in the studio of Gutzon Borglum. (Borglum would go on to carve the presidential heads into Mount Rushmore.)

In 1919, Parsons married Schuyler Livingston Parsons; the newlyweds embarked on a nine-month European honeymoon in a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce. In the ensuing ten years, however, Parson was beset by ill fate. Having moved to Paris in 1922, enrolling at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière alongside Giacometti and Isamu Noguchi, Parsons divorced Schuyler and was subsequently disinherited by her family. In 1929, at which point she had settled in Montparnasse amongst such luminaries as Gertude Stein and Alice Toklas, the Stock Exchange crashed. The Parsons fortune disappeared. Parsons' alimony stopped overnight.



Untitled, c.1950

Parsons is best known for her pioneering New York gallery, which launched the careers of many postwar American heavyweights: Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock, Helen Frankenthaler, Agnes Martin, and Ad Reinhardt, among others.

As a young woman, she studied sculpture in Paris, alongside Alberto Giacometti and Constantin Brancusi. Parsons, who once went dancing on a weekly basis with Alexander Calder and counted Greta Garbo among her friends, eventually became known “as the den mother of Abstract Expressionism.”

A little bit about abstract expressionsism: <https://henitalks.com/talks/abstract-expressionism/>





Orange, 1956, acrylic on canvas.



Requiem, 1963, acrylic on canvas



Forms 1, 1978, oil on canvas, 72 x 70.5 cm



The Queen of the Circus, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 68 1/2 x 36 1/2"



untitled, 1978



African Dawn, 1972, acrylic on canvas.



Jolly, 1982. Wood, construction painted with acrylic, 21 ½" x 22 ¾" x 6" (54.61 x 56.83 x 15.24 cm).



"Il Oglala" (1979), acrylic on wood, 31 x 33 x 16 inches