

# Jackson Pollock







## 2 A New Process

In 1945 Pollock and his wife, artist Lee Krasner, moved to the east end of Long Island. Working in an unheated barn beside his farmhouse, he combined his earlier creative experiments to produce an entirely new way to paint. Dipping sticks or hardened brushes into cans of house paint, Pollock poured, flung, and dripped paint onto large canvases spread on the barn's floor. (He used commercial house paint because it is thinner and flows more freely than traditional artist's paints.) Pollock relied on his intuition and his body to infuse his images

**"My painting does not come from the easel. . . . On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting." Jackson Pollock**

## 1 Action Painter

Born in Cody, Wyoming, Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) became one of the most original American artists of the twentieth century. He was the youngest of five brothers. His mother encouraged all of her sons to become artists, and three of them did. While he was growing up, Pollock's family moved around the American West, but when he was eighteen years old, Pollock moved to New York City to become an artist.

Pollock discovered a wide range of styles and art forms that influenced his artistic development: the expressive style of contemporary Mexican muralists, the dream images of surrealists, the lyrical lines of Asian calligraphy, the raw force of works by Pablo Picasso, and the physical process involved in creating Navajo sand paintings. Pollock felt driven to express his emotions through painting.





# 3

## Lavender Mist

with emotional force. His process was not all physical, however, for Pollock spent a lot of time thinking about the canvas at his feet before setting his paint in motion. By carefully controlling his movements, he directed gentle spatters, thin arcs, and powerful diagonals of color onto his canvas. The “drip paintings” Pollock made from 1947 to 1951 were unlike any paintings people had seen before that time. They caused a sensation and established a new way of making art—one that made the act of creation visible.

More than seven feet in height and nearly ten feet wide, *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)* is one of Pollock's most recognized paintings.

**Imagine you could step inside this painting**

**What would it feel like?**

**Which line or arc would you like to follow?  
Where would it take you?**

**How would you move in, around, and under  
the colors?**

Pollock made dense, intricate layers with white, blue, yellow, silver, umber, rosy pink, and black paint. He didn't use any lavender paint on the canvas, but where the pink and the blue-black colors meet, it looks like lavender. When Pollock's friend, art critic Clement Greenberg, saw the painting, he said it felt like “lavender mist.” This atmospheric description became the painting's subtitle.

Pollock's handprints are visible at the upper left and right edges of the canvas. These are literal traces of the artist's presence in the work.



top and right: Photographs of Jackson Pollock painting *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30, 1950* by Hans Namuth, silver gelatin prints, © Estate of Hans Namuth, courtesy Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, East Hampton, NY

left: Jackson Pollock, *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)*, 1950, oil, enamel, and aluminum on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund





try this

## Paint Without Brushes!

Jackson Pollock's revolutionary art bypassed traditional ways of painting. He invented a method that was uniquely his own. Now it's your turn to experience the action of making a painting without using a paintbrush. This activity requires special materials and can be a bit messy. Get permission from your parents or other adults first!

### You will need:

Newspaper (to cover your work area)

Smock or big, old shirt (to protect your clothes)

Large sheet of white paper or butcher paper

Washable tempera paints

Paper cups or bowls (for the paint)

Look around for materials to paint with:

old mittens

popsicle sticks

cotton swabs

string

straws

sponges

combs

forks

spoons

paper tubes

spatulas



### Process

After covering the floor of the work area with layers of newspaper, place a sheet of white paper in the center of the space. Give yourself enough room to walk around all sides of it. You might enjoy listening to music while you work. (Jackson Pollock liked to listen to jazz.)

Work with one color at a time. Dip a popsicle stick or another item into one container of paint. Experiment with different methods of painting.



**Move** your whole body—not just your arm and hand—to reach all areas of the paper. Fill the paper from edge to edge to create an all-over pattern.

**Experiment** with different types of lines: thick, thin, short, long, straight, curved, parallel, diagonal. Vary the height, angle, and speed of your actions.

**Think** about how to layer your colors. Pause and wait until one color is dry before adding a layer of a different color.

**Remember** there are no mistakes. Chance occurrences are part of making art!

Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, 1951, ink on Japanese paper, O'Connor/Thaw 1978, no. 812, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen

**“When I am painting I have a general notion as to what I am about. I can control the flow of the paint. . . . There is no accident, just as there is no beginning and no end.”**

**Jackson Pollock**