

An abstract background featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes. A bright yellow shape is in the top left corner, and a large, textured orange shape covers the bottom half of the image. A thin, dark blue vertical line runs down the left side, passing through the yellow and orange areas. The text 'CLYFFORD STILL' is centered in the lower half, overlaid on the orange brushstrokes.

CLYFFORD STILL



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CLYFFORD STILL (1904-1980)

PH-589

1959

oil on canvas

114 x 166 in. (289.5 x 421.6 cm)



WATCH VIDEO

PROVENANCE

Marlborough Gallery, sold during artist's lifetime
Christie's New York: Wednesday, May 11, 2005, Lot 28
Private Collection, San Francisco

EXHIBITION

New York, Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, *Clyfford Still*, October-November 1969
Polanco, Centro Cultural Arte Contemporaneo, Fundación Cultural Televisa, *Pintura estadounidense, Expresionismo Abstracto*, October 1996-January 1997
Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, *Clyfford Still: Paintings, 1944-1960*, June-September 2001
Munich, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, *Monet and Modernism*, November 2001-March 2002

LITERATURE

Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, *Clyfford Still*, New York, 1969, p. 62-63, no. 32 (illustrated in color)
Fundación Cultural Televisa, *Pintura estadounidense, Expresionismo Abstracto*, Mexico, 1996, no. 106, p. 106-107 (illustrated)
J. Demetrian and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, *Clyfford Still: Paintings, 1944-1960*, Washington, DC, 2001, no. 38 (illustrated in color)
K. Sagner, G. Boehm, and J. William Gabriel, *Monet and Modernism*, Munich, 2001, p. 292-293 (illustrated in color)

— IMPORTANT FACTS

- *PH-589* marks a transition in Still's career, where his already profound engagement with abstraction began to evolve toward greater spareness and a deeper exploration of the expressive potential of voids and open space.
- *PH-589* is an anticipatory event before his move to rural Maryland in 1961 that coincided with a period of introspection and formal refinement when Still began to strip his compositions down to their essential elements.
- This painting signals the burgeoning openness of Still's later works, where the interplay of painted forms and unpainted ground would become a defining characteristic.

DETAIL IMAGES







TOP PAINTINGS SOLD AT AUCTION

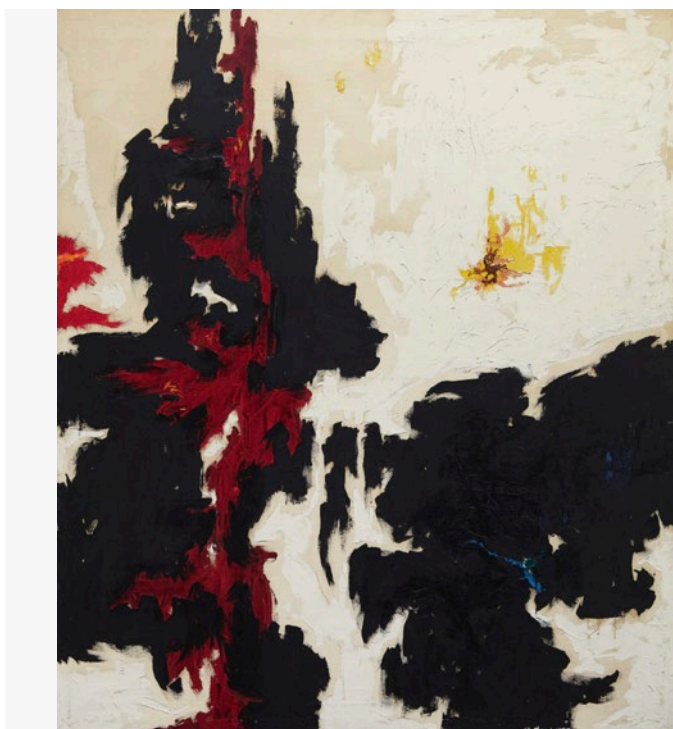


1949-A-No . 1
1949
oil on canvas
93 x 79 in.
(236.2 x 200.7 cm)

**Sold at Sotheby's New York:
November 2011 for \$61,682,500**

PH-144 (1947-Y-NO.1)
1947
oil on canvas
68 ½ x 59 in.
(174 x 149.9 cm)

**Sold at Sotheby's New York:
November 2011 for \$31,442,500**



TOP PAINTINGS SOLD AT AUCTION



PH-125 (1948-No. 1)

1948

oil on canvas

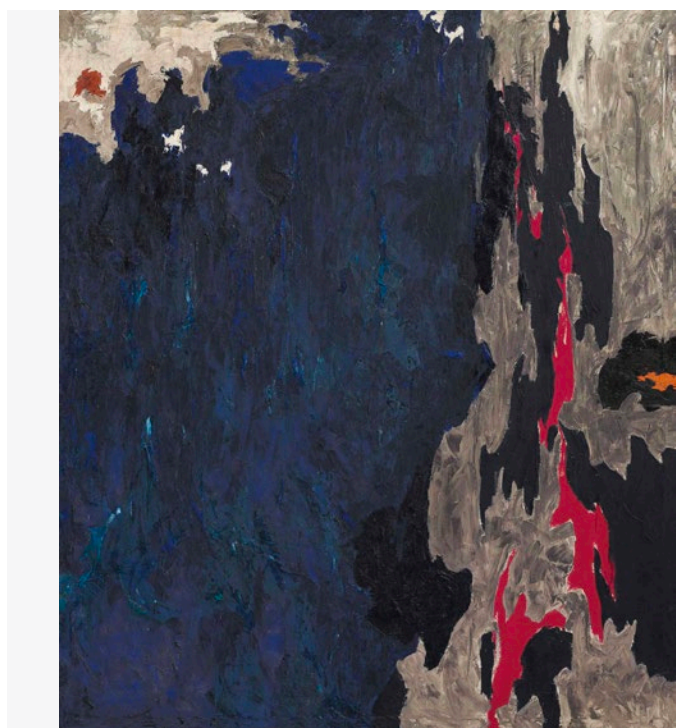
73 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 68 in.

(187.3 x 172.7 cm)

**Sold at Sotheby's New York:
May 2021 for \$30,712,500**

PH-234
1948
oil on canvas
69 x 59 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.
(175.3 x 151.4 cm)

**Sold at Christie's New York:
May 2016 for \$28,165,000**



TOP PAINTINGS SOLD AT AUCTION



PH-399

1946

oil on canvas

53 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

(136.5 x 113.7 cm)

**Sold at Sotheby's New York:
November 2019 for \$24,296,900**

1947-R-No. 1

1947

oil on canvas

69 x 65 in.

(175.3 x 165.1 cm)

**Sold at Christie's New York:
November 2006 for \$21,296,000**



STILL PAINTINGS IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS



**Clyfford Still Museum
Denver, Colorado**

PH-1029

1958

oil on canvas

79 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 69 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (202.7 x 175.5 cm)

**Buffalo AKG Art Museum
Buffalo, New York**

April 1962

1962

oil on canvas

113 x 158 in. (287 x 401.3 cm)



STILL PAINTINGS IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS



**San Francisco Museum
of Modern Art**

PH-919

1974

oil on canvas

111 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 174 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (284.1 x 442.6 cm)

**Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York**

Untitled

1965

oil on canvas

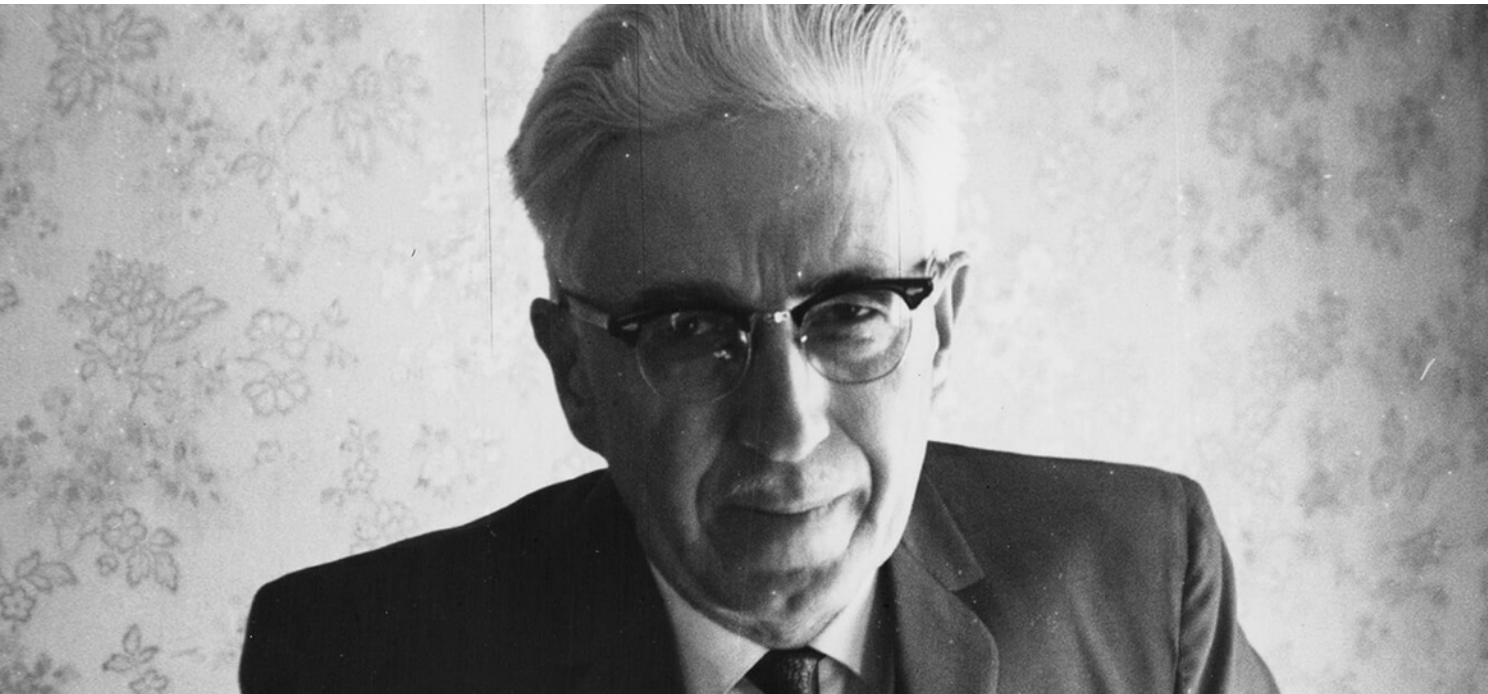
107 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 92 in. (273.4 x 233.7 cm)



“These are not paintings in the usual sense; they are life and death merging in fearful union. As for me, they kindle a fire; through them I breathe again, hold a golden cord, find my own revelation.”

Clyfford Still

HISTORY



Portrait of Clyfford Still, ca. 1961- 1962. Photograph by Sandra Still.

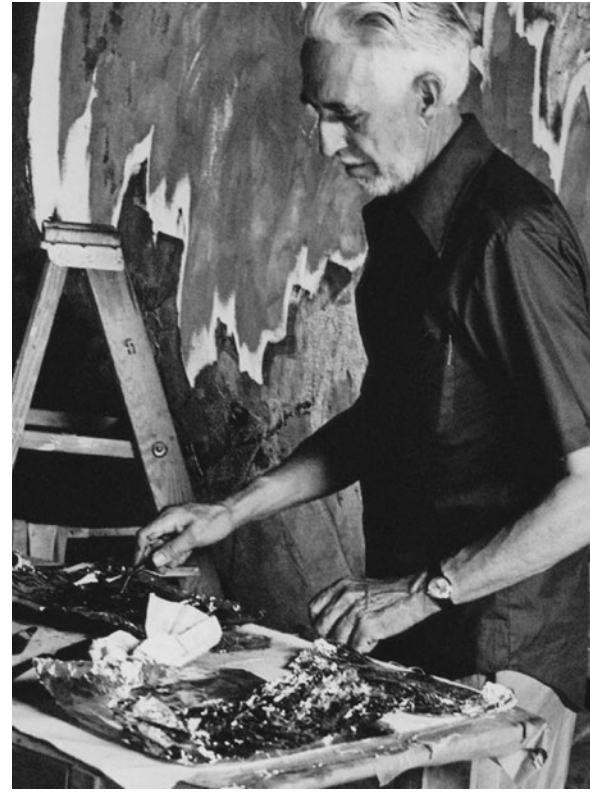
Clyfford Still occupies a monumental position in the history of modern art, often heralded as the earliest pure abstract painter to work on an expansive scale. By the early 1940s, Still had already arrived at a radically abstract visual language that transcended the aesthetic frameworks of his peers, rejecting representational imagery and producing canvases that were immense in size and conceptual ambition. Pollock famously confessed that “Still makes the rest of us look academic,” and Rothko once kept a Still painting in his bedroom as a guiding inspiration. His work was, as critic Clement Greenberg remarked, “estranging and upsetting” in its genuine originality, a raw and elemental confrontation of form and color that defied conventional expectations.

For viewers familiar with Still’s oeuvre, his paintings typically evoke a powerful physicality: vast canvases covered in richly textured layers of pigment—earthy blacks, ochres, siennas, and cadmiums—applied with a trowel-like rigor that recalls weathered geological formations. These thickly encrusted surfaces often alternate with more thinly painted passages, all juxtaposed against large swaths of bare canvas that lend his compositions a sense of immense scale and open-ended possibility. This aesthetic, rooted in the grandeur of raw and elemental presence, often manifests as jagged, opaque forms whose stark contrasts convey a primal energy. *PH-589*, on the other hand, marks a transition in Still’s career, where his already profound engagement with abstraction began to evolve toward greater sparseness and a deeper

exploration of the expressive potential of voids and open space. Painted in 1959, the expected density of his earlier surfaces gives way to a lighter touch and a more restrained use of paint. Against largely unpainted ground, two jagged shapes of continental significance hang suspended, their edges torn and irregular, as if wrested from the canvas itself. The bare canvas, which had served as a compositional counterpoint in Still's earlier works, now asserts itself as a dominant feature, heightening the power of the painted forms while introducing an ethereal sense of light and space.

This shift was both aesthetic and philosophical. By the late 1950s, Still had grown increasingly disenchanted with the art world, distancing himself from its commercial and critical structures. *PH-589* is an anticipatory event before his move to rural Maryland in 1961 that coincided with a period of introspection and formal refinement when Still began to strip his compositions down to their essential elements. As Still explained, he sought to fuse color, texture, and form into "a living spirit," transcending their materiality to evoke the human capacity for transcendence.

This painting signals the burgeoning openness of Still's later works, where the interplay of painted forms and unpainted ground would become a defining characteristic. By the 1960s and 1970s, Still's palette grew lighter, his gestures sparser, and his use of emptiness more deliberate, creating compositions that were at once monumental and ephemeral. Yet the seeds of that evolution are already present here in the restrained yet powerful interplay of color and space. His revolutionary approach to abstraction—both in scale and in spirit—provided a foundation upon which the Abstract Expressionists built their legacy. At the same time, his work resists easy interpretation, demanding instead an unmediated confrontation with its raw, elemental presence. With its terse eloquence and rhythmic vitality, this painting is both a culmination of Still's early achievements and a momentous portent of his later innovations.



Clyfford Still at work in his studio