



Provincetown
Art Association
and Museum

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JOHN GRILLO

Abstract Expressionism: The Formative Years: 1946–1948

PAAM gratefully acknowledges John Grillo, ACME Fine Art, Robert Green Fine Art, and the scholarship of art historian and curator Susan Landauer. *Grillo: Abstract Expression, The Formative Years, 1946-48*, with a foreword by Ms. Landauer, has been published in conjunction with this exhibition. Through PAAM's PARTNERS IN ART program, we extend our gratitude to Christopher Duff and Mark Westman, Sharon Fay and Maxine Schaffer, Brian Koll and David Altarac, David Murphy and John Simpson, Jane Paradise and Frank DiGirolamo, William Rawn and John Douhan, and Mallory White and Gail Bliss.



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curated by Christine McCarthy

June 24—August 14, 2011

In 1946, John Grillo, a recently discharged soldier, enrolled in the San Francisco School of Fine Arts. He had completed a tour of duty in the U.S. Navy, and was one of the first veterans at the school to take advantage of the G.I. bill. Officially titled the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, the bill provided World War II Veterans opportunities, which included a college education and home ownership loans. Like many returning Vets, Grillo's choice to attend school was built on a foundation of years of experience and education prior to the war.

Grillo's passion for art had developed as an adolescent, supported by his father, who was an amateur artist, and facilitated through a move by the Grillo family to Hartford, CT in 1931. The fourteen-year-old began to frequent the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, and recounts that there he "saw portraits that looked so real that I wanted to be a great portrait painter. Then I started to read books on artists and to take classes on Saturdays."

He went on to enroll in the Hartford School of Art and received an education that focused on figuration, working from plaster casts and mastering traditional painting techniques. In 1938 he received a diploma after three years of study. By the time he was drafted into the Navy in 1944, he was married, the father of a six-year-old son, and maintaining a studio while working at the Remington Typewriter Company and the Colt Revolver Company.

In San Francisco, Grillo sought to both break new ground and continue his life as an artist. In a fellowship application from that period he described his artistic goals to "develop new work without any influences other than self-expression."

By 1948 Grillo was ready to return east to study with the abstract expressionist painter Hans Hofmann, who maintained schools in New York and Provincetown. In Hofmann Grillo found a like-minded artist who exploited the sensuality and plasticity of paint, a generous mentor, and a skilled teacher.

The work featured in this exhibition represents the painterly freedom and exuberant experimentation created during Grillo's time in San Francisco and his first year in New York.

Remarkably, Grillo's gestural work predates or parallels the development of action paintings by celebrated abstract expressionists Franz Kline, William De Kooning and Jackson Pollack.

Over the next two decades Grillo maintained a studio in Manhattan and received critical recognition for his work. In 1967 he was appointed Professor of Fine Art at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

By his own account, from 1946 to 1967 the artist's creative effort was "devoted exclusively to exploring abstraction." But over time his early training and love for figuration returned to inform his work. Now in his 90s he continues to paint, moving fluidly between abstraction and figurative compositions. Of this process he states, "My figurative work informs my abstraction and the reverse is also true. All figurative work is abstract—colors and shapes on a flat surface."

Today Grillo is recognized as a seminal figure in the development of Abstract Expressionism in the Bay Area. As the art historian Thomas Albright states, "[John Grillo is] perhaps the first and purest action painter on the west coast." (Thomas Albright Art in The San Francisco Bay Area 1945-1980)

Grillo has maintained his connection to Cape Cod for over sixty years. In 1991, after retiring from U.M.A, he took up year-round residence in Wellfleet with his wife Kathy, who is also an artist. Exhibition Curator and Executive Director Chris McCarthy states, "PAAM is pleased to celebrate the groundbreaking work of John Grillo, and to introduce this important work to the community. These vibrant and energetic compositions represent the advent of Abstract Expressionism, a movement with roots spanning a continent, from the Bay Area to the tip of Cape Cod and beyond."

JOHN GRILLO: Abstract Expressionism

The Formative Years 1946–1948

(4 drawings, 6 watercolors, 1945)

Aboard Ship (1.), 1945
graphite on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Aboard Ship (6.), 1945
graphite on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Aboard Ship (7.), 1945
graphite on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Aboard Ship (8.), 1945
graphite on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Okinawa (4.), 1945
watercolor on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Okinawa (5.), 1945
watercolor on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Okinawa, June 20 - 45 (9.), 1945
watercolor on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Okinawa (10.), 1945
watercolor on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Okinawa, June 15, 45 - Our Tent (11.)
1945, watercolor on paper, 11.5 x 9"

Okinawa, June 17 - 45 - Sunday (12.)
1945, watercolor on paper, 11.5 x 9"

(5 oils, 1946-47)

untitled (1.), 1946
oil on canvas, 19.5 x 20"

untitled (2.), 1946
oil on wood, 22.5 x 16.5"

untitled (3.), 1946
oil on canvas, 63.5 x 39.5"

untitled (4.), 1946
oil on wood, 72 x 23.5"

untitled (5.), 1947
oil on canvas, 32.5 x 65"

(18 Watercolors, 1946-48)

untitled (1.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 17.5 x 23.5"

untitled (2.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 17.5 x 23.5"

untitled (3.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 17.5 x 23.5"

untitled (4.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 17.5 x 23.5"

untitled (5.), 1946-47
watercolor on paper, 15 x 19.5"

untitled (6.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 15"

untitled (7.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 20 x 17"

untitled (8.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 18.5 x 23.5"

untitled (9.), 1948
watercolor on paper, 22 x 29.5"

untitled (10.), 1946
watercolor on paper, 22.5 x 18"

untitled (11.), 1946
watercolor on paper, 16.5 x 13.5"

untitled (12.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 18 x 23"

untitled (13.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 20 x 25"

untitled (14.), 1948
watercolor on paper, 19 x 24"

untitled (15.), 1948
watercolor on paper, 23.5 x 17.5"

untitled (16.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 17.5 x 23.5"

untitled (17.), 1947
watercolor on paper, 23.5 x 18"

untitled (18.), 1946
watercolor on paper, 17.5 x 14.5"