

A Crucial Site of the Abstract Expressionist Movement Was Just Named One of America's Most Endangered Places

The Brooks-Park Home and Studios served as the meeting grounds for artists of the 20th century—and now a group of activists is fighting to save it from demolition.

BY [SARAH DIMARCO](#) PUBLISHED: MAY 4, 2022



Gary Mamay

When you ask art historians and gallerists where the heart of the Abstract Expressionist movement lived, they'll mention New York City a bit, but also point you a bit further east. The quaint East Hampton enclave of Springs was often regarded as a creativity incubator for 20th-century artists such as Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, but one integral spot to the Abstract movement has been long overlooked: the home and studios of James Brooks and Charlotte Park.

The art couple settled onto the idyllic, 11-acre parcel in 1954 after a hurricane destroyed their Montauk property. Immediately, they deemed it as an artistic escape for not only themselves but anyone who came to visit. Today, the [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) listed the [Brooks-Park Home and Studios](#) as one of America's Most Endangered Historic Places in 2022.

For nearly a decade, local activists and art enthusiasts have been fighting to save Brooks' and Park's original home and studios from demolition while raising enough funds to preserve the location as a community center. Marietta Gavaris, an activist and painter who currently resides in Springs, believes the restoration of the studios would both help solidify Springs's mark on the art world and give the residents and visitors a place to feel inspired.

"It's one thing to see art hanging in a museum, but when you can explore where it was actually created and how artists interacted with nature, it's an indescribable experience," says Gavaris. "With its 11 acres and the adjoining hiking trails, we want art and nature enthusiasts alike to come to the site and enjoy not only the historic artist impact but just its environment."



Charlotte Park (1918 - 2010) *Untitled (Green, Yellow, and White)*, c. 1955.

Courtesy Berry Campbell, New York.

Christine Berry, one of the founders of the [Berry Campbell Gallery](#), adds that the site is also crucial in helping to tell the stories of female Expressionists, including that of Charlotte Park. A student of Yale's School of Fine Art and member of the prestigious New York School, Park was instrumental in shaping abstract art as we know it today with her ability to translate lush landscapes into forceful, painterly works. However, as with many other women of the time, her contributions were overshadowed by her male counterparts.

"On paper, Charlotte [Park] had almost the same exact resume as her husband, James [Brooks], and yet, so few people knew about her work," says Berry. "It's only as of late that her name is becoming part of the canon of art history. Her work was not representational in any way, but rather conceptual interpretations of every single day from her beautiful property in Springs."



James Brooks' studio in its current state.

Marietta Gavaris

Her studio stands as an exhibition of her artistic process and solidifies the importance women have in the art world. Though as the years go on, Park's studio—along with the other structures on the site—deteriorates more and more. Echoes of the site's demolition began in 2013 after the city of East Hampton purchased the land. However, the residents of Springs lobbied together to designate it a town historic landmark in 2014. Since then, Gavaris along with Preservation Long Island and other activists have been actively working with the members of the East Hampton town board to devise a plan that preserves the property and helps it reach its full potential as the Brooks-Park Arts and Nature Center.

Gavaris notes that the major roadblock currently in the town's way of preserving the site is the funding and support. The Brooks-Park Arts and Nature Center asks advocates to sign a petition on their site in support of the restoration of the home and studios of artists James Brooks and Charlotte Park.