

LONG ISLAND / SUFFOLK

Brooks-Park Home listed as endangered historic place



The former studio of artist James Brooks in East Hampton in February 2018. Credit: Gordon M. Grant

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The 1950s East Hampton home of two midcentury American expressionist artists who worked closely with Jackson Pollock was listed as one of the nation's 11 most endangered historic places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The 11-acre Brooks-Park Home and Studio, which belonged to artists James Brooks and Charlotte Park, have deteriorated over the decades and were considered for demolition last year, nearly a decade after the property was purchased by the Town of East Hampton.

But preservationists and historians said the home and the four buildings on the property in the Springs community need to be preserved to commemorate the contributions to art history on the East End of Long Island.

“The Brooks home is a shining example of both the significance and potential of places like this,” said Katherine Malone France, the chief preservation officer of the National Trust. “These are places we can’t lose. To lose the Brooks-Park Home and Studio is to lose who we are as a country and our artistic legacy and how American art changed the world.”



The former home of artists James Brooks and Charlotte Park in East Hampton in February 2018. Credit: Gordon M. Grant

The National Registry listed locations facing an urgent threat of disappearing either due to environmental issues or deteriorating conditions. The locations must have a historical significance and have a local group fighting for preservation.

The Brooks home matched every category, Malone France said. Other locations on the list include the original colony of Jamestown, Virginia, which is at risk from sea-level rise and climate change, and the Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, Alabama, which is being damaged by termites.

Preservationists say the Brooks-Park Home and Studio provided a local hub that illustrated the artists' bond with the environment and how the environment influenced their art. They connected with other artists like Pollack and his wife Lee Krasner in Springs.

Brooks married Park in 1947, but her work was lesser known, as many female artists' works were at the time. She continued to live on the property for 18 years after Brooks' death in 1992 and her work also gained renown after she died in 2010, National Trust preservationists said.

But since their death, much of the property fell into disrepair and became a target for vandalism.

The town bought the property in 2013 for \$1.1 million with plans to preserve the estate. The town committed \$850,000 for restoration efforts. The town struggled to find a nonprofit to maintain the property and recommended in a report last year that it be demolished for open space.

Advocates with the nonprofit Brooks-Park Arts and Nature Center are working to save the historic site. A revised draft report by the town this year halted calls for demolition and cited working with the group. The town was still considering estimates for restoration.

An architect report said the buildings could be restored or recreated to match their original form.

“I think what we want to see is the use of community preservation funds by the town to stabilize and preserve this site,” said Marietta Gavaris, an artist and officer with the nature center. “There is a solution here and it’s for the town and Art and Nature Center to work together to rehabilitate this site and bring it back to life and sustain it long term with a model that combines history with art and nature and writes the next chapter.”