



Willem de Kooning Paintings Discovered in Storage Locker by NY Gallerist

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by Pat Rogers

Six paintings authenticated to Willem de Kooning have been discovered by NY gallerist David Killen in a NJ storage facility after he purchased the cache of artworks originally from the estate of art conservator Orrin Riley, [reported the New York Post](#). [NY gallerist David Killen](#) paid \$15,000 for the lot which had been previously turned down for purchase by an auction house.

The find was a surprise as Killen deemed the visible lot of 200 paintings as sellable but not noteworthy after a cursory look. A [Paul Klee](#) painting was another treasure discovered in the storage locker purchase, according to Killen.

The unsigned Willem de Kooning paintings were found by Killen tucked inside a box marked de Kooning, according to the NY Post. Since then, six paintings have been authenticated by [Lawrence Castagna](#), an art restoration and conservation expert based in East Hampton, NY. [Castagna worked](#) for both de Kooning and Riley during their lifetimes. He was an art assistant to Willem and Elaine de Kooning and trained with Riley. Castagna believes the paintings were painted by de Kooning in his East Hampton, NY studio in the seventies.

"In my opinion, they are [de Kooning's]," Castagna told the NY Post. "There's no doubt about it."

[The Willem de Kooning Foundation](#) does not authentic artwork. Killen exhibited the painting at his Chelsea gallery this week and intends to sell the artworks in the fall, according to the newspaper. If buyers are confident the artworks are the genuine article, they could fetch millions of dollars.



NY gallerist David Killen, right, and East Hampton art restoration expert Lawrence Castagna, left, examine a newly-discovered painting attributed to Willem de Kooning in New York. Courtesy David Killen Gallery via AP.

Orrin Riley founded the conservation department at the Guggenheim Museum and later launched his own restoration business and was known to have restored several de Koonings. After he died in 1986, his partner, Susanne Schnitzer, took over the business. After her death in 2009, the estate executors spent nine years tracking down the artwork owners they could find. The rest of the unmatched artworks were considered "abandoned" and free to be sold, [according to NJ.com](#).

Willem de Kooning's abstract painting *Untitled XXV*, 1977, [broke a world record at auction](#) in 2016 when the painting sold for \$66.3 million at Christie's evening sale of Post-War and Contemporary Art on November 15, 2016 in New York. The painting had been sold previously at Christie's in November 2006 for \$27.1 million, which was also record-breaking for the artist.

Untitled XXV, 1977, was made in de Kooning's home in The Hamptons in Springs, located next-door to East Hampton Village. Inspired by the waters and landscapes of nearby Louse Point, de Kooning spent hours observing the water and the merging of land, sky and figures.



Detail of "Untitled XXV" by Willem de Kooning, 1977. Oil on canvas, 77 x 88 inches. Courtesy of Christie's Post-War & Contemporary Evening Sale.

[Willem de Kooning](#) was born on April 24, 1904 into a working class family in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. In 1926, he stowed away on a ship and moved to America in search of the American dream. He worked as a house painter and commercial artist before becoming an integral part of the Greenwich Village art scene that included Pollock, Rothko, Kline and others.

de Kooning first achieved fame and critical acclaim in his forties, and then again in his fifties with his "Women" paintings. He moved to East Hampton, NY in 1963 and remained there until his death in 1997 at 92 years old. While in East Hampton, he painted abstract pastoral landscapes inspired by the natural surroundings around him.

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