

THE REDISCOVERY OF A SANTA BARBARA-BORN ARTIST
WITH INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM

SELDEN SPAULDING

(1922 – 2005)

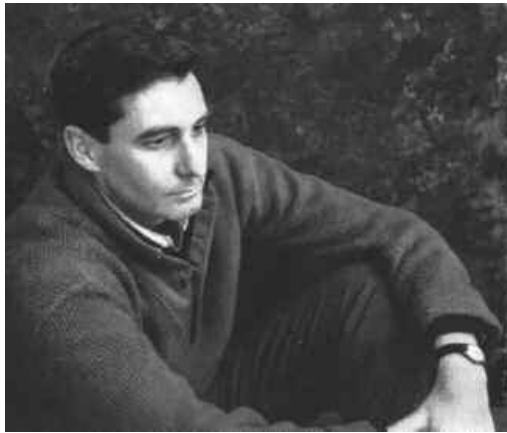


Red, 1963, 57" x 59"

“I KNOW IT IS ALMOST SELF-DEFEATING
to try to hold onto an emotional experience when one of its
most basic qualities is usually the briefness of feeling it,
but if a work of art succeeds, it serves at best as a catalyst
for re-experience, or failing that, as an encouraging reminder
that it can and did occur.”

SELDEN SPAULDING

SELDEN SPAULDING was born in Santa Barbara in 1922 and spent his boyhood in Mission Canyon. His father, Edward Selden Spaulding, was the founding headmaster of Laguna Blanca School, where Spaulding spent six years, graduating in 1939 and distinguishing himself as a talented and serious



artist. After a post-graduate year at The Hill School in Pennsylvania, he went on to Princeton University to major in art and archaeology. He graduated from Princeton in 1943, a year early, in a US Army program designed to speed young officers into the European theater of World War II.

Young Lt. Spaulding saw enough of northern Europe to know that he wanted one day to return to France to live. So after returning to Santa Barbara for five years to practice sculpture, he moved to France as an expatriate artist in 1950. After living in Paris, where he attended art school and studied French, he eventually moved to the south of France to a plot of vineyard outside the beautiful port town of La Ciotat. Quickly, he came to feel at home in Southern France and immersed himself in a life of painting in his small, spare, stone house. Here



Black/Green, 1962, 57" x 59"

he produced landscapes that reflected his luminous Mediterranean surroundings, cultivated his vineyard, and produced enough grapes to make his own wine supply each year. After a number of years in La Ciotat, Spaulding decided to trade his rustic life in the vineyard for the rising art world of Cannes and then Paris, to be closer to his colony of artistic friends. In Cannes he lived in a simple third-floor apartment, then in Paris, he bought a small apartment in the Bastille district, where he loved the hustle-bustle and lack of pretension of the then working-class neighborhood. By the time he moved to Paris, his painting style had begun to change

dramatically, from largely representational to completely abstract. He began to paint on canvas stretched out on the floor, dropping diluted paint from above and creating rich multicolored patterns. An Italian art critic "discovered" him and hailed him for his new style in a book published in Italian.

IN THE EARLY 1960S, SPAULDING'S paintings attracted attention in the United States. After the success of a gallery show in Los Angeles in 1964, he returned to live in Santa Barbara, where he had a number of shows at the Esther Baer Gallery. In the tumultuous politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in association with his dear friend Kit Tremaine, he became increasingly active in the Civil-Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. And then in the late 1970s, he and Kit moved north to the small coastal town of Elk, in Mendocino County. He designed and built a house for each of them, and was thrilled by the light and views from his house and studio, perched on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. In what was to be perhaps the most prolific period of his artistic career, his painting style again evolved, this time to slightly abstract and vibrantly colored landscapes inspired by his new surroundings.



Black/Blue/Red, 1968, 57" x 59"

In the early 1980s, Spaulding moved to San Francisco, where he continued to paint in his Victorian house in the Castro District and had a number of shows at local galleries. By the mid-1990s, his ability to paint was diminished and then completely ended by problems with his hands that surgery failed to correct. He died on October 31, 2005, in San Francisco, after a short illness, at age 83. His paintings now reside in the permanent collections of a number of museums, including the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

