

Born: 1927, Bronx, New York

- 1937-41** Wins Hi Li Competition, cash award, buys first oil paints
Part-time work as a floor waxer
Buys first camera
Begins serious gymnastics (hand balancing)
- 1942-44** Stuyvesant High School
Buys first 16mm movie camera
Completes first film "*The Eagle and The Foetus*"
Begins second film "*Walking*", begins third film "*Directions*"
Begins posing in art schools
Shows paintings and photos to Reginald Marsh, Robert Hale, Frank DuMond, Ivan Olinsky
Meets French actress Simone Simone, Zero Mostel and Luigi Pirandello's former secretary, Dr. Saul Colin
Through Colin meets legendary avant-garde theater director and frequent collaborator with Bertolt Brecht, Erwin Piscator and his wife Maria (creators of *The Dramatic Workshop* at The New School). His students will include Marlon Brando, Rod Steiger, Shelly Winters, Judith Malina, and Harry Belafonte
First hand exposure to Modernism in paintings, theater, and literature
Witness performances at *The Dramatic Workshop*, audits some classes in World Theater taught by Dr. Colin
Tries to sell songs to Brill Building music publisher
The film "*Directions*" re-titled to "*Directions: A Walk After The War Games*"
- 1945-49** Graduates DeWitt Clinton High School, wins Painting Award and Art scholarship to Pratt Institute which is never used
Enlists United States Coast Guard, WW2 ends while in boot camp, service on the Cutter Galatea and Ambrose Lighthouse.
1st Studio (148 West 4 St.)
Completes "*Directions: A Walk After The War Games*", adds war footage shot by Tom Guarino in Europe
Poses in the following art schools; Art Students League of New York, Pratt Institute, and Hans Hoffman School of Fine Art whose students include; Milton Resnik and Robert De Niro Sr.
Works nights as office cleaner and floor waxer
Meets Elaine de Kooning, Richard Bellamy
2nd Studio (640 East 6 St.) & 3rd Studio (25 Essex St.)

1945-49**Continued...**

Part time designer/ fabricator for Tiffany Plastics

Through GI Bill takes classes at NYU. Show of photographs at NYU. Walker Evans brought to the show by painter Calvert Coggashall
Meets theater agent Pricilla Morgan, Vogue editor Babs Simpson, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning,

Mark Rothko, Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, John Cage, Helen Frankenthaler, Clement Greenberg, Merce Cunningham, Franz Kline, Tony Smith, David Smith, Harry Jackson, Allan Kaprow, Robert Goodnough, George Segal, Clifford Still, William Baziotos, Robert Beverly Hale, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Isamu Noguchi, Betty Comden, Homer Page, Norman Mailer, Meyer Schapiro, Buckminster Fuller and many others

Begins facsimile novel of "*Ulysses*", writes short stories and poems

Short article on Anti-Semitism suggested by Greenberg for Commentary Magazine, never published

Makes large sculptures out of auto tailpipes, mufflers, flocked papier-mâché, plaster and nails, wooden chair parts

Continues filming and making photographs. Begins exhibiting paintings at Studio 35 NYC

Screens film "*Directions*" at Museum of Modern Art for teachers' conference

Music written for the film by Peter Kahn not ready in time substitutes Stravinsky's "*The Rite of Spring*"

Give special occasion classes at Museum of Modern Art in making photo-gram's with Tom Guarino and Charles Gellis

1950-52

Exhibited in New Talent 1950, Kootz Gallery, showing "*Mid-Winter Painting 1949*" curated by Clement Greenberg, Meyer Schapiro

Show includes: Franz Kline, Grace Hartigan, Harry Jackson, Helen Frankenthaler

Leslie painting singled out by reviewers

Meets Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, James Merrill, Barbara Guest, Auden, Chester Kallman, John Myers, Richard Miller, Floriano Vecchi, Tennessee Williams, Delmore Schwartz, and Daisy Alden

Decides to pause public writing, making films, and photographs

Sells all related equipment to painter John Reed who becomes a photographer

4th studio (36 East 4 St.)

New Sculpture made of painted and unpainted plaster and nails. Shows them at Tibor De Nagy.

Exhibits Ninth Street Show with Resnick, Pollock, de Kooning, Kline, Goodnough, Hartigan, Jackson, Sanders, Motherwell, Frankenthaler, Vicente, and others

Eases decision to pause other disciplines buys new typewriter, builds darkroom in new studio

Continues in those areas but does not make the work public

1953-55

First one-man show at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, NYC

Builds new darkroom. Earns living doing carpentry and moving jobs.

Gloria Vanderbilt Award. First silk-screen's for Tiber Press

Moves to 5th studio at 22 Hudson Place, Hoboken, NJ, builds new darkroom

Works briefly at Jersey Central RR and Bethlehem Steel

Travels to Los Angeles, CA through writer/producer Don Devlin meets Jack Nicholson and Louis Stoumen

Buys Model A Ford pickup "Rosebud"

Paints and Photographs extensively

1953-55
Continued...

Meets Derek Walcott, Kenneth Tynan, William Styron, George Plimpton, Terry Southern, Allan Kaprow, Hilton Kramer, Julius Hatofsky,
Writes first version of *"The Cedar Bar"*
Set builder and designer at Lakeside Summer Theater, ten shows, including *"Gigi"*, *"My Three Angels"*, *"I Am A Camera"*,
"A Summers Day", and *"Detective Story"*
Works with Lotte Lenya, Herbert Machiz, John Robertson, Hesper Anderson, Rachel Armour
Meets legendary Hollywood set designer Richard Day and artist and writer of *"Terry And The Pirates"* Alfred Andriola
Does set designs in NYC for the first English language production of S. Ansky's *"The Dybbuk"* at David Ross's Fourth Street
Theater (meets Lee Strasberg who advises on the production), The Artists Theater production of Federico Lorca's
"The Love of Don Perlimplin for Belissa in the Garden" with music performed and written by Billy Strayhorn
(arranger for Duke Ellington and composer of the jazz classic *"Take The 'A' Train"*), *"The Screen"* by Parker Tyler,
(*"Hoboken Oval"* 8 x 24 feet is one of the set elements), *"The Death Of Odysseus"* by Lionel Abel
Fifteen shows are done in a two year period
Consecutive painting shows with Tibor De Nagy continue
Helps John Robertson with production details and lighting at early Joe Papp's Shakespeare Festival productions
First plans for film and theater company with Tom Guarino, John Robertson and Rachel Armour
Helps build and paint sets for TV commercials with painter Harry Jackson and his partner

1956

6th studio (36 3rd Ave)
Makes first Polaroid portraits, does mug shots
Major group shows, museums and galleries, U.S., Japan, and Europe
Meets Michel Tapié, Martha Jackson, Billy Klüver, Pontus Hultén, Jerry Leiber,
Mike Stoller, Arnold Rüdinger, and Emile de Antonio
Writes film scripts and stories. Writes *"Chekov Cha Cha"* (a "combination work": play/ film script/ fiction/ biography)
Withdraws it from publication in first issue of *Art And Literature* edited by John Ashbery
Starts writing what will become *"Pull My Daisy"*
Shows with Tibor De Nagy
Does first machine print with Bruce Hooton at Poets Press
Accelerates plans for film company with John Robertson and Thomas Guarino
Guarino becomes ill, Robert Frank replaces him as co-photographer
Plans literary/ art/ political magazine
OSAKA Sky Festival organized by the Gutai Group and Michel Tapié

1957-59

7th Studio (108 4th Ave)

Geigy Foundation Purchase Grant sets into motion, "*Pull My Daisy*"

"*Pull My Daisy*" Best Film of the Year, Film Culture Magazine

Longview Foundation Purchase Grant

Begins literary magazine, "*The Hasty Papers*", publishes Sartre, "O'Hara", "WC Williams", "Malcauchon", by Derek Walcott,

"*Awake in Spain*" by Frank O'Hara, "*The Compromise*" and "*To The Mill*" by John Ashbery and episodes from William Arrowsmith's translation of Aristophanes', "The Birds"

Group Show, Pittsburgh International Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, PA

Consecutive one man shows Tibor de Nagy Gallery

"*Young Americans*" Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris

MOMA "*16 Americans*", Stella, Rauschenberg, and Johns also in the show. "*Two Part Horizontal*" enters the collection.

"*Pull My Daisy*" premieres in New York with John Cassavetes' "*Shadows*".

Viewings of "*Pull My Daisy*" in Paris, London, and New York.

Large silk-screen print of polaroid "*Al Held*" and other book-sized silk-screens of Kenneth Koch poems, "permanently", done at Tiber Press with printer, Floriano Vecchi

Creates five collages for cover of first American edition of Robert Franks' book "*Americans*"

Joins Martha Jackson Gallery

1960-63

8th Studio (940 Broadway)

Completes "*Hasty Papers*"

Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, One Man Exhibition, 1960, 1961, 1962

Art In Motion: MOMA, Sweden, includes "*The Jolly*" a 22 foot diameter helium filled balloon (helium calculations done by Billy Kluever)

Newsweek magazine coverage quotes and headlines "*The Jolly*"

Allan Stone shows new box and can sculptures

"*4 Americans*" MOMA, Sweden, travels around Europe (Leslie, Johns, Rauchenberg, Stankiewicz)

Makes inaugural speech and film presentation at MOMA Stockholm of new film program

Meets film critic & filmmaker Jorn Donner, playwright Peter Weiss. Returns to New York via Hollywood

Meets André Previn, Joseph von Sternberg, Harry Brown, John Collier, Jim Poe, Gypsy Rose Lee, Vincent Price, & Ray Stark

Refuses producer Henry Blanke and writer John Collier offer to direct film

Plan animated film with Bill Brice

City Center Opera by Ned Rorem with Leslie sets canceled as "too avant-garde"

Travel with Kerouac to San Francisco for opening of "*Pull My Daisy*" at San Francisco film festival

Complete "*String of Pearls*" and "*Lakefront Property*", and other works

- 1960-63** "Painting Annual", Whitney Museum of American Art, 1961
Continued... Pasadena Art Museum, California, Group Exhibition, 1961
 David Anderson Gallery, NYC, *100 Collages*, one man exhibition, 1961
 Joins Richard Bellamy Gallery, NYC
- 1964-65** Grisaille Self Portrait, 9 x 6 1/2 feet, at 1964 Whitney Annual, NYC
"Last Clean Shirt" premieres at Lincoln Center Film Festival, London Film Festival,
 Wins award at Bergamo Film Festival. One of three artists in CBS film, *"Bridges"*
 New films, *"Alfred Leslie's Birth Of A Nation"*, *"Philosophy In A Bedroom"*, *"The Flower Girls"*, *"To The Film Industry In Crisis"*, *"Act And Portrait"*.
 Screenings: St. Marks Church In The Bowery, Museum of Modern Art, and Syracuse University
 Performance and screening with Ken Jacobs at The Guggenheim Museum of *"Art As Information"*
- 1966** July 25, Frank O'Hara killed. Begins work on what would become *"The Killing Cycle"*
 October 17, Building burned, 12 firemen killed. Studio destroyed. Huge loss of new and early works
 Proposed Whitney Museum show of new work stalled
 Grant from National Education Association, Grant from Guggenheim, Grant From Longview Foundation
 First watercolor *"Notans"* for what would become *"100 Views Along The Road"* bought by MOMA
 Pause film and writing projects
- 1970 -71** 11th Studio (Amherst, Mass), Whitney Museum purchase of first post-fire Self Portrait
 One Year appointment at Amherst College
 Whitney Museum *"21 Realists"*
 Noah Goldowsky Gallery *"Coming To Term"*
 Virginia Museum of Art acquires tryptic *"Act And Portrait"* via Sidney and Francis Lewis Foundation
 First painting of the Killing Cycle bought by Robert Orchard (He eventually owns all three)
"The Oxbow" 6 x 9 feet bought by The Ludwig Museum in Germany
- 1972-86** Dozens of exhibits worldwide, museum and galleries. Gold medal from Butler Institute in Ohio
 Major survey of realist work. Travels from Boston Museum of Fine Art to MOCA, Chicago, Hirshhorn Museum in
 Washington D.C.,
"One Hundred Views Along the Road" at Richard Bellamy's Oil and Steel Gallery travels to Butler Institute in Ohio, then throughout the US
 Begins writing and planning films and theater works again. Does *"Cool Men in a Golden Age"* at Yaddo Artist Retreat
 Rewrites, *"The Cedar Bar"* (original destroyed in fire)
 Commissioned to paint portraits by Time Magazine of Ronald Reagan, Yuri Andropov, Jesse Helms. Other commissions include:
 Joseph Pulitzer, Virginia Bagley Wright, Tim Healy, president of the NY Public Library and for U.S. Department of the Interior for
 Centennial Celebration the 9 x 11 foot landscape *"View Over Mt. Greylock"* Oil and Steel Gallery *"The Quotidian Landscape"*
 24 x 40 feet charcoal on paper.
 Complete *"Americans Youngstown Ohio"* 9 x 24 feet.

- 1987-92** Returns to 8 West 13 St. studio. Completes *"The Killing Cycle"*, exhibited in St. Louis Museum of Art.
 Hill Gallery exhibits realist paintings in a one man exhibition including: *"Mary Wigmen's Dance Class"*, *Angelica Fenner*,
 and *"Afternoon Soaps"*
 Barbara Flynn Gallery exhibits *"Portrait of Timothy Healy"*, Grisaille Paintings and Drawings, *"The Red Paintings"*, and *"Four Artists"*
 The Hill Gallery exhibits selections from *"One Hundred Views Along The Road"*.
 Publication of two books, *"One Hundred Views Along The Road"* and *"The Grisaille Paintings"*
 Two months more at Yaddo writing, focusing on lost works
 Adds another studio space to supplement 8 W 13th St.
- 1992-94** Manny Silverman Gallery L.A. exhibits *"The Nineteen Fifties"*
 Pace Graphics NYC exhibits *"New Prints"*
 Whitney Museum exhibits *"In A Classical Vein"*
 Re-Publication of *"The Hasty Papers"* by Host Publications, Austin, TX
 Print retrospective at the Butler Institute (traveling exhibit)
 Receives Pollock Krasner Grant, Artists Foundation Grant, induction into The American Institute of Arts and Letters
 and their Gold Medal of Merit
 Begins new series of post fire *"Grisailles"*, *"Fifty People"*
- 1995** *"The Painted Drawings"* at Hill Gallery, Birmingham, MI
"Abstract Paintings" 1947-1962, Manny Silverman Gallery, LA, CA
"Ten Men" Richard Bellamy, Oil and Steel Gallery
"American Prints" Pace Graphics, NY
"American Masters" Hill Gallery, Birmingham, MI (premiere exhibit in new gallery building)
 Artist Award *"Lifetime Achievement"* Drawing, American Artist Magazine
"Beat Culture" and *"The New America"* at Whitney Museum of Art, includes *"Pull My Daisy"*, and the mammoth *"Four Panel Green"*
 (which enters their collection also included is an archival section of *"The Hasty Papers"*)
 Television interviews for the exhibition
 Two week stay at artist retreat, Yaddo, making drawings for *"The Hasty Papers"*
- 1996** *"Abstract Expressionism in the United States"* at The Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporanea, Mexico
 One person show at Huntington Museum, Huntington, VA
 Group Show, Studio School, NY
 Group Show, Manny Silverman Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

- 1996**
Continued... Completion of "*Cool Man In A Golden Age*", a novel in rhymed prose
 Completion of play, "*The Cedar Bar*", along with preparation for production of the play and development of a film version
 Receives sponsorship from the New York Foundation for the Arts for ongoing publication of "*The Hasty Papers*" as a tax exempt corporation
 Video release of films "*Pull My Daisy*" and "*The Last Clean Shirt*" by the Museum of Modern Art
 Interview for Disney film "*The Fifties*"
 Interview for biography of Joel Oppenheimer
 "*Pull My Daisy*" plays in Venice Film Festival
 Honorary dinner sponsored by Yaddo
 "*Pull My Daisy*" one of twenty-five films selected for inclusion in the National Film Registry, D.C.
- 1997**
 Print retrospective with new mono-prints "*Lines From Frank O'Hara*" at Pace Graphics in NY.
 May 2nd - staged reading of "*The Cedar Bar*" at The New School Theater in NY
 Graduate student production of "*The Cedar Bar*" at Boston University
 Film work continues on "*Cool Man In A Golden Age*"
 "*The Feminine Mystique*", Nassau County Museum of Art
 Talk on '50s theater work in Off Broadway Productions given at New York Theater Workshop in Manhattan
 Lecture at Brandeis University
 Ten photo silk-screen editions for Pace Graphics
 Work continues on post-fire *Grisailles*
 Work on final reconstruction of recovered fire damaged scenes from film loss in fire in preparation for MOMA screenings.
 Work on revisions to "*The Cedar Bar*" for full production
 Work on final details for completing "*The Hasty Papers*"
- 1998-2000**
 New paintings and drawings. Millennium Edition of "*The Hasty Papers*" published.
- 2001-2006**
 Reconstruction of the lost film "*Alfred Leslie's The Birth Of A Nation*"
 Feature film "*The Cedar Bar*" completed, premieres New York Lincoln Center Video Festival, plays London FF (film festival), Vienna FF, Tribeca FF, Los Angeles FF (Best Experimental Film), Sidewalk FF, Dallas FF, (Lifetime Achievement Award) Chicago Underground Film Festival, Dylan Thomas Festival.
 Begins work on new film "*Lost In The Fire*"
 Sell 8 West 13 St. studio, begin building new studio NYC
 Banner Festival Sydney Australia
 Honorary degree, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada
 American Academy Arts and Letters show of *10 People* (double hung)
 Panelist with John Ashbery and Bill Berkson at MOMA Frank O'Hara event

- 2007-2012** Begin work on "3 Panel Hoboken Stripes" 6'x5' and "8 Panel Hoboken Stripes" 8'x10'
 Surrogates for lost "Hoboken Stripes" paintings
 Begins new body of large digital paintings and titles them "Pixel Scores"
 Creates 20" x 24" book with drawings titled "So Dis Is a Sheeps"
 DVD published of film works, including posters
 Construct 15 Workbooks for website
 Anthology Film Archive 3 day screening of works
 Complete new films: "A Stranger Calls At Midnight", "Einstein's Secret", "Songs of The Blue Footed Boobie", "Attacked By The Heart", "Magic Thinking", and "San Francisco Spreads Her Legs".
 MOMA Abstract Expressionist New York shows "Two Part Horizontal"
 Alan Stone Gallery one man show: "Expressing The Zeigisteist"
 Alan Stone Gallery: Alfred Leslie and John Chamberlin
 Ameringer Yohe "The Radical Theater Of Alfred Leslie"
 Ameringer Yohe: "Dairy Cream", "Power Chords" and "Mobile Grids" (Multi-paneled works)
 Slought Foundation, Philadelphia, 2009: "Cool Man in a Golden Age: Alfred Leslie's Films, Books, and Installations, 1957-2009"
 Tibor De Nagy Gallery 50th anniversary show
 Smithsonian Institution National Portrait Gallery
 Ludwig Foundation, American Realist Painting
 New oil pastels on linen, 7x5 feet, "Seven Men / 10 works" begun
 Reading from "Cool Man In A Golden Age" and screening at Housing Works
 Film Retrospective San Francisco Film Archive, Interview by Judith Stein, Art News, open two additional work-spaces
 Janet Borden, NYC, "The Lives of Some Women-New Pixel Scores"
- 2013** Janet Borden, NYC, "Willem de Kooning in 1966", 2012, 7 x 5 feet, oil pastel on linen
 Hill Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan, "The Multi-Panel Mammoths: Walking and Reaching"
 Cranbrook Art Museum viewing of "Cedar Bar" with lecture
 C24 Gallery, New York City, New York; Clarissa Dalrymple curated group show includes: Hugo Von Aschenbach, Dulcy Perry, and Mademoiselle De Maupin
 Xavier Hufkens Belgium, group show five works from "The Lives of Some Women"
- 2014** Haggerty Museum, "The Killing Cycle: The Complete Paintings and Drawings"
 American Academy, Hugo Von Aschenbach
 Lyme Academy of Art Honorary Degree
 The Art Show, ADA, one man show of new work exhibited by the Janet Borden Gallery
 The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, "Lisa Bigelow" 1964-65, Face Value: Portraiture in the Age of Abstraction
 The Armory Show - Modern, "Multi-Paneled Works 1956-1962", Exhibited by Hill Gallery

TEXTS:

Cool Man in a Golden Age

TEXT WITH IMAGES:

Attacked by the Heart

So Dis Iz A Sheeps

MOVING IMAGES:

The Eagle and The Feotus, 1942-43, BW, 16MM, 90 minutes

Walking, 1943, BW, 16mm, 6 minutes

Directions: A Walk After the War Games, 1943-1949, BW, 16mm, 90 minutes

Pull My Daisy, 1959, BW, 16/35mm, 44 minutes

Alfred Leslie's Birth of a Nation, 1966, BW, 8/16/35mm, 60 minutes

To the Film Industry in Crisis, 1965-66, BW, 8/16/35mm, 90 minutes

Philosophy in a Bedroom, 1965-66, BW, 8/16/35mm, 90 minutes

Broadway Melody of 1966 (Lost in The Fire), A Stranger Calls at Midnight, Einstein's Secret,

Attacked by the Heart, Songs of the Blue Footed Boobie, Magic Thinking

TEACHING APPOINTMENTS, LECTURES, AND WORKSHOPS:

1949-1996

New York University, Yale, Amherst College, Smith College, U Mass Amherst, Mount Holyoke, Springfield Museum, Hampshire College, MOMA NY, Whitney Museum, Guggenheim Museum, Modern Museum Stockholm, University of Hartford, Ball State University, Oklahoma Institute, Youngstown University, University of Syracuse, Yaddo, San Francisco Museum of Art, LA County Museum, Boston University, New York Studio School, Parsons Graduate School of Art, New York Studio School, New York Academy of Art, University of Wisconsin at Madison, Towson State University, Atlantic Center for the Arts, The Studio School, Oklahoma, Huntington VA, Brandeis University, University of Pennsylvania

SOME COMMENTARY: ALFRED LESLIE:

"...Leslie, whether as a painter or a filmmaker, was not following tendencies emerging in the early sixties, but was one of the artists inciting them. His film...Pull My Daisy (1958) is considered to have severed the American avant-garde film from its European roots in Symbolist poetry..."(Leslie's) Stripes in fact...William Rubin has acknowledged their influence on Frank Stella".
[Catrine Neiman and Barbara Flynn in Alfred Leslie: The Grisalle Paintings]

"...(Peter) Weiss's experience in Leslie's studio was fundamental to his play about Nuremberg; later he told me that he had been dazzled by this (Leslie's) working method . . ."
---Then Pompediou Center Director Pontus Hulten quoted by Alain Jouffroy in Al Leslie: From Gestural Abstraction to Hyperrealism

"In point of fact, The Last Clean Shirt was one of the two most original films shown in the London festival (the other being Jean-Luc Goddard's)."
---Phillip French, Encounter Magazine, 1964

In Premise and design, and in its concentration on issues of language and speech, repetition and duration beyond the threshold of boredom, The Last Clean Shirt anticipates later influential films in the international avant-garde including the works of Michael Snow (Wavelength, Remeau's Nephew), Hollis Frampton, (Critical Mass), Robert Nelson (Blu Shut), and Joyce Wieland (Solidarity), Pierre Vallieres, as well as Jean-Marie Straub's and Danielle Huillet's didactic road movie, History Lessons.
---Blaine Allen, The New American Cinema, 1984

"Or Al Leslie and his giant feet canvases."
"Al Leslie's giant is sleeping in the Paramount building."
---Jack Kerouac, Lonesome Traveler - New York Scenes

"...and when the hype-storms of the twentieth century die down, Alfred's contribution to twentieth century painting and film – if I may indulge in a little academic-poetic hyperbole – will stand out as a singular achievement, eclipsing the now fashionable types. A lemon pox on their houses!"
---Emile De Antonio, The Unpublished Journals, edited by Douglas Kellner

"...it would seem that the issue of painting from immediate observation has loomed larger and larger, thanks not to any change in theoretical position...but simply to the fact that for over a decade certain American artists have been painting realist pictures that suddenly have begun to look so strong, so intense, so compelling that we can no longer ignore them.... His full-scale conviction...demand(s) a radical rewriting of the last ten years of art history."
--- Robert Rosenblum writing in Alfred Leslie

--- Alexi Worth: "Octopussarianism: Ten Alfred Leslie Years"

Probably no American artist has had a decade as wildly prolific and tumultuous as Alfred Leslie's in the years 1956 to 1966. At the outset of this brief amazing run, in the latter fifties, Leslie carried Abstract Expressionism to new heights of graphic vehemence. At the same time, at the behest of what he later called his "octopussarian impulses," Leslie began exploring other creative possibilities: writing, photography and, above all, experimental film. The "Beatnik Classic" Pull My Daisy was screened in 1959, followed by The Last Clean Shirt (1964) and Alfred Leslie's Birth of a Nation (1966). Then, to the consternation of his Ab-Ex partisans, Leslie's paintings began to change. In the early sixties, visitors to his studio were confronted by giant grisaille portraits, often female nudes, standing in stiff, utterly un-beatnik solemnity. Each of his three main bodies of work—the abstract paintings, the films, the monumental figures—was singular and extreme. And yet, in an art world notoriously hungry for signature style, Leslie's triple resumé made him less, not more visible. Audiences couldn't decide which Leslie was Leslie. And the best opportunity to correct the situation went up literally in smoke. Late in 1966, as he was preparing for a midcareer retrospective at the Whitney, a disastrous fire destroyed the contents of Leslie's studio. A handful of lost paintings are visible in footage shot by visiting film crews. The canvases themselves—approximately fifty of them—not to mention drawings, notes, and hours of film, were destroyed.