

**POUSETTE-DART, RICHARD, (1916-1992),**

b. St. Paul, MN

*By the Sea*, 1958, oil on canvas

### **EDUCATION/INFLUENCES**

- Basically self-taught, although he did watch his father, also an artist at work frequently.
- Attended Bard College for a short time and then left for New York City.
- To make ends meet, his first job in NYC was assistant to sculptor Paul Manship (also born in St. Paul, MN and just recently added to the KIA collection-see last month's Docent newsletter)
- Influenced by theories of Freud and Jung, NW Indian, African and Oceanic art as well as the art of the European and American 20th century Avant-Garde. Also influenced by American Transcendentalism (God in Nature)
- Considered one of the early Abstract Expressionists and one of the youngest members of the group. Left the group and NY in 1951 and relocated to upstate NY. He felt he was being corrupted by the group and wanted to pursue his own spirit and style. Did develop his own style but also not as well known as others in the group like Pollock, Rothko and Gottlieb.
- Maintained connection to art world and new art trends by teaching at a variety of schools including New School for Social Research, the School of Visual Arts, Columbia University, the Art Students League, Bard College and Sarah Lawrence College.

### **BIG IDEAS/THEMES**

- Hoped to experience transcendence through the act of painting and the act of looking. Believed that abstract symbols could reveal universal truths by suggesting the mysterious realm of the spirit. Wanted paintings to have a spiritual "presence" and to express his life journey and exploration of self. Forms are inspired by nature.
- Early works feature more symbols with a pictograph or hieroglyphic appearance.
- Later signature style features repeated brushwork, thickly encrusted paint, paint was often squeezed directly onto board or canvas. Materiality of paint adds dimension to viewer's experience of light and color. Thick paint catches light and provides highlights and shadows on the 2D surface.
- Luminous color applied in dots, sometimes appearing stippled or almost checkerboard. Has been called "pointilist" but application of paint looks more like a mosaic than pointilism.
- As viewer looks at deciphering underlying shapes and appreciating the physicality of each tiny unit of color, the experience becomes as important as what is seen, which was Pousette-Dart's goal.

### **KIA Work-By the Sea, 1958, oil on canvas**

- Recent gift from the Pfizer Corporation. It was part of their corporate collection.
- Work from late 50's and early 60's backed away from including recognizable shapes and symbols to creating diffuse "implosions" of color.
- Inspired by nature. One of the definitions of "Mosaic" is a word in zoology that describes the visual picture made by an insect's compound eye that is then unified in the brain. Pousette-Dart's paintings have a similar effect.
- Subject is painted light, color and energy.
- Was known to work and rework paintings so did not work as quickly as other Abstract Expressionists.



"A work of art for me is a window, a touchstone, or a doorway to every other human being. It is my contact and union with the universe." Richard Pousette-Dart