

827-831 Broadway Buildings

827-831 Broadway, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 564 Lots 17 and 19 in part

Built: 1866-67

Architect: Griffith Thomas

Style: Italianate with Neo-Grec elements

Action: Calendered September 19, 2017



The 827-31 Broadway Buildings are twin Civil War-era “commercial palaces” designed by Griffith Thomas and built for tobacco heir Pierre Lorillard in 1866-67. 831 Broadway is culturally significant for its association with an extraordinary succession of prominent Abstract Expressionists, who lived and worked there during periods of great productivity and influence in their careers, including Willem de Kooning, Elaine de Kooning, Paul Jenkins, Larry Poons, and Jules Olitski, and the curator William S. Rubin. With its twin at 827 Broadway, the ensemble represents the pivotal era in which New York City became the epicenter of the art world after World War II.

Willem De Kooning was one of the foremost visual artists of the New York School and a pioneer of Abstract Expressionism. 831 Broadway was the last of his New York City residences before his permanent move to East Hampton. While at 831 Broadway from 1958-63, De Kooning began to experiment with vivid tones—a shift his biographers attribute to the quality of light in his studio—and to deviate in his work from dense urban landscapes to abstract pastoral scenes that anticipated his move from Manhattan.

On the third floor, Elaine de Kooning completed her 1962-63 portrait of John F. Kennedy, a commission for the Truman Library. As an abstract expressionist, a woman, and an artist with few prior commissions, de Kooning was an unorthodox choice for the commission but was thought to be uniquely able to capture the essence of her subject. De Kooning continued to paint and sketch Kennedy from memory here for months, until shock at the news of his assassination made her unable to paint for a year.

Paul Jenkins acquired the studio and residence from William de Kooning in 1963 and owned it through 2000. Here, Jenkins painted notable works including *Phenomena 831 Broadway*. Foreign dignitaries and eminent artists attended the gatherings that Jenkins held here, a practice that continued across the hall in architect Richard Meier’s renovation of a loft for art historian and MoMA curator William S. Rubin. In addition to pieces by Jackson Pollack, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, and others, Rubin’s loft displayed works by Willem de Kooning, Paul Jenkins, Larry Poons, and Jules Olitski—all one-time residents of the buildings.

This pair of buildings is culturally significant for its association with the Abstract Expressionist art movement and the succession of significant artists who lived and worked there, symbolizing an important moment in New York City history and in the history of art.