Jules Olitski

**MEDIUM** Painting

**NATIONALITY** American

**LIFE DATES** Snovsk, Ukraine 1922 - 2007 New York

Jules Olitski was born in Snovsk, Russia (now Ukraine) in 1922, shortly after the political execution of his father, Jevel Demikovski. His remaining family immigrated to New York in 1923. Olitski showed an early love for drawing and attended art classes in his early teens. He studied at the National Academy of Design from 1940 to 1942 while attending evening classes in sculpture at the Beaux-Arts Institute, New York.

As a soldier in the army during 1942-45, Olitski became a U.S. citizen and changed his name to that of his stepfather. Under the G.I. Bill, he studied in Paris from 1949 to 1951, working in the studio of Ossip Zadkine and at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière.

Following his first solo exhibition in Paris, Olitski returned to New York and studied art education at New York University during 1952-55. In Paris, Olitski had experimented with violent, surrealist works executed while he was blindfolded. Back in New York, he turned away from brilliant colors toward monochrome abstractions and, late in the 1950s, heavily textured works in acrylic resin and dry pigments.

Beginning in 1960, Olitski began to stain his canvases with color, by pouring paint or applying it with broad brushes, sponges, or rollers. After 1964, he started to spray the paint onto the canvas. He elaborated the method over the next few years, varying the number of spray guns and often using brushstrokes to create borders in contrasting colors. In late 1968 he visited Anthony Caro in England and began work on a series of sculptures made as open constructions from sheets of colored aluminum.

In the following decades, Olitski moved away from the spray-paint technique and instead began to use thickened paint to create a textural effect. He is primarily remembered as a major figure in the Color Field movement. He was head of the art department at Bennington College, New York, from 1963 to 1967. Olitski had over a hundred solo exhibitions, beginning in 1961 and including a 1969 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the first living American artist to be so honored. His work is in the collections of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts; the Metropolitan Museum; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Seattle Museum; the National Gallery of Canada; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Jules Olitski died in New York in February 2007.