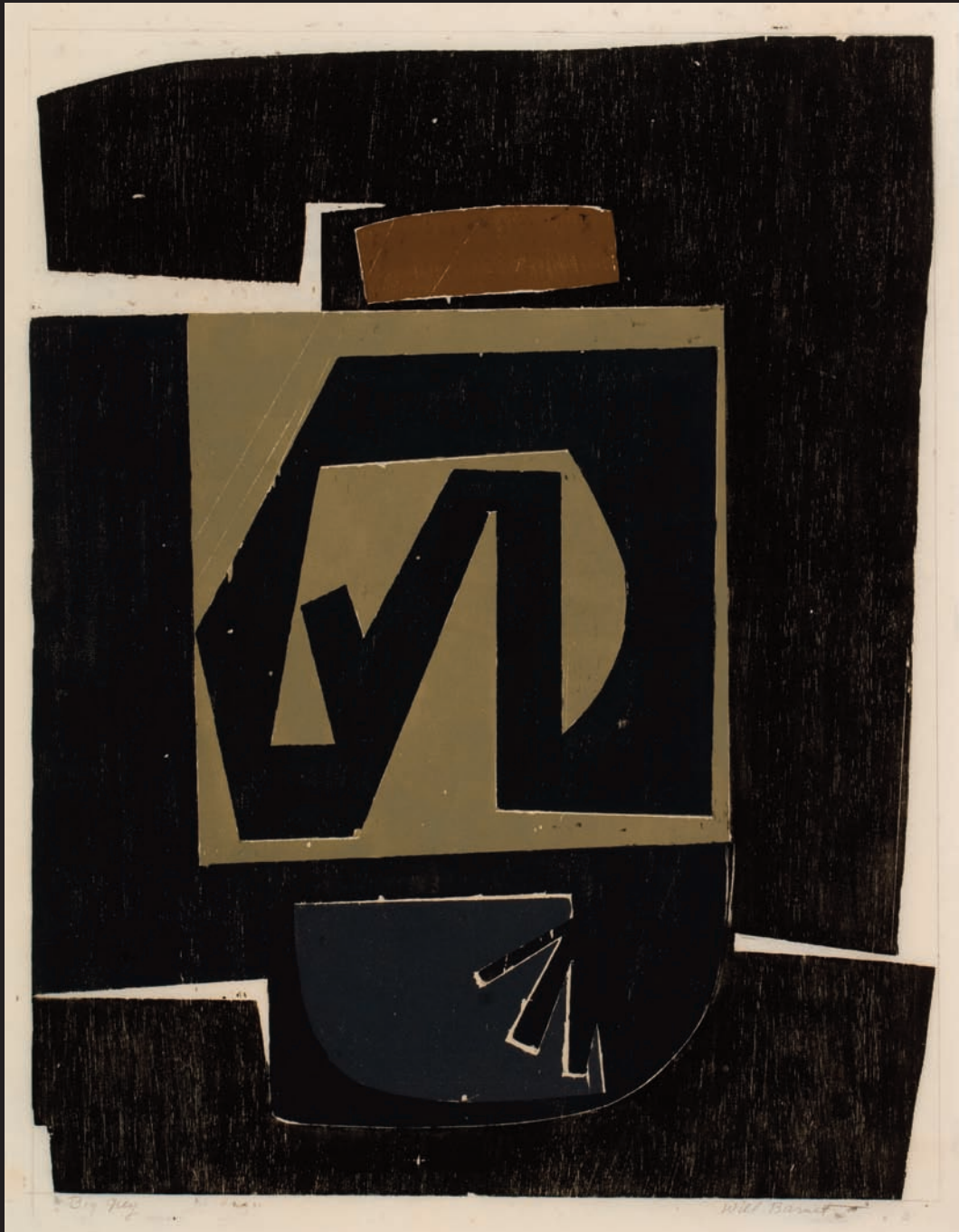


# WILL BARNET

THE LEIBER MUSEUM



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Will Barnet on his work of the 50's – 60's

In the late 1940's I began looking for abstract forms that symbolized the figures I wanted to represent. I concentrated on eliminating illusional representation in favor of a formal approach that gave equal attention to positive and negative space. It was an intense period of searching which led to radical aesthetic solutions.

My search was to find forms that belonged to the pure matter of painting itself but which were equivalent to the substance and forces I felt in nature. I eliminated realistic space and substituted a painting space based purely on the rectangle: the vertical and horizontal expansion of forms. These discoveries also translated into my graphic works.

Later, in 1956, I spent the summer in Provincetown. I remember walking down a road there and feeling very happy to be in an environment surrounded by sun, water and sailboats. These feelings had a great impact on my palette and I created a series of works, which had various levels of nature: under water, above the water and in the heavens. I composed them into horizontal bands and then placed vertical thrusts in between. In a sense, I found compartments, colors, changes equivalent to the experiences I had in nature.

In 1958, I was invited as a visiting professor to the University of Minnesota at Duluth. This again presented me with an extraordinary experience. We lived on the edge of Lake Superior and I was overpowered by the tremendous imagery: The northern lights, the horizon, and the forces of nature I felt when the stars came out at night and seemed to press down on the water. My palette again changed completely. I used more deep and muted colors and tightly interlocking forms to evoke the force of the landscape.

The inspired, independent artist searches for meaning that lies hidden beneath things seen and felt. His vision is to find concrete shapes that express and communicate his feelings and to state them in fresh vital terms. This explains the conspicuous elimination of the subject and its replacement by symbolic imagery. It is thus in the object symbol that the subject has persisted: the symbol has come to contain the character of the subject.

In the field of abstract landscape strong feelings and emotions pertaining to nature take place. These landscape forms have now become shorthand symbols often able to convey with poetic feeling the love for and joyousness of nature in its changing moods.

My work is constantly revitalized by direct contact with reality. The abstract work is never concerned with amorphic feelings but always with visual images of very real experiences, which demand that each form exist in its own sharply defined character.

The statements and observations are taken directly from my notes and personal papers that documented my work at that time in my career. I feel they are the strongest and most immediate observations of that period.

Will Barnet  
New York City, 2009



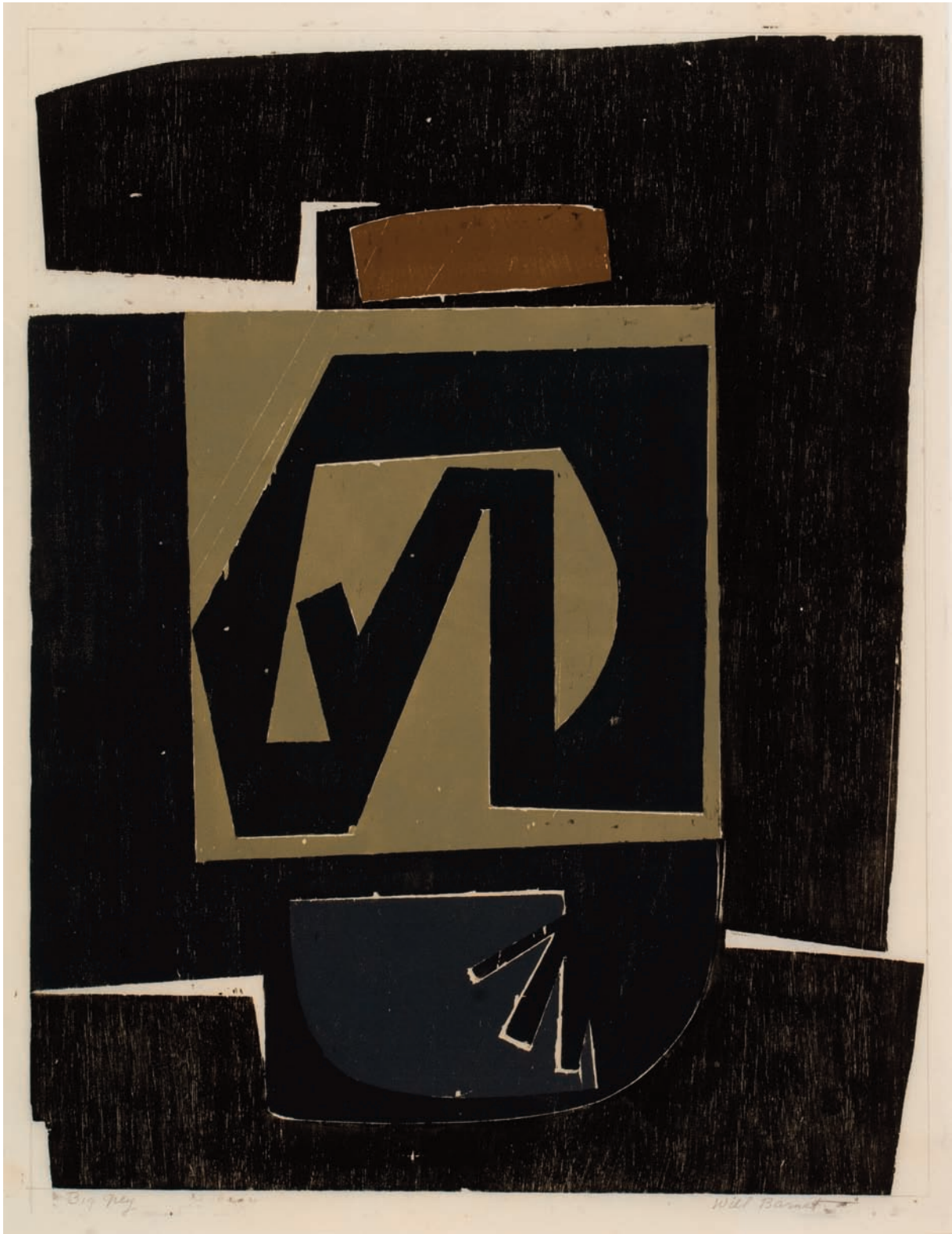


Enclosure, 1963, Color woodcut on paper, 38 1/2" x 33"



Province By the Sea, 1959, Color woodcut on paper, 27 1/2" x 23"





Big Grey, 1962, Colored woodcut on paper, 26 1/4" x 20 1/2"



Wine, Women and Song, 1958, Color linoleum cut on paper  
31 1/2" x 16 3/4"





The Figure, 1955, Lithograph on paper, 22 1/4" x 12 3/4"





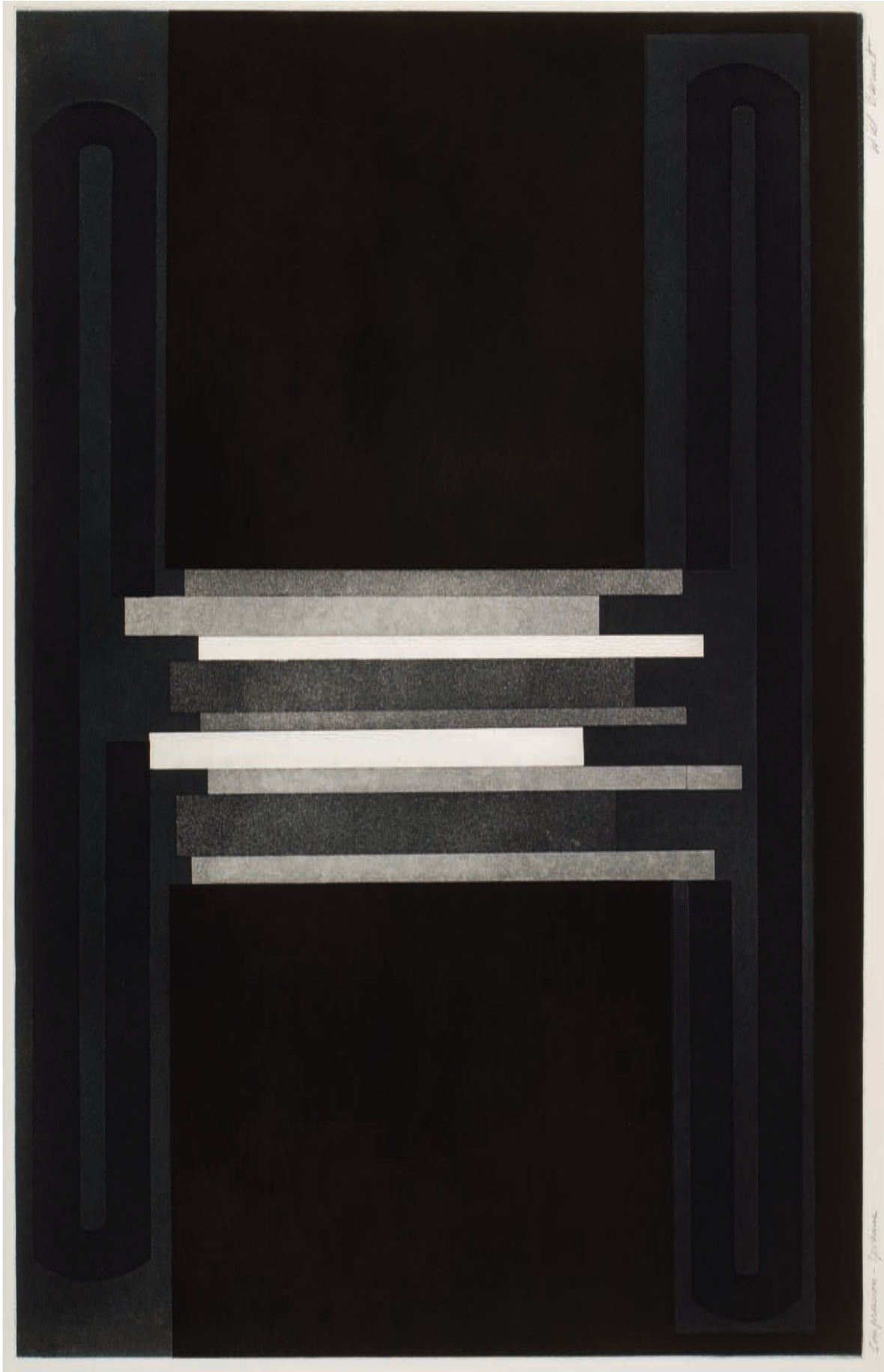
Dark Image, 1960, Color etching on paper, 15 3/4" x 9"





Dark Image II, 1960, Color etching on paper, 15 3/4" x 9"

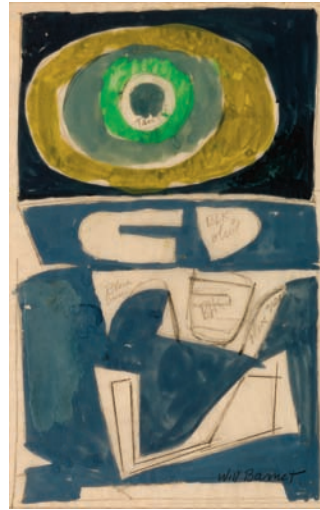




Compression - Spokane, 1967, Acquatint on paper, 22" x 33 1/2"



Untitled III, circa 1957 - 1960  
Watercolor on paper, 5 1/4" x 4 1/4"



Study for Big Duluth, 1959  
Gouache and watercolor on paper, 8" x 5"



Untitled II, circa 1957 - 1960  
Watercolor and ink on paper, 6" x 3 1/2"



Study for Big Black, 1959  
Gouache and pencil on paper, 5" x 6 1/2"



Untitled, n.d.,  
Watercolor and ink on paper, 6 1/2" x 6"



Big Duluth (study), 1959  
Gouache on paper, 4 1/4" x 2 3/4"

# WILL BARNET: A LIFE IN ART

By Jeffrey Sussman

Will Barnet was born on May 25, 1911 in Beverly, Massachusetts. By the time he was ten, he knew that he would be an artist and set his sights on achieving the necessary skills to make that dream a reality. He studied art at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and then, in 1930, went to the Art Students League in New York. At age 98, he continues his prolific output, creating some of the finest paintings, watercolors, drawings and prints of any American artist.

In 1936, Barnet became the official printer for the Art Students League, where he instructed many young artists, who in later years would develop singular reputations of their own. One such student was Gerson Leiber, whose beautiful abstract watercolors, light, airy, and bright, complement the work of his admired teacher in this dual exhibition. In addition to printmaking, Barnet concentrated on painting, and many of those paintings are in some of the most esteemed private collections as well as in important museums.

Though busy turning out a wide variety of work, Barnet always found time to teach, which he loved doing. He taught at some of the nation's finest art schools, including Cooper Union, Yale University, and at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

While much of Barnet's work is representational, the elemental elegance of his figures and their flat surfaces reflect his interest in abstraction. He produced abstract and semi-abstract work as a pivotal figure in the New York movement known as Indian Space Painting, which was based on Native American art. He continued to produce many finely articulated abstract paintings for which he received the plaudits of critics; yet, he often returned to figurative painting, producing highly regarded enigmatic family portraits, many of which are included in his Silent Seasons series. However, his earlier works maintain edginess and brooding contemplation that is remarkable.

His works are in major public collections such as the National Gallery of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He has been the subject of over eighty one-man exhibitions held at prestigious venues, including the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of American Art of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the National Academy of Design Museum, the National Museum of American Art, and the Montclair Art Museum.

Barnet has been the recipient of numerous awards including the first Artist's Lifetime Achievement Award Medal given on the occasion of the National Academy of Design's 175th anniversary, the College Art Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Art's Lippincott Prize, and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters' Childé Hassam Prize. In addition, he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in London, England, 1978; elected to the American Academy of Art, 1982; awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, 1989; awarded a Medal of Honor, National Arts Club, NY, 1990; and awarded a medal of Lifetime Achievement, Butler Museum, Ohio. In 2000, Barnet received the Kitty Carlisle Lifetime Achievement Award. He is an elected member of the National Academy of Design, The Century Association, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Defining Barnet's career, Robert Doty wrote: "[he] has always gone beyond the limitations of modern art because his work affirms a faith in life." One should add that it also affirms a faith in art, a life in art.

Will Barnet lives in Manhattan with his wife Elena. He has three sons: Peter, Richard and Todd, and one daughter, Ona, who models for many of his images.





Dark Spokane, 1964, Color etching on paper  
23 3/4" x 10 1/4"

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East Hampton, NY

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Essay © 2009 Will Barnett

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Cover: Big Grey, 1962,  
Colored woodcut on paper,  
26 1/4" x 20 1/2"

Photo Credit: Gary Mamay

Photo Credit: Gary Mamay  
Design: Jess Frost



**BACK COVER**  
**Image to come?**