

An Exhibit at Ille Arts Offers an Inside Look at Artist Billy Sullivan

By Erin Riley | August 14, 2015 | [Culture](#)

An exhibition opening this weekend at [Ille Arts](#) offers a glimpse inside the vibrant past and peaceful present of artist and East Hamptonite Billy Sullivan.



Red, by Billy Sullivan, 2015.

Charged with the intimacy of private moments, Billy Sullivan's paintings and pastels depict the ordinary scenes of an otherwise extraordinary life. The artist's work is featured in many museums, including the permanent collections of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, as well as the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill. He was a fixture on the bohemian artists' scene of the late '70s and early '80s (Max's Kansas City was a frequent hangout) both in the city and in the Hamptons, where he moved full-time in 1971 with his partner, the curator and author Klaus Kertess.

From August 15 to September 2, Ille Arts will exhibit a retrospective of sorts of Sullivan's work. New paintings like *Red* (top), capture the artist's favorite pastime—morning walks along Two Mile Hollow Beach with his dog, Red— while others, like *Leo and Jessie*, were borne out of the frequent, and somewhat fulfilling, process of revisiting a photograph taken decades before (he started the piece in 2008 and finished it in 2013).

Sirpa 3, also on display, is a portrait of a woman done from a photograph taken after a raucous night at Studio 54. "She was my muse in '72, and I've been painting her ever since," he says. Actress and friend Cookie Mueller once described Sullivan's work as "diaristic," a term the artist has used ever since. "It's about me keeping track of what's going on in my life," he says. Many of the images Sullivan paints today are from photographs that he didn't pay attention to at the time they were taken. "We didn't have a delete button before," he says. "If that were the case, I wouldn't have anything to work from."

When he isn't collecting the artwork of friends (his most recent acquisition is a neon sculpture from Keith Sonnier) or painting in the adjacent studio, he is in the city teaching photography at New York University and the School of Visual Arts. Besides a slew of shows in NYC next year, Sullivan is awaiting the springtime release of his yet-unnamed book (from Swiss publisher Edition Patrick Frey) encompassing his life's work. *Billy Sullivan's work will be on view from August 15 through September 2 at Ille Arts, 216A Main St., Amagansett, 905-9894*

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