

NEW YORK

The Artists Are—Believe It or Not—Still Here

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“Come sit between my legs,” Eric Fischl told the sculptor Bryan Hunt. They were among the artists, many of them in their 70s or older, who had gathered on a recent afternoon on Main Beach in East Hampton. Most came out from Soho and Tribeca to live and work on the East End of Long Island back when the prices were lower, and they have been socializing and dipping into one another’s studios for decades.

The eldest is Natalie Edgar, 93. Joan Semmel, the 92-year-old feminist figurative painter, has been around long enough to remember Elaine de Kooning, who bought on Alewife Brook Road in 1975 after her split from Willem, who lived on Fireplace Road until his death in 1997. The de Koonings were following artists such as Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, James Brooks and Charlotte Park, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell, who had come to the area in the 1940s and ’50s for the



Front row, second from the right: painter and sculptor; April Gornik.
Photo courtesy of Martin Schoeller.

cheap real estate and that famous light. That remained the attraction for those who came after them through the art market’s collapse in the 1990s, even as the cost of living inched ever higher around them.

“I moved here because I wanted to be an artist and have a family and didn’t want to do it in the city,” said Peter Dayton, 70, who lives in Springs, not far from the landmarked Pollock-Krasner House and near Ross Bleckner and Cindy Sherman.

Sanford Biggers, 53, whose wife’s family had a house in Sag Harbor’s historic Black community, bought his own place in nearby Noyac in 2020. “In this group, I’m the kid, but I feel so connected to everyone,” Biggers said. He showed his quilt series with Eric Firestone in 2013.

Firestone, along with Tripoli Patterson, Halsey McKay, and the Springs Fireplace Project, revved up the gallery scene over the past two decades, and Fischl and his wife, April Gornik, also a painter, founded the nonprofit gallery the Church in Sag Harbor in 2021. “It’s our job as artists and makers to give the public the highest level of creative experiences we can,” Fischl said. “Or else Sag Harbor will become a parody of itself, like Soho or Key West.”