

# The Museum of Modern Art

## CY TWOMBLY A Biography

Edwin Parker Twombly, Jr., was born in Lexington, Virginia, on April 25, 1928. He inherited the nickname his father had earned as a professional baseball player -- recalling the legendary pitcher Cy Young. Twombly's parents encouraged his artistic inclinations, and, at the age of twelve, he began to study painting with Pierre Daura, a Spanish artist who had been part of the Cercle et Carré group in France.

Twombly's first formal art school training was at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1948 and 1949. Afterwards, he enrolled in the newly created art program at Washington and Lee University, Lexington. The sole instructor, Marion Junkin, immediately recognized Twombly's talent and encouraged him to apply for a fellowship from the Art Students League of New York. Twombly moved to New York in September 1950, where he studied at the League under Will Barnet and Morris Kantor.

While in New York, Twombly made the round of museum shows and gallery openings, where he saw the works of such diverse artists as Salvador Dalí, Arshile Gorky, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, and Jackson Pollock.

Twombly developed a close relationship with his fellow League student Robert Rauschenberg, who was three years his senior. Together, they attended the 1951 summer session at the progressive Black Mountain College in North Carolina, studying under Motherwell and Ben Shahn. Autumn 1951 marks Twombly's first gallery showings in Chicago and at the Sam Kootz Gallery, New York.

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The following year, Twombly won a grant to study in Europe. Rauschenberg accompanied him, and, together, they explored Italy and North Africa. The two artists returned to New York in the spring of 1953, and Rauschenberg established a studio on Fulton Street, which they often shared. In the autumn, Eleanor Ward began to show their work.

In 1957, at the age of twenty-nine, Twombly left New York for Rome. Though he had a profound interest in ancient art, Twombly was also attracted to the contemporary European art scene. Shortly after his arrival, Twombly was introduced to Giorgio Franchetti and his sister Tatiana, the children of a prominent Italian family with an illustrious history of patronage in art. In two years time, Tatiana became Twombly's wife, and, in the intervening period, Giorgio provided Twombly with a special entree into the Roman art community.

In 1959, after several successful gallery showings in Italy, Twombly briefly returned to Virginia and New York. At the end of that same year, he and Tatiana had a son, Cyrus Alessandro, an occasion the artist commemorated with the large-scale work *The Age of Alexander*. Twombly and his family established a new home in Rome in early 1960, and the artist then had one of the most productive summers of his career in 1961 -- yielding such works as *Triumph of Galatea* and the *Ferragosto* series.

Leo Castelli began showing Twombly's work in New York in the early 1960s. However, at a moment of ascendancy for Pop art and Minimalism, Twombly's work seemed out of step to many. His friends Rauschenberg and Johns were celebrated as precursors of Pop, while Twombly was accused of being too closely tied both to Abstract Expressionism and to (then-unpopular) European painting.

In the later 1960s, Twombly began to pursue a sharply different direction, in a new cycle of gray-ground canvases that would dominate his work into the early 1970s. This new aesthetic was more in step with favored contemporary currents, and, when Twombly had his first one-person museum exhibition in the United States, at the Milwaukee Art Center in 1968, the critic Robert Pincus-Witten approvingly called the new work "heroic."

In the later 1970s and 1980s, Twombly's production slowed, and his work often took on a more pastoral, contemplative attention to nature, under the influence of such artists as Monet and Turner. He began, at the same time, to work more frequently outside of Rome, either in his country residence in Bassano to the north or, more recently, in his home overlooking the Bay of Gaeta to the south.

Despite an illustrious international reputation, Twombly's work remains relatively unknown in his native country. The last American retrospective of Twombly's work was held in 1979 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In 1987-1988, a major touring retrospective of the artist's work was seen in Zurich, Madrid, London, Düsseldorf, and Paris. In February 1995, a special building dedicated to a survey of Twombly's art will open at The Menil Collection in Houston to coincide with its showing of **CY TWOMBLY: A RETROSPECTIVE.**