

Checklist

ROBERT MOTHERWELL: LYRIC SUITE

September 8 - October 13, 1969

Unless otherwise indicated, the works are gifts of the artist in memory of Frank O'Hara. The sequence of numbering is a system requested by the artist to identify the works and does not indicate sequence of execution. Dimensions cited are for sheet size, height preceding width. Negative numbers are in parentheses.

MOTHERWELL, Robert. American, born 1915.

Lyric Suite, in black (MOMA #1). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 1/8 x 11 1/8". 2379.67 (Mathews 1851).

Lyric Suite, in black (MOMA #2). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 1/8 x 11 1/8". 2390.67. (Mathews 1862).

Lyric Suite, in black (MOMA #3). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 1/8 x 11 1/8". 758.66. (Varon 42).

Lyric Suite, in black (MOMA #4). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 x 11 1/8". 755.66. (Varon 40).

Lyric Suite, in black (MOMA # 5). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 2388.67. (Mathews 1860).

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Lyric Suite, in black (MOMA #6). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 2381.67. (Mathews 1853).

Lyric Suite, in black (MOMA #7). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 2389.67. (Mathews 1861).

Lyric Suite, in black (MOMA #8). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 1/8 x 11 1/8". 2380.67. (Mathews 1852).

Lyric Suite, in purple-black and purple (MOMA #9). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 1/8 x 11 1/8". Extended loan from the artist. E.L.67.1422. (Mathews 1864).

Lyric Suite, in purple-black and purple (MOMA #10). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 1/8 x 11 1/8". Extended loan from the artist. E.L.67.1423. (Mathews 1865).

Lyric Suite, in purple-black and purple (MOMA #11). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 x 11 1/8". 764.66. (Varon 47).

Lyric Suite, in purple-black and purple (MOMA #12). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 x 11 1/8" 763.66. (Varon 46).

Lyric Suite, in purple-black (MOMA #13). (April-May) 1965. Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". Extended loan from the artist. E.L.67.1424. (Mathews 1866).

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Lyric Suite, in blue and black inks and pale blue gouache (MOMA #23).

(April-May 1965). ^{brush and ink} Gouache/ on oriental paper, brush and ink, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8".

2383.67. (Mathews 1855).

Lyric Suite, in blue and black inks and pale blue gouache (MOMA #24).

(April-May 1965). Gouache, brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9"

2384.67. (Mathews 1856).

Lyric Suite, in black and brown (MOMA #25). (April-May 1965). Brush and

ink on oriental paper, 9 x 11 1/8". 753.66. (Varon 39).

Lyric Suite, in black and brown (MOMA #26). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink

on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9". 756.66. (Varon 41).

Lyric Suite, in brown (MOMA #27). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental

paper, 9 1/8 x 11 1/8". Extended loan from the artist. E.L.67.1421. (Mathews 1863).

Lyric Suite, in red and blue (MOMA #28). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on

oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 2381.67. (Mathews 1853).

Lyric Suite, in red and blue (MOMA #29). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on

oriental paper, 11 1/8 9 1/8". 2382.67. (Mathews 1854).

Lyric Suite, in red and blue (MOMA #30). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on

oriental paper, 11 x 9". Lent anonymously. 69.1092

Lyric Suite, in purple-black (MOMA #14). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 9 1/8 x 11 1/8". Extended loan from the artist. E.L.67.1425. (Mathews 1867).

Lyric Suite, in orange and brown (MOMA #15). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 762.66. (Varon 45).

Lyric Suite, in orange and brown (MOMA #16). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 760.66. (Varon 43).

Lyric Suite, in blue and green (MOMA #17). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 2386.67. (Mathews 1858).

Lyric Suite, in blue and green (MOMA #18). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 2385.67. (Mathews 1857).

Lyric Suite, in red-purple, blue and black (MOMA #19). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 759.66. (Mathews 302).

Lyric Suite, in red-purple, blue and black (MOMA #20). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9". 757.66. (Mathews 303).

Lyric Suite, in purple-black and blue (MOMA #21). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 x 9". 754.66. (Mathews 301).

Lyric Suite, in purple-black and blue (MOMA #22). (April-May 1965). Brush and ink on oriental paper, 11 1/8 x 9 1/8". 761.66. (Varon 44).

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The Museum of Modern Art

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The Museum of Modern Art

Wall Label 1

During the winter of 1964/65, Robert Motherwell underwent a period of reflection. He was being questioned about his work by two curators who were preparing exhibitions and books, and he was beginning to feel that his paintings of that winter were on the verge of becoming self-conscious, a quality he had always abhorred. He was being asked a great deal about the role of "automatism" in his work from the early 1940's on. And, having been commissioned to do a mural for the John F. Kennedy Building in Boston, he was wondering whether he could do an "automatic" mural, which would be "personal, subjective, sensitive, humanized," in the foyer of a vast and rather impersonal building.

On an impulse, during the spring of 1965, Motherwell purchased a thousand sheets of Japanese "rice" paper. Some weeks later, it suddenly occurred to him to paint these sheets using techniques of automatism: spontaneously, quickly, working without critical judgements, no changes or revisions. Although he was using Oriental paper, he wanted no references to calligraphy or Oriental brush and ink painting. With colored inks and sable brushes of various sizes, he painted quick strokes as energetically as possible without tearing the paper. Groups of the same colors were mostly done during a single day. The ink, brushed or accidentally dripped from the brush, continued to expand on the soft paper and partially formed its own configuration. And he noticed that, after the sheets had dried, some inks had bled into bright colors at the edges -- an effect that could not be calculated since the color emerged only after drying. Through April and May, he painted some 600 in all and later titled them Lyric Suite.

The paintings are individually impressive, with a directness and clarity, scale and presence that belie their small size. Their fluid rhythms lead the eye from one to the next, as during execution the hand must have been led from one sheet to another. The artist believes that there is a continuing impact of their purity of feeling in much of his current work, especially in the

OPEN series and in recent collages.

Lyric Suite remains, in a sense, a memorial to two friends: the death of David Smith on May 24, 1965, put an abrupt end to Motherwell's work on the series; the concern for automatism was clarified partly through questions asked by poet Frank O'Hara while he was preparing the Museum's retrospective of Motherwell's work. The artist's gift and loan to the Museum of twenty-nine works from Lyric Suite were made in memory of Frank O'Hara and make possible this exhibit of a small group from the series, which perhaps can never be exhibited in its totality.

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The Museum of Modern Art

Wall Label II

...early in April 1965, it came to me out of the blue: PAINT THE THOUSAND SHEETS WITHOUT INTERRUPTION, WITHOUT A PRIORI TRADITIONAL* OR MORAL PREJUDICES OR A POSTERIORI ONES, WITHOUT ICONOGRAPHY, AND ABOVE ALL WITHOUT REVISIONS OR ADDITIONS UPON CRITICAL REFLECTION AND JUDGMENT.** GIVE UP ONE'S BEING TO THE ENTERPRISE AND SEE WHAT LIES WITHIN, WHATEVER IT IS. VENTURE. DON'T LOOK BACK. DO NOT TIRE. EVERYTHING IS OPEN. BRUSHES AND BLANK WHITE PAPER!

Something like that, but intuited, not thought out.

Like the first stage of a passionate affair. With paper.

Anywhere from 10 to 50 a day, on the floor, sweat dimming my spectacles on hot days... like a crap game in the street, many at one sitting -- never one throw alone...

Most made in seconds, not minutes.

Unable to control spread of ink, which varied according to heat and humidity -- never knew what one would end as, until 'set'; each picture would change before my eyes after I had finished working it, sometimes for many minutes -- as the ink spread, like a spot of oil. I repeat, because of the technical process of spreading and drying after I had ended my participation, the pictures literally continued to paint themselves as the ink spread in collaboration with the paper. Was tempted to use blotting paper at a miraculously fine moment on some of them, but never did. A few spread until a square inch or two of white was all that was left of the original blank white paper.

Part of the experience was like those speeded up botany films that show you months' growth in several minutes, the bud becoming a flower.

That some of the inks bled was wholly unexpected, and did not show until the ink was nearly set, so never could exploit bleeding; couldn't see the bleeding while actually painting...

The rhythm of my wrists became freer and broader and unself-conscious.

Was anxious that they were not complex enough. Now prefer the barest ones.

No artist should be his own critic. I wasn't in the process of making the Lyric Suite.

But, afterward, although I do not know how other people feel, I like this series as much as any of my works. The feeling is pure and clear, like mountain air. Lyricism has its own kind of beauty, as the tragic (the Spanish Elegies) and the ironical (some of the collages) have theirs.

* I cannot, however, lose my prejudice that quality is the mark of true feeling, that feeling is the realm of qualitative discrimination.

** I violated this last on about 10 sheets, always to their detriment.