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The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	MoMA Exhs.	679.8

Exhib,

Rothko  
679

cc: Rene d'Harnoncourt  
William Seitz ✓

February 9, 1961

Monroe Wheeler

Peter Selz

Mark Rothko just asked me whether it might be possible to extend his show beyond its closing date of March 12. His main reason for this is the fact that the most important reviews such as: Goldwater in Arts, Hess in Art News, Katherine Kuh in the Saturday Review will appear only in March.

I told him that there was almost no possibility of extending the show due to the Steichen Exhibition, but I did want to report to you his hope that we could extend it.

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*Rothko show*

*Rothko*

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ART  
1960  
announcements of  
ons

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

Rakko

Peter - these must still be cut

NEW CURTAINS

to be shown at  
the Futurist  
in the United States  
on the work of Balla,  
Directed by Peter Selz.  
Dr.  
Joshua Taylor will  
hibition will also  
- Dec. 19, 1961,  
19, 1962.

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No 16, 1967

Mural, Section 7,  
1959

Sketch for Mural No 7, 1958-59

White and Black on Wine  
1959  
Rubin

Sketch for Mural No 6, 1958

Sketch for Mural No 4  
1958

No. 12, 1960  
Dr. Pang a

Mural, Section 2, 1959

Mural for End Wall  
1959

Sketch for Mural No 1  
1958

Red, Brown, Black  
1958  
MOMA

No 7, 1960

White + Greens  
1957  
Nelson Rockefeller

No 9, 1958  
Blinken

Mural, Section 3, 1959

No 14, 1960

No 19, 1958

Black + white  
1956  
Stanton

No 14, 1955

Orange + Yellow  
1956  
Albright, Buffalo

No 13, 1949

Black over Reds  
1957  
Berman

No 5, 1960

Temp. Blade  
on Red  
1957  
Grassman

No 3, 1956

Homage to  
Matisse  
1954

Mural, Section 5, 1959

No 21, 1947

No 24, 1947

No 15, 1949

No 11, 1949

No 20, 1950

Mural, Section 7, 1959

No 18, 1952

No 27, 1954  
Heller

No 15  
1948

No 8, 1952  
Tremaine

No 19, 1948  
Chicago

No 16, 1948  
Stamos

No 21, 1949

No 22, 1952

No 24, 1949  
Reynal

1954  
Goldsmid

1948  
Kantel

No 18, 1948  
Vassier

No 12, 1948  
Phillips Coll.

No 10, 1953  
Heller

1948  
Blinken

No 2, 1954

No 8, 1953

No 20, 1949



**THE OVERSIZED FLOORPLAN FOR “Installation – ROTHKO  
EXHIBITION, 1<sup>st</sup> FLOOR GALLERIES, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ”  
WAS NOT IMAGED IN ITS ENTIRETY DUE TO SIZE LIMITATIONS.**



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## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

CC: Mr. d'Harnoncourt  
Mr. Wheeler  
Captain Steichen  
Mr. Porter

Mrs. Shaw  
Mrs. Woodruff

Date May 23, 1960

To: Mr. Selz

Re: Scheduling of Exhibitions,

From: James White

Changes in Dates

Dear Peter,

The following changes have been made today in the dates of the Rothko exhibition. It will now open on:

Monday, January 16, 1961 - Private  
Tuesday, January 17, 1961 - Press & Private  
Wednesday, January 18, 1961 - Public

It will close on:

Sunday, March 12, 1961

These dates are now registered with the Museums Council and represent a one week advance in the prior opening date as well as a one week advance in the prior closing date.

Also, the Edward Steichen exhibition is now scheduled to open on:

Monday, March 27, 1961 - Private  
Tuesday, March 28, 1961 - Press & Private  
Wednesday, March 29, 1961 - Public

It will close on:

Sunday, May 21, 1961.

These dates are likewise a one week advance in both opening and closing dates and are also registered with the Museums Council.

These changes effectively avoid any conflict with other museum openings and also work regarding the Museum's own scheduling of exhibitions on other floors

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# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Date May 20, 1960  
~~May 18, 1960~~

Re: Rothko Exhibition  
~~etc.~~

To: James White  
From: Elizabeth Shaw

Dear Jim:

Thank you for the drop copy giving the new (and perhaps still tentative) dates for the Rothko exhibition. We have to write to your leaders informing

I think we should make an effort to change it so that it does not conflict with the Whitney show of The Immaculates, which is a show of realistic (close to magic realist) painting. I think that it would be unwise to have the two shows open on the same day for several reasons, including the strong possibility that the New York papers will review them together, undoubtedly to the detriment of Rothko.

Also Miss McKeller of the Whitney tells me that she has begged us not to have a private opening the same day that the Friends of the Whitney have their spring 1961 affair. She says she had this date first and considers the conflict very serious. We have scheduled the Steichen members' opening for that day, but we could easily change it don't you think? insert a qualifying phrase to the effect that the opening and closing dates of the exhibition are possibly subject to a slight change of one or two weeks, either at the beginning or at the end.

cc: Peter Selz, Emily Woodruff, Rene d'Harnoncourt, Richard Koch

*Jan 16 - Mar 12*

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	MoMA Exhs.	679.8

## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

CC: Mr. d'Harnencourt  
Mr. Wheeler  
Mrs. Shaw  
Mrs. Woodruff

Date May 18, 1960

To: Mr. Selz  
From: James White

Re: Rothko

Dear Peter,

Reference is made to your request for revised opening dates for the Rothko exhibition. I know that you have to write to your lenders informing them of the change of periods during which you will wish to borrow.

I have reviewed the problem with Rene and we agree that the most feasible schedule at the present time would be for the Rothko to open as follows:

January 23, 1961 - Private  
January 24, 1961 - Press & Private  
January 25, 1961 - Public

It would close on Sunday, March 19, 1961. 12

Since, as we all realize, the present state of all Museum schedules is far from ideal, I would suggest that when you write to your lenders you insert a qualifying phrase to the effect that the opening and closing dates of the exhibition are possibly subject to a slight change of from one to two weeks, either at the beginning or at the end.

*J.*

Jan 16 - Mar 12

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NEW YORK'S OUTRAGEOUS GOOD FORTUNE

# SCRAP 4

EDITORS  
Anita Ventura  
Sidney Geist

February 16, 1961

15¢

SCRAP presents a study by one of its editors of the essay on Mark Rothko by Peter Selz in the Museum of Modern Art's brochure for the Rothko exhibition (to March 12). Mr. Selz' essay is reproduced photographically and in its entirety; numerals have been inserted after words and passages which are discussed under the corresponding numeral in Mr. Geist's article, in typewrit-

er type. SCRAP recommends that the order of reading be: first Selz, then Geist...The brochure contains reproductions, a brief biography of the artist, a bibliography, a list of exhibitions and reviews, and a catalogue of the exhibition besides Mr. Selz' text, which is reprinted here by kind permission of the Museum of Modern Art.

## "moodily dare": I F P

A CRITIQUE OF CRITICISM  
BY SIDNEY GEIST

MARK ROTHKO

The intimate view of Vermeer and Vuillard is denied to current experience<sup>1</sup>; it no longer fits into our scale of values.<sup>2</sup> The sunlit, peacefully disciplined interior of Vermeer seems to offer the outsider a candid glimpse into a well-regulated life which, though he may not enter it, yet presents him with a vision of order to contemplate. But desirable<sup>3</sup> as this quiet world appears, it is no longer accessible to the modern artist, who requires different visions. The painters of the New York School have set out to create their own environments.<sup>4</sup> Intolerant of the chaotic mass culture in which they live, they have also become thoroughly disillusioned with the painting of social and political revolt. (How far away the thirties seem to be!)<sup>5</sup> And yet they reject the expressionist attitude of personal antagonism vis-a-vis society.<sup>6</sup> Even the American scene does not to any extent inspire their mural-sized paintings. The vast plateaus of the Northwest, the vaster bottom-lands of Texas constitute only a small part of the artistic experience of these painters, whose culture is based chiefly on European art.<sup>7</sup> Their large paintings have been formed within the walls of dreary lofts and studios, in the very heart of a congested city.<sup>8</sup>

In his New York studio Mark Rothko has built a new habitat<sup>9</sup> of extraordinary emotional dimensions. His paintings can be likened to annunciations.<sup>10</sup> Rothko returned from a trip to Italy with great admiration for Fra Angelico's frescoes in the monastery of Saint Mark's. But no angels and madonnas, no gods, no devils furnish a common property to be invoked in Rothko's paintings. There is no public myth to express the modern artist's message for him.<sup>11</sup> The painting itself is the proclamation; it is an autonomous object and its

1 Is it denied? 2 What scale of values? 3 Doesn't it? 4 Or the viewer? Mr. Selz would have us be aliens in a world we never made, but we are all outside of every picture. In a document that Mr. Selz quotes twice, Rothko says, "the instant [a picture] is completed, the intimacy between the creation and the creator is ended. He is an outsider." 5 "desirable" even though it "no longer fits our scale of values"? This is Having It Both Ways (HIBW). 6 The terminology has gone from "intimate view" to "vision of order" to "own environments" as if these were interchangeable terms. This is Verbal Slide (VS). Is Mr. Selz trying to say that contemporary artists live in a world that is visually and ideologically different from that of the Past? OK, but why all the Art Talk (AT)? Why pick on Vermeer and Vuillard? 7 Not seem--are; 22 years, in fact. This is the second "seem" in 14 lines. 8 Why not toward? Because "vis-a-vis" is vaguer. 9 Is the experience of physiography an "artistic" experience like the experience of European art? 10 That is to say, large paintings, uninfluenced by landscape but proceeding from a culture based on European art (although rejecting Vermeer and Vuillard) have been painted in a congested city. What's the point? No point, this is the Meaningless Package (MP). The image of paintings "within the walls" is a little unpleasant, don't you think? Anyway, if we can trust the photograph in the catalogue, Rothko has a clean and spacious studio. 11 Has Rothko built a habitat, or has his studio a special character because of the presence of his work? 12 A Non Sequitur (NS). In modern English the word "annunciations", there is only the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary would bear the Christ child. Yes, we're on church. 13 What can this phrase possibly mean there ever been a public myth that expressed his message for him? Note that in this sentence, Rothko, and are dealing with the "moodily dare" in the next sentence, then, would have to How

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very size announces its eminence.

That the sense of belonging is gone<sup>1</sup> and cannot be recaptured under the circumstances in which we live, is a truism. The personal estrangement of the artist from the mass culture surrounding him had better be accepted. But Rothko indeed has welcomed this new-found freedom; he wrote in the mid-forties: "The un-friendliness of society to his activity is difficult for the artist to accept. Yet this very hostility can act as a lever for true liberation. Freed from a false sense of security and community, the artist can abandon his plastic bank-book, just as he has abandoned other forms of security. Both the sense of community and of security depend on the familiar. Free of them, transcendental experiences become possible."<sup>2</sup>

Rothko paints large surfaces which prompt us to contemplate. The actuality of the painted surfaces makes even the symbolic configurations of his earlier work unnecessary. His rectangular configurations have been compared with the work of the followers of neo-plasticism, but unlike them, Rothko does not paint about optical phenomena or space and color relationships. His work has also at times been classed erroneously with action painting, yet he does not inform us about the violence and passion of his gesture.<sup>3</sup>

Holding tenaciously to humanist values, he paints pictures which are in fact related to man's scale and his measure. But whereas in Renaissance painting man was the measure of space, in Rothko's painting space, i.e. the picture, is the measure of man.<sup>4</sup>

This is perhaps the essential nature of the viewer's response to Rothko's work: he contemplates these large surfaces, but his vision is not obstructed by the means of painting; he does not get involved in the by-ways of an intriguing surface; these pictures do not remind us of peeling walls or torn canvases. The artist has abandoned the illusions of three-dimensional recession; there is not even the space between various overlaid brush-strokes.<sup>5</sup> The surface texture is as neutral as possible.

Seen close up and in a penumbra, as these paintings are meant to be seen, they absorb, they envelop the viewer.<sup>6</sup> We no longer look at a painting as we did in the nineteenth century; we are meant to enter it, to sink into its atmosphere of mist and light or to draw it around us like a coat—or a skin.<sup>7</sup>

But, to repeat, they also measure the spectator, gauge him. These silent paintings with their enormous, beautiful, opaque surfaces<sup>8</sup> are mirrors, reflecting what the viewer brings with him. In this sense, they can even be said to deal directly with human emotions, desires, relationships, for they are mirrors of our fantasy and serve as echoes of our experience.<sup>9</sup>

It is important for an understanding of the art of this later, whose work seems to have little precedent in the history of painting, that the visual arts formed no part of Rothko's early life.<sup>10</sup> He recounts that art was not a part of his life in his youth, that he did not visit galleries until he was

ings by modern artists are "proclamations" and that their size always announces their eminence—and that's a bit much. Proclamations—of what? This is the Incomplete Forward Pass (IFP). By now we have gone from "environment" to "bottom-lands" to "habitat" to "myth" to "message" to "proclamation" (VS).

1 Social-worker talk. Whose belonging, and to what? (IFP)  
2 The mass-culture artists are not estranged from mass culture. How many ways can you have it?

3 It is most unusual that it is "surfaces" and not paintings which prompt us to contemplate. Contemplate what? (not IFP, as we shall soon see) 4 Examination of the painted surfaces leads me to think that actually they are not very actual, but if Mr. Selz wants to think so... for the moment. 5 At what level does actuality of surface supplant symbolic configuration? 6 What neo-plasticists paint about optical phenomena? 7 Does this mean that there is no violence and passion in Rothko's gesture because he doesn't tell us about it, or that, simply, we don't know? There is some doubt too about "gesture". Gesture of stroke, or gesture as total artistic intention? Because later....

8 Omitting the reference to Renaissance painting, we have, "he paints pictures...related to man's scale...; space...is the measure of man." This is not humanism, this is spacism.

9 Above we read that the "large surfaces prompt us to contemplate." Now we see that we "contemplate these large surfaces". Forward Pass Completed! 10 Has your vision been obstructed lately by the means of painting? I find that I can see the painting only because of the means of painting. 11 No painting means, no intriguing surface, no space between overlaid (?) brushstrokes—are we ever going to be told what is on the canvas? 12 At the same time that the painted surfaces have an "actuality" that makes unnecessary etc. 13 So does any painted wall. 14 Rather, like a cape; they haven't any sleeves, you know. Mr. Selz implies that in the twentieth century we are meant to sink into pictures, draw them around us etc.; this is ridiculous.

15 Careful--don't get involved in the by-ways of an intriguing surface. 16 That's a good one--they deal directly with human emotions etc. because they serve as mirrors and echoes. Anyway, the coat has become a mirror. This is Having It 2 Ways (HI2W).

17 It is never explained why it is "important" to know that the visual arts formed no part of Rothko's early background.

2

in his twenties. Since childhood, however, he had been preoccupied with cultural and social values! When Rothko finally encountered the world of painting, his mind was fully formed<sup>1</sup>—much as Kandinsky's had been at the time of his arrival in Munich some thirty years earlier,<sup>2</sup> before he became the great pioneer of early twentieth-century painting.<sup>3</sup>

Rothko's task now was to make of painting something as powerful and as poignant as poetry and music had seemed to him; to make his painting an instrument of similar force. Even today, he says, he is concerned with his art not esthetically, but as a humanist and a moralist.

Rothko is largely self-taught as a painter. In fact, his paintings show no direct reflection of the painting of the past.<sup>4</sup> His work has been highly individualistic from the beginning. His city scenes of the thirties are characterized by large flat shapes of subtle color, for the plane of the picture asserts itself early in his work. Immobile human figures, isolated and without contact with each other were the subject matter. "But the solitary figure could not raise its limbs in a single gesture that might indicate its concern with the fact of mortality and an insatiable appetite for ubiquitous experience in face of this fact."<sup>5</sup>

Rothko has never abandoned his search for means of expressing human emotion, although he no longer employs the symbol of the figure to enact his drama. He has found his own more conclusive way of dealing with human qualities and concerns.<sup>6</sup>

Toward the eventual achievement of this vision, the experience of surrealism proved a liberating instrument for Rothko as it did for so many other American artists of his generation. He has always admired Dali, de Chirico, Miró, and Max Ernst. The impact of surrealism led to an exploration of myth. But his archaic mythological beings of the early forties, his soothsayers and oracles, are generalized and not recognizable.<sup>7</sup> They appear to inhabit an imaginary world below the sea,<sup>8</sup> and the familiar identity of things is destroyed by these organic, biomorphic beings made up of elements partly human, animal, or vegetable. These symbolic abstractions are muted in color and always dominated by a swirling calligraphic line. He exhibited this biomorphic series in his first important one-man show, held at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century in 1945.<sup>9</sup>

Soon thereafter the flat plane reasserted itself, and by 1947 Rothko was using diffuse, rectangular color shapes, permitting them to float freely in his ambiguous space. It was difficult for an unprepared audience to comprehend this departure into a new, completely uncharted world. "Yet the remarkable thing about that period was that the artist was really not alone, that there always was a small audience which greeted each new manifestation as an answer to what had to be done."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, on the occasion of a decisive show, held at the Betty Parsons Gallery, M. B. wrote

1 Isn't it rather pretentious to say of a boy in his teens that he was "preoccupied with cultural and social values"? 2 He was 22. 3 Kandinsky was 30, he was qualified to practice law, and had been offered a teaching post at the University of Dorpat. Also, he had drawn and painted since early childhood.

4 Quite a task for a young man of 22 who up to this time has not been touched by the visual arts, who has just become aware of museums and art galleries. Didn't he have to learn to paint? Talk of Annunciation--!

5 The paintings, as mirrors, "deal directly with human emotions" and, here, "show no direct reflection of the painting of the past." In both cases Mr. Selz supports an untenable position with a form of the strong word "direct". I can't shake off the idea that Rothko's rectangles in orderly series come after Mondrian, not before. 6 Flat shapes, subtle color, the picture plane--these don't look like humanist or moral considerations to me.

7 By making "mirrors"?

8 Which vision? 9 It's nice of Mr. Selz to tell us that something in art touched Rothko, after the "self-taught", "no direct reflection", "little precedent in the history of painting": HIBW. 10 Seen any specific and recognizable soothsayers lately? 11 Oracular frogmen, skin-diving soothsayers.

GLOSSARY for page 2

HIBW Having It Both Ways  
IFP Incomplete Forward Pass  
VS Verbal Slide

12 What was happening in the world when "this biomorphic series", "dominated by swirling calligraphic lines", was exhibited by our "humanist" and "moralist"?

13 By all the evidences, this happened three years after the exhibition; is this what Mr. Selz means by "soon"? Possibilities 1 illustrates two paintings in the biomorphic series dated 1946, and four dated 1947, and none in the style employing "rectangular color shapes". Nor in 1 see rectangular color shapes in the two paintings dated 1947 in the Museum show. The rectangular c. s. appear till 1948. 14 Not causing. This is t. God, Father or Ringmaster (AAGFOR). 15 Nov

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1949: "But the unfortunate thing is that these paintings con-  
gest... in or design. The famous 'pot  
paint flung... canvas' would apply here with a  
society."

Despite a complete lack of understanding of Rothko's  
indifference to accepted principles of design—of achiev-  
ing precision without resorting to formulae—the review-  
er's reference to Ruskin's celebrated insult is actually  
valid. Thomas B. Hess in fact immediately recognized an  
orientalism similar to Whistler's. The orientalism  
may be doubtful, but as in Whistler's "Nocturnes," the  
shapes in Rothko's paintings are enveloped in mist. Less  
static, however, these thinly painted, elusive rectangles  
move past each other without friction, slowly, in veiled  
silence.

In 1943, in a letter written jointly by Rothko and  
Gottlieb to the *New York Times*, the artists outlined  
some of their esthetic beliefs. One of them: "We favor  
the simple expression of the complex thought."<sup>4</sup>  
Rothko achieved a further simplification around 1950.  
Subject matter in the conventional sense had, as we  
know, been abandoned for some time. Now line and  
movement were also eliminated.

Although the thin application of paint always per-  
mits an awareness of the weave of the canvas,<sup>7</sup> texture  
is not important. Conventional recession into depth, as  
well as weight and gravity, has been eliminated,<sup>9</sup> yet we  
cannot even speak of flatness when confronted with the  
surfaces which actually breathe and expand. Light has  
become an attribute of color. Few of the elements which  
are a part of most paintings have remained. In fact,  
Rothko's constant stripping-down of his pictures to  
their barest essentials, to a simplicity beyond complex-  
ity, is intrinsic to their being. His paintings disturb and  
satisfy partly by the magnitude of his renunciation.<sup>10</sup>

Color, although not a final aim in itself, is his pri-  
mary carrier, serving as the vessel which holds the  
content. The color may be savage, at times burning in-  
tensely like sidereal landscapes, at others giving off an  
enduring after-glow. There are paintings whose reds  
are oppressive, evoking a mood of foreboding and  
death; there are reds suggesting light, flame, or blood.  
There are pictures with veil-like blues and whites, and  
blues suggesting empty chambers and endless halls. At  
times the color has been gayer, with greens and yellows,  
reminiscent of spring in its buoyant, almost exultant  
delight. There is almost no limit to the range and  
breadth of feeling he permits his color to express.

If color sets the general tenor of the mood,<sup>15</sup> the shape  
gives a more specific feature as well as a more concrete  
character. Similar as the shapes may appear, the rec-  
tangular color fields vary considerably from painting  
to painting. They are always presented in relentless fron-  
tality in the canvases of the fifties.<sup>17</sup> These symmetric  
shapes are usually not sharply outlined; they are never  
frozen, and are able to shift along a lateral axis  
because of their blurred edging. Areas often seem to

1 I A doubt about a doubt. 2 The wiggling of thought in  
this passage is noteworthy; it results from Mr. Selz's ef-  
fort to express some Art Historical Insights:

"difficult for an unprepared audience to comprehend"  
"Yet...there always was a small audience"  
"Nevertheless" M.B. didn't get it.  
But M.B. reference to Ruskin insult "actually valid."  
T.B. Hess in fact recognized "orientalism" like W's.  
Orientalism "may be doubtful".  
But as in W "Nocturnes", the shapes in R paintings...

3 Far from describing Rothko's paintings, this sentence,  
except for "rectangles", describes the Whistler paint-  
ings in issue. This is Reverse English (RE).

4 Why is this letter of 1943 introduced after the passage  
on the 1949 show and not before that on the 1945 show?  
Because after it was written Rothko painted the biomor-  
phic pictures, and they were far from "simple expres-  
sions!"; were, in fact, packed with imagery. Could our  
artist have, for a while, fallen short of his intentions?  
Our Artist Can Do No Wrong (OACDNW). 5 I don't see any  
lines in the pictures after 1947, except for some long  
strokes in "No. 11, 1949"; but one thing is certain, Mr.  
Selz does not describe these paintings as having lines:  
"rectangular color shapes", "shapes...in mist", "elusive  
rectangles"—these are his terms. The only clear lines  
in any of the pictures after 1947 in the entire exhibi-  
tion are in "No. 22, 1950": three long thin white lines  
scratched into a band of red.

6 So we finally learn what is on the canvas! 7 Are we  
aware of the weave of the canvas in the same sense that  
Rothko was "not aware of museums or art galleries"? or  
don't we, simply, see the weave of the canvas? 8 HIBW.  
Is there anything in a painting that is "not important"?  
There is always a texture. What Mr. Selz does not do is  
discuss the meaning or import of the texture in issue;  
in this case, of the "thin application of paint". This  
is Neglect of Critical Task (NoCT). 9 Does this para-  
graph describe what happened after 1950? Because weight  
and gravity must have been eliminated by 1947, accord-  
ing to Mr. Selz, from those shapes that "float freely".  
10 This Is It, folks. Earlier we had "annunciations",  
now "renunciation". (Is light, which in this paragraph  
"has become an attribute" of color, an example of renun-  
ciation? Sounds as if something has been added, but  
this is not Mr. Selz's intention.) To arrive at the idea  
of renunciation in this paragraph, the paintings are  
described in terms of thin application of paint (not  
thin paint), texture not important, no weight and gravi-  
ty, no recession, "cannot even speak of flatness"; sur-  
faces "actually" breathing, light. The image created is  
that of a glowing ball of light, and I think that that  
is what Mr. Selz means us to see. Are we still in the  
realm of painting?

11 What content? 1FP. 12 Color is the "vessel", but such a  
pretty vessel. 13 Seen in a "penumbra", of course, as  
they are meant to be (p.2, col.1). 14 That word again;  
AAGFOR. Doesn't the artist do anything, isn't he an  
agent, doesn't he put paint on the canvas?

15 How vague can you get? AT. It would have been enough  
to say: If color sets the mood... 16 Does this mean that  
the paintings actually differ from each other? 17 Can  
you make a non-frontal rectangle on a canvas? 18 Wasn't  
movement eliminated "around 1950"? HIBW. 19 Doesn't  
sound like the right word, but is good AT.

fade into each other, or they may be most emphatically  
separate; the relationships between Rothko's shapes in  
space, however, are never explicitly defined. They are  
only implied, whispered, or, one might say, revealed.  
Between the major fields there are often zones which  
simultaneously divide and unify. "It is at the divide be-  
tween the rectangular expanses of color forms that sus-  
pense—that element which Rothko calls violence—in-  
vigorates almost imperceptibly the overall lyricism."<sup>7</sup>

Although recession into depth has been eliminated,  
Rothko's canvases are by no means flat, two-dimen-  
sional areas of color and pattern. To be sure, there is no  
depth illusion as in Renaissance painting,<sup>4</sup> nor is there  
the constructed space of cubism or the planar quality of  
Mondrian. The "space" is not really in these pictures of  
Rothko's, but rather it inheres in the sensations of ac-  
tual physical imminence, of immediate impingement,  
which they evoke in the viewer. And since man can be  
cognizant of existence, can feel, that is to say, only in a  
continuum of space, the space sensations in these  
pictures actually occur outside of the picture plane,  
on some meeting ground between the picture and the  
viewer.<sup>5</sup>

A great many of Rothko's paintings of the fifties  
make us feel as if a charge has been set up; we seem to  
be confronted with the world during the heavy hours  
preceding the storm, when the clouds are about to  
close in on each other. Yet whereas the color shapes are  
informed with some impending ominous transforma-  
tion the canvases are, so to speak, suspended at the point  
of instability. The spectator contemplates an atmosphere  
of alarm, in which the contact of electrically charged  
and dangerous elements is held in check by the tense  
areas between them. In some pictures the vibrating  
areas are pulled apart by the outside color frames.<sup>10</sup>

In other paintings we feel that all movement has eased.<sup>11</sup>  
These suggest the aftermath of once violent activity.  
Eventually as other images occur to the viewer the meta-  
phor of the creation of some universe becomes para-  
mount. And increasingly—in the mind of this writer—  
these "shivering bars of light" assume a function simi-  
lar to that loaded area between God's and Adam's fingers  
on the Sistine ceiling. But Rothko's creation can no  
longer be depicted in terms of human allegory. His sep-  
arated color areas also create a spark,<sup>15</sup> but now it takes  
place in some sort of revolving atmospheric universe  
rather than between Michelangelo's man and his God.  
Rothko has given us the first, not the sixth, day of  
creation.

An Apollonian intensity becomes evident in Roth-  
ko's work once we go beyond the immediate sensual  
appeal of the beautiful color relationships. In her inter-  
pretations of Rothko's work, Dore Ashton has com-  
pared it with Greek drama, "to the fatalism, the stately  
cadence and the desperately controlled shrieks."<sup>14</sup> In-  
deed, his work does not so much resolve agitation as  
contain it, in the sense of holding it within bounds.  
These apparently quiet, contemplative surfaces are only

1 This sentence begins with a discussion of ex-  
posed forms ("areas") and slides into the realm of illu-  
sion ("shapes in space"): VS. Anyway, these shapes or  
are always, in the paintings referred to, one above  
other, in orderly series. Read It In SCRAP. 2 No. 1  
Is It! The Gospel According To Mark.

3 Why not say simply that Rothko creates a shallow  
depth? 4 This is the third time in this essay that we  
learn that Rothko does not do something that was done in  
the Renaissance. Is the Renaissance his antagonist? This  
is very old stuff. 5 Not much room for a meeting ground  
between the picture and the viewer, since they are meant  
to be seen "close up" (p.2, col.1). This is all AT; Mr.  
Selz favors the complex expression of the simple thought.  
After long study I am able to report to our readers that  
the verbiage of the last two sentences means to say: You  
do not look into a Rothko painting, rather it seems to  
come out to you. Read It In SCRAP. Incidentally, for the  
purpose of discussing space, the terms "paintings", "can-  
vases" and "works" become "pictures" in this paragraph,  
where it is used three times as against four times in  
all the rest of the essay.

6 Translation: whereas something is about to happen to  
the color shapes, nothing happens to the canvases, so to  
speak. 7 Is alarm Out There where it can be contemplated?  
8 After a subjective origin (above, "feel as if"), the  
Thing has become Real: VS. 9 The same "divides" that "in-  
vigorates almost imperceptibly the overall lyricism"?  
10 But movement was eliminated "around 1950".

11 Not ceased; "eased" is used to suggest the stoppage of  
a movement that never really started, since, after all,  
movement was eliminated "around 1950". 12 It was bound to  
be said. 13 If there is any area in art that seems elec-  
trically charged, it is the small area between God's and  
Adam's fingers; but Mr. Selz used up a lot of electrici-  
ty in the preceding paragraph, hence "loaded". 14 HIBW.  
Mr. Selz appropriates the creative aspect of the spark—  
the spark of life—for Rothko, a dynamo by turns fright-  
ening and beneficent. Meanwhile, we have moved from the  
New to the Old Testament.

15 HIBW; a nice trick, like Dionysian calm. (We are in  
Greece.) 16 Since Mr. Selz agrees, or appears to agree,  
with Miss Ashton's comparison, he uses the word "inter-  
pretations"; of M.B. he said "reviewer". 17 The sense re-  
quires that this word be omitted. But this is not a sim-  
ple error: the intention is to transfer some of the tur-  
moil and passion below, to the (quiet) mask above; HIBW.

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15 HIBW; a nice trick, like Dionysian calm. (We are in Greece.) 16 Since Mr. Selz agrees, or appears to agree, with Miss Ashton's comparison, he uses the word "interpretations"; of M.B. he said "reviewer". 17 The sense requires that this word be omitted. But this is not a simple error: the intention is to transfer some of the turmoil and passion below, to the (quiet) mask above; HIBW.

An Apollonian intensity becomes evident in Rothko's work once we go beyond the immediate sensual appeal of the beautiful color relationships. In her interpretations of Rothko's work, Dore Ashton has compared it with Greek drama, "to the fatalism, the stately cadence and the desperately controlled shrieks." Indeed, his work does not so much resolve agitation as contain it, in the sense of holding it within bounds. These apparently quiet, contemplative surfaces are only

they are meant to be (p. 2, col. 1). 14 That word again; AnGFor. Doesn't the artist do anything, isn't he an agent, doesn't he put paint on the canvas? 15 How vague can you get? AT. It would have been enough to say: If color sets the mood... 16 Does this mean that the paintings actually differ from each other? 17 Can you make a non-frontal rectangle on a canvas? 18 Mean't movement eliminated 'around 1950? HIBW, 19 Doesn't sound like the right word, but is good AT.

given a more specific feature as well as a more concrete character. Similar as the shapes may appear, the rectangular color fields vary considerably from painting to painting. They are always presented in relentless frontality in the canvases of the HIBW. These symmetric shapes are usually not sharply outlined; they are softer, freer, and are able to shift along a lateral axis because of their blurred edging. Areas often seem to

masks for underlying turmoil and passion!  
 In recent years even the bright or blazing colors have been largely subdued to make way for painting of a somber ritualistic nature. "As I have grown older, Shakespeare has come closer to me than Aeschylus, who meant so much to me in my youth. Shakespeare's tragic concept embodies for me the full range of life from which the artist draws all his tragic materials, including irony; irony becomes a weapon against fate."<sup>2</sup>

In 1958, when he began to paint murals commissioned for a large private dining room, they turned out to be paintings which may be interpreted as celebrating the death of a civilization. In these vast canvases he abandoned solid color areas for rectangular frames of a single hue set in a field of solid color.<sup>5</sup>

The open rectangles suggest the rims of flame in containing fires, or the entrances to tombs, like the doors to the dwellings of the dead in Egyptian pyramids, behind which the sculptors kept the kings "alive" for eternity in the ka. But unlike the doors of the dead, which were meant to shut out the living from the place of absolute might, even of patrician death, these paintings—open sarcophagi—moodily dare, and thus invite the spectator to enter their offices. Indeed, the whole series of these murals brings to mind an Orphic cycle; their subject might be death and resurrection in classical, not Christian, mythology: the artist descending to Hades to find the Eurydice of his vision. The door to the tomb opens for the artist in search of his muse.<sup>10</sup>

For about eight months, Rothko was completely occupied in the execution of his mural commission.<sup>11</sup> When it was finished, and the artist had actually created three different series, it was clear to him that these paintings and the setting did not suit each other.<sup>12</sup> One may go so far as to say that this modern Dance of Death<sup>13</sup> had developed into an ironic commentary on the elegant Park Avenue dining room for which it had originally been intended.<sup>14</sup> Like much of Rothko's work, these murals really seem to ask for a special place apart, a kind of sanctuary, where they may perform what is essentially a sacramental function. This is not an absurd notion when one considers the profoundly religious quality of much apparently secular modern art—indeed, the work of art has for a small but significant number of people (including spectators as well as artists) taken on something of the ecstatic and redeeming characteristics of the religious experience. Perhaps, like medieval altarpieces, these murals can properly be seen only in an ambience created in total keeping with their mood.<sup>16</sup>

Rothko's most recent dark paintings, done after the "Orphic cycle," combine the palette of these murals with the figuration of the previous period. They have the glowing color of embers and are as relentless in their austerity. Nietzsche wrote in *The Birth of Tragedy* an essay Rothko had read with great admiration when he was a young man: "There is need for a whole world of torment in order for the individual to produce the redemptive vision and to sit quietly in his rocking rowboat in mid-sea, absorbed in contemplation."<sup>10</sup>

NOTES TO THE TEXT

1. Mark Rothko, *Possibilities I*, Winter 1947/48 "The Romantics Were Prompted," p. 24
2. *Ibid.*
3. Mark Rothko, interview with the author, autumn 1960
4. M.B., *Art Digest*, April 15, 1949, Vol. 23, No. 14 Fifty-Seventh Street in Review, "Mark Rothko at Parsons," p. 17
5. T.B.H., *Art News*, April 1949, Vol. XLVIII, No. 2 Review and Preview, "Mark Rothko (Parsons), 10 April 1949," p. 49
6. Letter, *New York Times*, June 13, 1945. Jointly with Adolph Gottlieb
7. Georgine Oeri, *The Baltimore Museum of Art News*, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, Winter 1960 "Rothko's 'Olive over Red,'" p. 8
8. Dore Ashton, *Art and Architecture*, August 1957 "Mark Rothko," p. 1
9. Mark Rothko, interview with the author, autumn 1960
10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, translation by Francis Golting, New York, Doubleday & Company, 1956, pp. 13-14

Peter Selz is Curator of the Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions of the Museum of Modern Art, and the director of the Mark Rothko exhibition.

1 But then there is the curious passage (p. 2, col. 1): "he does not inform us about the violence and passion of his gesture."

2 Is this passage quoted because the mood of Shakespeare is closer than that of Aeschylus to painting of a "somber ritualistic" nature?

3 They turned out to be...when he began to paint—as if they were alive. Did Rothko "permit" this to happen or did he lose control? 4 And then again, maybe not. How do you feel about it, Mr. Selz? This is the Critic as Innocent Bystander (CaIB). 5 In these new canvases Mr. Selz sees and describes one color area set in another. The earlier paintings he describes only in terms of "solid color areas", and that is how he sees them. That is, he does not mention the usually narrow stretches of color between and around the rectangles: NoCT. If the rectangles are not surrounded by these stretches of color, they are in real space, where we are. Also RE: "abandoned solid color areas for rectangular frames of a single hue [solid color] set in a field of solid color".

6 And so to Egypt. One can feel the relief with which Mr. Selz writes about something other than Rothko's paintings. 7 Dare what? IFP. 8 Could be. CaIB. 9 So the painters of the New York School create their own environments with Greek and Egyptian materials: HIBW. 10 That is, the door to the Egyptian tomb opens for the artist in search of his Greek muse.

11 Artists are single-minded. 12 There they were, not suiting each other. Didn't Rothko have anything to do with the situation? Could he have failed to carry out the commission? But—OACDNW. 13 This started out as "Orphic cycle": VS. Are these paintings, by any stretch of the term, a modern Dance of Death? 14 Sounds as if that Park Avenue dining room had commissioned a Dance of Death. The verbal gambit is interesting: up to this point Mr. Selz implied that the paintings developed into ("turned out to be") a number of things and among others a Dance of Death; now, fait accompli, the Dance of Death "had developed into an ironic commentary": RE. 15 That word again. Is it or isn't it secular? 16 I get Mr. Selz' suggestion that we make a kind of religious set-up around Rothko's paintings. But what if an architect begins to build a sanctuary and it turns out to be a dining room, hum?

17 "relentless" is not the right word for "austerity", but anyway, it's a package: "glowing color" and "austerity": H12W.

I have asked many questions, most of them rhetorical, in my examination of Mr. Selz' essay, and I will ask only one more: Why is it the confused and confusing piece that it is? Because Mr. Selz has nothing to say about Mark Rothko's painting. He has put himself in the impossible position of discussing an art which he describes as emptied of everything, and then of having to fill it all up again with everything else, merely in order to have something to deal with. Admittedly criticism is a special, and I may add, difficult practice, and Mr. Selz is primarily a historian. But even the historical aspects of Rothko's work are handled inadequately when they are not actually distorted. His essay, pub-

GLOSSARY for pages 3 and 4

AnGFor	Artist as God, Father or Ringmaster
AT	Art Talk
CaIB	Critic as Innocent Bystander
HIBW	Having It Both Ways
H12W	Having It 2 Ways
IFP	Incompleted Forward Pass
NoCT	Neglect of Critical Task
OACDNW	Our Artist Can Do No Wrong
RE	Reverse English
VS	Verbal Slide

lished as it is by a museum of the high authority in the field of modern art, only do damage to the already crumbling canons of criticism, to say nothing of the damage done to its immediate subject. His verbal imprecision, his distortion of historical and documentary material, and his semantic dodges have led us into a logical, critical and moral situation from which, if we cannot rescue him and his subject, we can extract a few quite simple lessons:

That statements about art make the same sense that we expect to find in statements about any other subject.

That critics be knowledgeable, sensitive, honest, literate and artistic.

That critics know what they are talking about, and talk only about what they know. This is not to say that there are no problems, difficulties, even mysteries in the realm of art. There are many. But it is one thing to admit their existence, and another to write as if they did not exist.

That it be possible, in reading criticism, to distinguish between statements of fact and other kinds of statements.

That artists not be silent when their works are wrongly described or when their intentions are misrepresented.



Dear SCRAP,  
 Every so often I find myself opposite someone with a pencil and a pad of paper, sketching him. What does it mean?  
 --VERA M., New York, N.Y.

Dear Vera: You're living in a dream world. Let's face it, the kind of thing you tell us about could be considered subversive these days. Our advice is, keep your pencil and pad under the table. And please don't write us about this anymore; we'd hate to have to take a stand on the matter.  
 --The EDITORS

Dear Sidney,  
 What are boxes? Not sculpture, not painting, not objects? I mean BOXES like Joseph Cornell's and Meret (Pur Teacup) Oppenheim's.--And last and least, mine. I'd like to know, really.  
 --EDITH SCHLOSS, New York, N.Y.  
 P.S. Writing the address, I see SCRAP lives in a BOX too.

Dear Edith: Boxes are containers. You put things into them. Christ! What are boxes for? You could decorate a box, use it in some formal, non-functional way; in that case it might be a work of art or it might just be work. Have to see the box.  
 --S. GEIST  
 --A. VENTURA

Dear S.G.,  
 With food between my teeth, a tooth-pick is more valuable than a painting. Watchmakers, garbage-men, artists, typists, clowns, watchmen, chemists, dry-cleaners, writers, janitors, loafers, presidents, salesmen, nudes, newsmen, noodlemakers...  
 If art has to be something (that is, if we choose to talk about it) then it is more a mode of experience than a social activity. Nothing-special.  
 Use a clock as a house-number.  
 --GEORGE BRECHT, East Brunswick, N.J.

Note: Mr. Brecht may live in East Brunswick, but his letter is postmarked Milltown, N.J.  
 --The EDITORS

Dear Ventura and Geist,  
 As with "our" time, big deep dabble with SCRAP is that it's not as just cranky.  
 --Alan Kapelner, New York

Dear A.V. and S.G.,  
 Thanks for the clear voice of SCRAP.  
 --HERSCHEL CHIPP, Berkeley

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# REPORT

from  
the Club



SESSION OF 1/20/61

Mark di Suvero: "There is no such thing as environmental sculpture."

George Brecht: "Why bother with virtual space when you can have real space?"

Irving Kriesberg: "Why bother with a painting of a rabbi by Rembrandt when you can have a real rabbi?"

Claes Oldenburg: "I've never used smells in my things--not intentionally, anyway."

Frederick Kiesler: "There is no difference between a light bulb and sculpture, between a personage and sculpture. We must break the barrier between artist and citizen. We must give not only form but content."

Milton Resnick: "You don't scare me, Kiesler."

Valerie Petersen: "If I stood up and screamed would I be a piece of sculpture?"

SESSION OF 2/3/61

Peter Agostini: "Painters are seducers. Sculptors are con men."

David Weinrib: "Suppose a smell turned into a balloon."

Sidney Geist: "You mean a sculpture can be three hours long?"

Claes Oldenburg: "Whitman's time is different from Calder's time."

Milton Resnick: "You think you've discovered time, when it's been there all the time."

Robert Whitman: "I make sculptural objects."

Rube Kadish: "You can make ten pieces of sculpture if you need ten gods."

Burt Hasen: "There is no god in this table."

E.A. Navaretta: "I threw out a couple of ideas a while back on non-duality and energy. I'm surprised nobody picked them up."

"We too are crazy about heads."



LESTER JOHNSON/Ellison Gallery/March  
/Ft. Worth, Texas/

56 3rd Ave./GR 5-9240/closed Mon.  
Modern Museum methods used  
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wet mounting/special problems  
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March 31-April 20:Labyrinth

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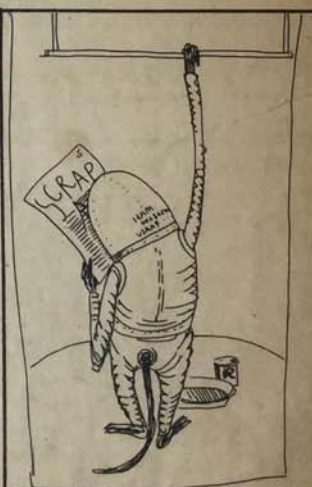
g r i l l o  
to March 4th

Howard Wise/50 W 57

to March 4  
**Leland Bell X ZABRISKIE**  
36 E 61

to March 4  
.....  
Felix Pasilis  
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green gallery 15 W 57

Fulton Gallery  
group.....  
61 Fulton



SCRAP--the paper for the way out!

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March 18.  
See you!"

**SSS**

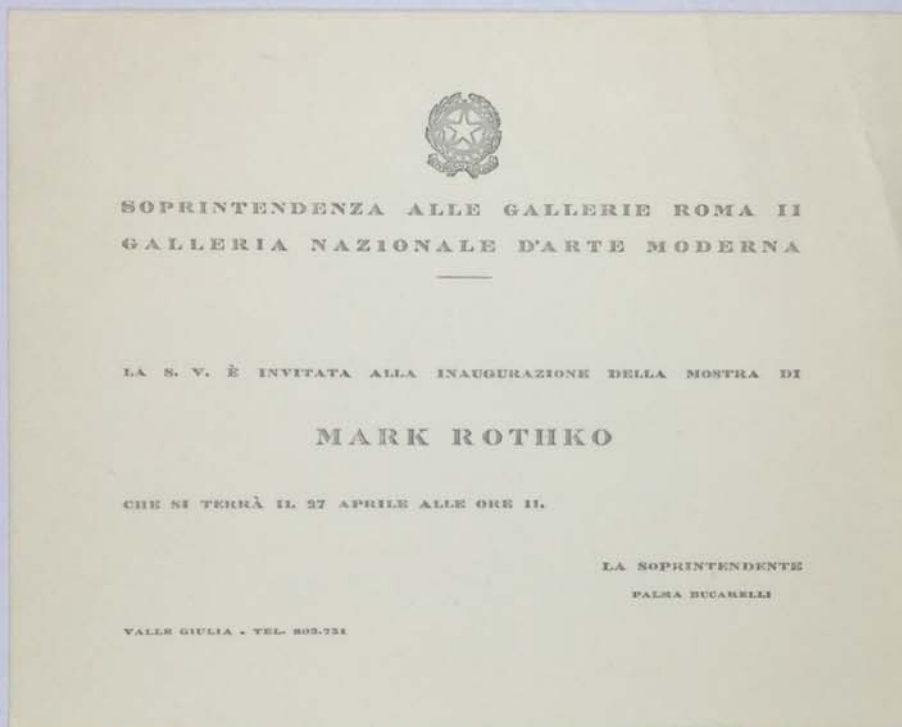
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*the trustees of the museum of modern art request the pleasure of your company at a special preview of the exhibition **MARK ROTHKO** on monday evening, january 16 from 9 until 11 o'clock. this invitation will admit two*

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*Max Selz*

No. 18  
FOR RELEASE:  
Tuesday, Mar. 7, 1961  
or thereafter

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**  
**11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.**

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

MARK ROTHKO by Peter Selz. 44 pages, 29 photos (6 in color). Published by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Distributed to booksellers throughout the world by Doubleday and Co., Inc. \$2.25.

Mark Rothko, a 44-page monograph by Peter Selz, will be published by the Museum of Modern Art on March 7\* in conjunction with a major exhibition of Rothko's paintings selected and installed by the author. The book is the first to be devoted to the controversial American artist, whose highly original style is characterized by large floating rectangles of color. Twenty-seven paintings dating from 1945 to the present are illustrated, six in color.

Mr. Selz traces the evolution of Rothko's style from surrealist watercolors of the mid-forties; canvases of the late forties in which he used diffuse flat areas of brilliant color; to the greatly simplified works of the fifties in which most conventional visual elements have been eliminated.

Rothko's brilliant color is largely subdued in his recent paintings. In 1958 he painted a series of dark reddish-brown murals in which the characteristic solid forms are abandoned for open rectangles. In subsequent canvases he has combined the somber palette of the murals with the figuration of previous periods.

Although Rothko has eliminated the figure as a symbol, his primary concern is with humanist values, as Mr. Selz notes:

"Holding tenaciously to humanist values, he paints pictures which are in fact related to man's scale and his measure. But whereas in Renaissance painting man was the measure of space, in Rothko's painting space, i.e. the picture, is the measure of man...."

These silent paintings with their enormous, beautiful, opaque surfaces are mirrors, reflecting what the viewer brings with him. In this sense, they can even be said to deal directly with human emotions, desires, relationships, for they are mirrors of our fantasy and serve as echoes of our experience."

The book includes, in addition to Mr. Selz' critical essay, a brief biography of the Russian-born painter. Rothko came to the United States in 1913 at the age of ten. After two years at Yale University he settled in New York where he studied briefly at the Art Students League. He has exhibited extensively here and abroad since 1929 when a number of his paintings were selected for a show at the Opportunity Gallery in New York.

A bibliography of thirty entries and a list of Rothko's exhibitions with references to reviews make the book particularly useful for students. A catalog of the current exhibition, which will be on view through March 12, is also included.

Mr. Selz, Curator of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions, is the author of German Expressionist Painting, New Images of Man and co-editor of Art Nouveau.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Review copies and photographs are available from Nancy Reed, Assistant Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. CI 5-8900.  
\*Note to out-of-town reviewers: Since Museum of Modern Art books are frequently published in conjunction with an exhibition there is an unavoidable lag between the date they go on sale at the Museum and delivery date to booksellers throughout the country. Although local publication date of Mark Rothko is March 7, the book will not be available in bookstores outside New York until July.

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**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**  
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NO. 3  
FOR RELEASE:  
Wednesday, Jan. 18, 1961

PRESS PREVIEW:  
Tuesday, Jan. 17, 1961  
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

A comprehensive exhibition of paintings by Mark Rothko will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York City, from January 18 through March 12. Selected and installed by Peter Selz, Curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions, the exhibition consists of fifty-five works by the American artist dating from 1945 to the present. Included are eleven murals painted in 1958-59, exhibited for the first time.

Rothko's highly original style, characterized by large rectangles of color floating in undefined space, has made him a controversial artist in our time. His work shows no direct reflection of the past. He is largely self-taught. Although he has eliminated the figure as a symbol, his primary concern is with humanist values. As Mr. Selz writes in the exhibition catalog\*:

These silent paintings with their enormous, beautiful, opaque surfaces are mirrors, reflecting what the viewer brings with him. In this sense, they can even be said to deal directly with human emotions, desires, relationships, for they are mirrors of our fantasy and serve as echoes of our experience.

The exhibition, the largest ever assembled, includes four early watercolors which indicate Rothko's relationship to surrealism during the mid-forties. The evolution of his present style is demonstrated by fifteen canvases dating from 1947 to 1949 in which he uses diffuse, flat areas of brilliant color--reds, yellows and greens predominating.

In the paintings of the fifties, which comprise a major part of the exhibition, Rothko achieved the simplification which Mr. Selz describes as follows:

Subject matter in the conventional sense had, as we know, been abandoned for some time. Now line and movement were also eliminated.

...texture is not important. Conventional recession into depth, as well as weight and gravity, has been eliminated, yet we cannot even speak of flatness when confronted with the surfaces which actually breathe and expand. Light has become an attribute of color. Few of the elements which are part of most paintings have remained. In fact, Rothko's constant stripping-down of his pictures to their barest essentials, to a simplicity beyond complexity, is intrinsic to their being. His paintings disturb and satisfy partly by the magnitude of his renunciation.

The rectangular areas always occupy the frontal plane of these pictures. Although the shapes appear very similar, they vary considerably. Seldom sharply outlined the areas sometimes merge; at other times they remain clearly separate. The spatial relationship of these constantly shifting shapes is never explicitly defined. Analyzing the tension created between the major fields Mr. Selz writes:

The spectator contemplates an atmosphere of alarm in which the contact of electrically charged and dangerous elements is held in check by the tense

more...

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... areas between them. In some pictures the vibrating areas are pulled apart by the outside frames.

In other paintings we feel that all movement has eased. These suggest the aftermath of once violent activity. Eventually as other images occur to the viewer the metaphor of the creation of some universe becomes paramount.

The brilliant color of these canvases--blazing reds and oranges, yellow-greens, veil-like blues and whites--has been largely subdued in the somber, ritualistic work of recent years.

The exhibition culminates in eleven murals, some fifteen feet long, from a series commissioned in 1958. In these dark red canvases, Rothko abandoned solid forms for open rectangles - usually black or red - suggesting entrances to tombs or rims of flame. After working on the project for eight months, during which he completed three separate series, Rothko decided the paintings were inappropriate for the setting and did not deliver them.

The four 1960 paintings shown combine the subdued palette of the murals with the figuration of previous canvases.

Born in Dvinsk, Russia in 1903, Rothko moved with his family to Portland, Oregon at the age of ten. During his youth he was not exposed to the visual arts. He attended Yale University for two years, but left because he was not interested in academic training. By 1925 he had settled in New York where, after studying briefly with Max Ernst at the Art Students League, he worked alone.

Since 1929, when a number of his paintings were selected for an exhibition at the Opportunity Gallery in New York City, Rothko has exhibited extensively in this country and abroad. His first important one-man show was an exhibition of mythological paintings at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century in 1945. He was represented by several works in two major group shows at the Museum of Modern Art: "Fifteen Americans" in 1952 and "The New American Painting" which toured eight European countries before its New York showing in 1959. He was one of four artists selected for the U.S. Representation at the XXIX Biennale, Venice, in 1958.

Lenders to the exhibition include the artist, who loaned the murals as well as several other canvases, American museums and galleries, and private collectors here and abroad.

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For additional information and photographs contact Nancy Reed, Assistant Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. CI 5-8900.

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*Rothko folder*

*set another for de Kooning*

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**  
**11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.**

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

May 27, 1959  
No. 44  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*Miss Legg*

Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning will be given major one-man shows at the Museum of Modern Art in 1960 and in 1961, René d'Harnoncourt, Director, announced today. Both exhibitions will be selected by Dr. Peter Selz, Curator of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions. The exhibition of Rothko's paintings will be on view from October 4 through November 20; the de Kooning show is scheduled for the spring of 1961.

Although these will be the first one-man shows at the Museum of Modern Art for these artists, both have been included in several group shows and examples of their work are owned by the Museum.

Paintings by Rothko and de Kooning are included in "The New American Painting," an exhibition which has just completed a year-long European tour and will be on view at the Museum this summer. Rothko's work was also shown in 15 Americans at the Museum in 1952 and in the U.S. Representation for the 29th Venice Biennale organized by the Museum's International Program last year.

De Kooning, whose paintings were sent to the Venice Biennale by the Museum in 1954, is represented by three paintings in the Collection: a canvas purchased in 1948 and "Woman I" and "Woman II" acquired in the early 50's.

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For further information please contact Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director,  
Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York 19, N.Y. CI 5-8900.

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MOMA

Excerpts from selected press comments

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James Thrall Soby Exhibition (cont'd)

N. Y. Sunday Mirror (Feb. 12) - Charles A. Wagner. "Toss out about 20 paintings and, all in all, its a fairly good collection James Thrall Soby is giving the Museum of Modern Art....There is too much of de Chirico and Tanguy....and that goes for the Klee and Miro groups as well."

Mark Rothko Jan. 18 - March 12, 1961

Art News (Jan. 1961) - E. C. Goosen reviews "Rothko: The omnibus image" illustrated with full page in color.

N. Y. Herald Tribune (Jan. 18) - Emily Genauer - "The Museum of Modern Art, I've long maintained, would be doing a public service in informing visitors, through labels or legends, of what its officials find significant about the more 'difficult' and controversial works it chooses to exhibit. It has done just that-- at least in an accompanying catalog...for the...exhibition of paintings by... Rothko....it's paint-it-yourself theme. The artist just confronts us with a colored canvas, or, as the museum itself says, a mirror."

New Yorker Mag. (Jan. 28) - Rothko - "He is...to a considerable degree one of the modern innovators and I was a little disappointed that the current collection didn't reveal the processes of his development in this direction in a more detailed fashion....Yet if we are left, tantalizingly, pretty much in the dark not only about his youthful background but about the mechanics of his shift from it, the show does record his development in maturity with commendable thoroughness....Despite his restricted color and limited design, I felt little monotony in the show--again a tribute to Rothko's coloristic dexterity..." Robert M. Coates.

The New Republic Mag. (Feb. 6) - Frank Getlein writes on "The Ordeal of Mark Rothko." "The Museum of Modern Art continues its relentless exposure of Abstract Expressionism. The process is beginning to resemble beating a dead horse, particularly since the Museum is making a more positive contribution in its announcement of a big exhibition for 1962 on The Human Figure....What the Museum's Rothko show reveals is not that the emperor doesn't have any clothes but that there isn't any emperor behind that enormous brocade."

Scrap 4 (Feb. 16) - devoted almost entire issue to critical analysis of Rothko catalog. Almost every sentence (unless a direct quote from Rothko) is thoroughly scrutinized and comes up failing.

Die Welt, Essen - Germany (Feb. 10) - reviews Rothko show.

Time Mag. (March 3) - devoted full color page to Rothko show, "a man who is one of the top half dozen abstract painters in the U. S.--one who has created a personal idiom that pleases the initiated but to the others dramatizes some of the limitations of abstractionism."

Glamour Mag. (Feb. 1961) - In What's New feature" "...fiery individualist Mark Rothko - his wall-sized abstractions one-man showing at New York's Museum of Modern Art."

more...

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MOMA

Excerpts from selected press comments

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Mark Rothko cont'd.

Arts Mag. (March 1961) - "Reflections on the Rothko Exhibition" by Robert Goldwater, illustrated with four paintings from the Museum exhibition. "In Mark Rothko's pictures the apparent end lies close to the apparent beginning--so close in fact, or in apparent fact, that they are almost indistinguishable. If this suggests that the paintings are simple (without complication), so indeed they finally are, or have become; if it implies as well that they are simplist (without subtlety), this is only because here is the unavoidable area of discussion. This is the argument they engender and provoke--whether and why being the first, they are not (as I think they are not) the second." This extremely interesting article discusses Rothko's forms, use of color, size and the exhibition catalog and installation and retrospective character (or lack of it).

Saturday Review (March 4) - Katherine Kuh reviews Rothko show. "...an authentic statement about life with such conviction and insight that the statement takes on far more than personal meaning....a dramatic, almost apocalyptic blow. At once glowing, glowering, somber, radiant and tragic, these paintings are involved with the whole gamut of human experience."

The Nation (Feb. 25) - Fairfield Porter on Rothko show - "A whole Mondrian equals the sum of its parts, but a whole Rothko is greater than the sum of its parts.... His paintings have no structural skeleton. What holds them together? Perhaps it is simply the artist's energy, which acts like a magnetic field around plasma....Their simplicity calls for more wall space than they have been given..."

Max Ernst March 1 - May 8, 1961 (3rd floor)  
March 1 - May 21, 1961 (auditorium gallery)

N. Y. Journal American - L. E. Levick on Ernst. "He has continued to draw on a seemingly inexhaustible imagination--painting, with overtones of mystery, enchanted forests and landscapes, spooky figures and geometric figures, and eerie beauty..."

N. Y. Sunday Mirror (March 5) - Charles Wagner - "The rich talents of Max Ernst, that have been wasted for so many tragic decades (tragic for art) on empty collages and the meaningless frills and fancies of the surrealist imagination gone haywire are on display in a new show at the Museum of Modern Art. But there are also a few pictures here that, by way of the wine that ennoble the cup, offer intimations of what might have been immortality. So this is a sad show indeed...."

N. Y. Herald Tribune (March 5) - Emily Genauer. "The time and the man met last week. Had the Museum of Modern Art's large, new, and very handsome retrospective exhibition of the art of Max Ernst, seventy-year old pioneer surrealist, been presented ten years ago, it would have had nothing like its present impact....he has overnight been catapulted into place alongside the top artists of our time. He's not on Picasso's level, to be sure, but now we see he belongs up there very close to Chagall, Braque, Miro....Now...we're going into a new phase. We've had our fill of nothingness, of the acres of next-to-blank or merely decoratively colored canvas crowding our exhibitions. Suddenly we're beginning to look for meaning, for focus. If we weren't quite sure of this the new Ernst exhibition--and most especially the eye-opening contrast it offers with the exhibition of empty abstractions by Mark Rothko still current on the Modern Museum's main floor--makes it clear....it's the impact of the whole, of Ernst's endless vitality and variety, of the way he has found to express his ideas through forms, which remains most impressive--and must, I'm certain, have an immense effect on our own younger painters."

more...

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NO. 2, 1954  
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SIDNEY JANIS GALLERY,  
NEW YORK

W A L L P A I N T S A M P L E R O T H K O E X H I B I T I O N

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Sidney Janis Gallery, New York

ROTHKO EXHIB  
WALL COLOR

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SIDNEY JANIS GALLERY,

NEW YORK

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MURAL FOR END WALL. 1959

OIL

LENT BY THE ARTIST

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W A L L P A I N T S A M P L E R O T H K O E X H I B I T I O N

No. 18, 1952

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Sidney Janis Gallery, New York

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ROTHKO EXHIB  
WALL COLOR