

The Museum of Modern Art

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A major retrospective of paintings and collages by Robert Motherwell, a leading figure in the revolutionary art movement now known as Abstract Expressionism, opens the fall season at The Museum of Modern Art on October 1. Directed by Frank O'Hara, Associate Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions, the exhibition of approximately 70 works dating from the 1940s to 1965, will tour Europe under the auspices of The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art after the New York showing ends November 28. This is the first major New York retrospective of Motherwell's work. Large recent paintings never before exhibited in New York include Africa (1964-65), a 81" x 222 1/2" black and white painting; the colorful Dublin 1916. With Black and Tan (1964); and In Green and Ultramarine (1963-64); and Irish Elegy (1965).

As Motherwell is the American artist who has made the most important contributions to collage, the exhibition includes approximately 25 in this medium. They range from the early Pancho Villa, Dead or Alive, bought by The Museum of Modern Art before his first one-man show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery in 1944 to recent collages of torn paper.

In the accompanying catalog*, Frank O'Hara writes: "Motherwell's special contribution to the American struggle for modernity was a strong aversion to provincialism, both political and esthetic, a profound immersion in modern French culture (especially School of Paris art and the poetry and theories of the Symbolist and Surrealist poets) ... and a particular affinity for what he has sometimes called 'Mediterranean light,' which in his paintings seems to mean a mingling of the light of his native California with that of Mexico and of the South of France.

"The complexity of his modern esthetic, if one may draw a distinction between

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*ROBERT MOTHERWELL, by Frank O'Hara. 96 pages, 101 illustrations (10 in color). Hardbound \$6.95; paperbound \$2.95. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Doubleday and Co., Inc.

modern vision and contemporary attitudes toward styles, is unified by certain basic preferences which govern every period of his work and are of an almost textbook simplicity: a painting is sheer extension, not a window or a door; collage is as much about paper as about form; the impetus for a painting or drawing starts technically from the subconscious through automatism (or as he may say 'doodling') and proceeds towards the subject which is the finished work."

Nine of the famous Elegy to the Spanish Republic series are shown, from the first in 1948 to 1965 and including Elegy C / ⁽¹⁹⁶³⁾ the largest of the series. Elegy LIV (1957-61), in The Museum of Modern Art Collection, is on view in the third floor collections' galleries. The Museum of Modern Art owns six works by Motherwell.

"The motif for the Elegies was discovered while he was decorating a page of a poem by Harold Rosenberg in 1948. Almost immediately the motif appears in a Spanish context, related to Lorca's poetry: At Five in the Afternoon, Granada; and then shifted to the more specific associations embodied in the 'Elegies to the Spanish Republic.' Sometimes the motif itself dictates how to use the medium, where to draft it, splash it, flatten an intervening area or flow it, in order to accomplish the presentation of the relationship of the images as a whole experience. The range of technical procedure between Elegy LVII with its almost expressionistic drama to the strict, flat statement of Elegy LV reveals the fecundity Motherwell has found in this motif and also indicates his ability to bridge the gap between action painting and what Clement Greenberg has called the 'Post-Painterly Abstractionists.' The latter Elegy in particular is also related to the transcendental exposure of the most recent works."

Another important series, and one which both advances from previous preoccupations with gesture and advances towards later works with calligraphic elements such as In Green and Ultramarine (shown here for the first time), is the group of works entitled "Beside the Sea." Eight of these 1962 series are on view. "Here the motif of an abstract wave breaking into the horizon and charging above it releases a marvelous arm-energy, and the characteristic Motherwell bands below, rather than

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becoming indications of landscape, give the works an emblematic drive," O'Hara writes. "The sea is as much a metaphor as a throw of the dice is, or the 'Spanish Elegies.'"

Robert Motherwell was born in 1915 on the West Coast where he lived and studied until 1937 when he entered the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. After traveling abroad in the summers and spending one year teaching at the University of Oregon, in 1940 Motherwell returned to the East to study under Meyer Schapiro in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. The following year, at the age of 25, he decided to devote himself professionally to painting and subsequently became not only an internationally recognized artist, but writer, theoretician and philosopher of the so-called New York School. He has had numerous one-man shows and has been represented in such important international shows here and abroad as the Third International Art Exhibition in Japan, 1955; The Museum of Modern Art's "The New American Painting" exhibition, 1958-59, which toured Europe; The American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959; Documenta II in Kassel, Germany, 1959 and the São Paulo Bienal, 1961, both organized by The Museum of Modern Art; and "Painting and Sculpture of a Decade: 1954-1965," Tate Gallery, London, 1964. He won a Guggenheim International Award prize in 1964. In 1966 this retrospective will be shown in Amsterdam at the Stedelijk Museum, in London at the Whitechapel Gallery, and in Essen, Germany, at the Folkwang Museum.

A 23 x 35" poster, in blue, black, grey and white, featuring a reproduction of Motherwell's Elegy to a Spanish Republic LXX, 1961, is on sale for \$1.95 in the Museum's bookstore and by mail from the Publication Sales Department. The poster was designed by the Museum's Graphics Department in collaboration with the artist.

Additional information and photographs available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.