

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MARK ROTHKO: WORKS ON PAPER
AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. March 23, 1984. Mark Rothko: Works on Paper, the first comprehensive exhibition of this major twentieth-century American artist's works on paper, opens its U.S. tour at the National Gallery of Art's East Building on May 6, 1984. Eighty-six works, dating from the late twenties through 1970, the year of Rothko's death, remain on view through August 5, 1984.

The exhibition has been co-organized by The American Federation of Arts and The Mark Rothko Foundation, under the curatorial direction of Bonnie Clearwater, Foundation Curator. It is made possible by a generous grant from Warner Communications Inc. Coordinator for the National Gallery is E. A. Carmean, Jr., curator of twentieth-century art.

Highlights of the exhibition are the generally unknown works on paper of 1968 and 1969. In contrast to his late canvases with their narrow range of somber hues of brown, black and gray, these works on paper continued to radiate with the high-keyed pigments of the fifties.

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Using unpublished documents, Ms. Clearwater re-evaluates the prevailing attitude that the well-known darker works on canvas and paper reflect a depressed emotional state which resulted in the artist's suicide.

The exhibition also explores Rothko's working on paper in preparation for his major commissions, including the Seagram murals in New York and the paintings for the Rothko Chapel in Houston.

Born Marcus Rothkowitz in Dvinsk, Russia, in 1903, Rothko emigrated with his family to the U.S. at the age of ten and settled in Portland, Oregon. He attended Yale University from 1921-1923, but left to pursue an artistic career in New York. Courses at the Art Students League, among them Max Weber's painting class, introduced Rothko to the work of European modern artists. At the same time, he began to associate with the American painter, Milton Avery. Together with Adolph Gottlieb, Rothko visited Avery's studio almost daily in the late twenties and thirties, often working side-by-side with the older artist.

Watercolors executed by Rothko during this period and included in the exhibition display a mastery of medium far exceeding that of his contemporary oils. Of particular interest is his use of thin washes of pigment, similar to Avery's works at this time, which would later influence his oil technique.

From this time on, Rothko remained an inveterate draftsman, producing a large volume of works on paper, both as studies for paintings and as independent images. During the 1940s, he changed his name formally from Rothkowitz to Rothko and, with Gottlieb, abandoned realism in favor of surrealism and mythic imagery. For the first time, he began to use oil as if it were watercolor, thinning it and applying it in overlapping glazes. By the end of the forties, pure abstract form

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supplanted surrealism as his compositions were gradually reduced to two or three rectangles of color on a stained field, and the large canvas began to dominate his production.

He continued to work on paper in a smaller scale, however, mounting many of these watercolors, oil washes, and acrylics on panels or stretched linen. As Ms. Clearwater demonstrates, the small works on paper are not "miniature Rothkos" but independent explorations of form and color.

After its premiere at the National Gallery, Mark Rothko: Works on Paper will be seen at the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh (November 3, 1984-January 6, 1985); The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (April 25-June 16, 1985); the Milwaukee Art Museum (November 17, 1985-January 12, 1986); the Portland Art Museum (February 9-April 6, 1986); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (May 4-June 29, 1986); and The Saint Louis Art Museum (July 18-September 1, 1986).*

Curator Bonnie Clearwater is the author of the accompanying catalogue, which also contains an essay by Dore Ashton, noted art historian and Rothko expert. The catalogue is published by Hudson Hills Press, Inc., in association with The American Federation of Arts and The Mark Rothko Foundation. A petit journal, prepared by Ms. Clearwater, will also be available for a nominal fee.

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*Official opening and closing dates should be confirmed with participating museums.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer) or Marla Price, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565 (202)842-6353.