

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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SEAGRAM MURALS BY MARK ROTHKO TO GO ON VIEW IN NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART'S EAST BUILDING

WASHINGTON, D. C. November 12, 1985. J. Carter Brown, Director, National Gallery of Art, announced that six large-scale mural panels by Mark Rothko are to go on view today in the National Gallery of Art's East Building Concourse Level galleries. These major paintings, the Seagram Murals (1958-1959), were commissioned for the Seagram Building in New York, designed by Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson. They will remain on view through April, 1986.

In May 1984, the Mark Rothko Foundation announced that it had designated the National Gallery as the chief repository of its collection. The Seagram Murals are the first of 285 paintings and works on paper, and more than 500 additional reference and study works, to be transferred to the Gallery from the Mark Rothko Foundation. Works in this important gift date from all phases of Rothko's career. By mid-1986, most of the collection is expected to rest in the Gallery, which will become a central repository and study center for Rothko.

Rothko completed three sets of panels for the Seagram commission. The first set of paintings for the murals was in Rothko's characteristic style of vertically stacked rectangles floating on a luminous field. In two successive series he broke away from this format and substituted single or paired rectangles on a dark, usually maroon field. Most of the mural panels measure eight feet nine inches in height, with the

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exception of four panels that are six feet high and fifteen feet wide. Several smaller canvases are studies for the larger murals, although Rothko considered the studies to be independent works in their own right. Both the large paintings and the studies exhibited here probably belong to the second series, characterized by soft-edged, brushy forms in orange, red, or black.

The final intended arrangement of the panels is not known. Rothko told friends that he wanted to evoke the feeling of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library in Florence, giving a sense that all the exits were blocked and there was no escape.

After producing three sets of panels, Rothko withdrew from the Seagram project because he objected to the location, a restaurant, where the paintings were to be installed. Most of the panels ultimately went to the Mark Rothko Foundation or his estate. At the time of his death in 1970, Rothko left a group of paintings, primarily from the third series, to the Tate Gallery in London where they remain a permanent installation.

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