

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NATIONAL GALLERY TO PUBLISH ROTHKO CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, today announced plans to publish the catalogue raisonné of the works of Mark Rothko, one of the foremost artists of the twentieth century. Encompassing some 3,000 works on canvas and paper, many unknown to both specialists and the public, the catalogue is being prepared by David Anfam, a noted scholar in the field of modern American art.

For the initial volume, which will be devoted to some 800 canvases, Anfam is seeking to examine every painting on canvas by Rothko in public and private collections throughout the world. He will also view a substantial proportion of the works on paper for subsequent volumes. The first volume on paintings is scheduled for publication in 1995. Collectors who have not already informed the Gallery of

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works to be considered for inclusion in the catalogue are urged to do so as soon as possible.

"We are delighted that this historic project will be a significant contribution to the National Gallery's continuing commitment to perpetuate, research, and share with the public Mark Rothko's extraordinary artistic legacy," said Powell. "We are grateful to the artist's heirs, Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko, whose cooperation, together with that of numerous private collectors and museums throughout the world, is crucial to the success of the catalogue."

In 1986 the National Gallery received the core collection of the Mark Rothko Foundation, a gift that included 295 paintings and works on paper, and more than 650 sketches. Thirty-four other institutions throughout the world also received gifts from the Foundation.

The Gallery's holdings constitute the largest public repository of Rothko's works, covering every phase of a career that spanned five decades. Since 1986, the National Gallery has made its Rothko holdings available internationally to museums for special exhibitions and has organized an exhibition through its National Lending Service, Mark Rothko: The Spirit of Myth--Early Paintings from the 1930s and 1940s, that is currently traveling throughout the United States.

A central figure in the development of postwar abstract painting in the United States, Rothko is famous primarily for the hypnotic and poignant fields of color that characterized his paintings from the late 1940s onward. Although these are

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considered among the most original landmarks of abstract expressionism, the catalogue raisonné will reveal that Rothko's output was even more prolific and wide-ranging than is already thought.

Rothko, who died in 1970 at the age of 66, was born in Dvinsk (now Daugavpils), Latvia, and emigrated to the United States in 1913, settling with his family in Portland, Oregon. After two years of studies at Yale, he dropped out of the university in 1923 and moved to New York City, where he began to paint. During the late 1920s and 1930s Rothko's art evolved through an array of styles and influences--from an initial realism to expressionism and then to more symbolic and imaginative idioms that anticipate the mythic themes which he and other abstract expressionists, such as Adolph Gottlieb and Barnett Newman, explored during the Second World War.

Rothko's watercolors and gouaches of the mid-1940s reveal a superb grasp of these media, a mastery which was to lend much to the radiance and poetic force of the ensuing canvases. By 1950, Rothko had distilled his pictorial means to one or more rectangular forms floating within a chromatic field. These images--outwardly simple yet remarkably nuanced and complex--grew more majestic and austere in Rothko's later years. In that period he also painted three mural series for New York's Seagram Building, Harvard University, and a non-denominational chapel in Houston. Rothko's achievement has at once had a decisive impact on the course of twentieth-century art and given rise to a wealth of critical interpretation.

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According to Anfam, "The catalogue raisonné will provide, for the first time, a unique opportunity to study Rothko's entire oeuvre. As such, it will form an indispensable foundation for future scholarship." Numerous color plates will accompany documentation on the chronology, provenance, titles, dimensions, media, inscriptions, exhibition history, and critical references in the literature for each work. The most extensive bibliography, exhibition listing, and selection of writings by the artist ever compiled will also be included. For clarity of reference and in order to emphasize the equal importance that Rothko gave to his production in different media, the catalogue is organized as a sequence of volumes treating works on canvas, and on paper, respectively.

Anfam graduated in art history summa cum laude (1976) from the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. He went on to gain a Ph.D. (1984) from the Courtauld on the work of Clyfford Still and Rothko, and has held teaching positions at several universities in England. Anfam has written widely on American art, contributing articles and reviews to numerous scholarly journals, including The Burlington Magazine, Art History, The Times Literary Supplement, and Art International. He is the author of Abstract Expressionism, Thames and Hudson, 1990, and, most recently, coordinating editor of American Art in the 20th Century, Prestel, 1993.

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