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Press Release

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**SPECIAL INSTALLATION OF MARK ROTHKO'S MURAL COMMISSIONS
ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART;
GALLERY CELEBRATES ARTIST'S CENTENARY**

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**Mark Rothko:
A Centennial
Celebration**

Press release from
The State Hermitage
Museum (pdf 132mb)



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Washington, DC-- **Mark Rothko: The Mural Projects**, a special installation of works by Mark Rothko (1903-1970), long recognized as one of America's foremost artists, celebrates the centenary of his birth. On view in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art indefinitely, the nine paintings are related to two mural commissions--the Seagram murals and the Harvard murals--which date from the late 1950s and early 1960s, respectively. Most of these related works have been exhibited at the National Gallery only once before, and showing them together in the open space of the concourse will create an opportunity to examine the process behind these major projects. This special installation also celebrates the 25th anniversary of the East Building.

Additional centenary events include the first American screening of a new biographical film at the National Gallery of Art as well as a special exhibition of Rothko's work which premiered in Riga, Latvia, and is now on view in St. Petersburg, Russia, through March 8, 2004.

In 1985 and 1986, the National Gallery of Art received a large body of Rothko's work from The Mark Rothko Foundation, a gift that included 295 paintings and works on paper, and more than 650 sketches. "As the most important repository and study center of this great artist's work, the National Gallery has a particular interest in bringing this special installation to the public," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

BACKGROUND

The Seagram commission--mural panels for the Seagram building in New York City, a project that Rothko never installed--was Rothko's first attempt to apply his work to a prescribed setting. For this commission, he changed his "classic" format to create works that recall frame-like portals. These expansive, commanding canvases, which he felt would evoke a "closed space," also reflect the darkening of his palette.

A "sketch" on canvas for the Harvard mural sequence, with similar compositional motif in colors of deep maroon and blood red, will also be on view. In addition to the National Gallery's paintings, the installation will include *No. 9 (White and Black on Wine)* (1958) from a private collection, and which is now thought to belong to the initial planning stage of the Seagram mural commission. Although the work retains Rothko's classic image of floating rectangles, its horizontal format reflects Rothko's attempt to suit the panels to the architectural setting.

MARK ROTHKO

Rothko's achievement has had a decisive impact on the course of 20th-century art and has given rise to a wealth of critical interpretation. A central figure in the development of postwar abstract painting in the United States, Rothko is best known for his use of luminous color in his paintings from around 1950 onward. These are considered among the most original landmarks of the New York School.

Rothko, who committed suicide at age 66, was born Marcus Rothkowitz in Dvinsk, Russia (today, Daugavpils, Latvia), and immigrated to the United States at age ten. After two years of liberal arts study at Yale University, he moved to New York, where he took classes briefly at the Art Students League and began to paint. In many respects he considered himself a self-taught artist, although his early style was influenced by other painters such as Milton Avery, whom he knew well.

EXHIBITION IN LATVIA AND RUSSIA

Mark Rothko: A Centennial Celebration, organized by the National Gallery of Art and presented by the U.S. Department of State, was on view at the State Museum of Art in Riga, Latvia, September 25 through November 30, 2003. It is currently on view at the Winter Palace of The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia until March 8, 2004. The exhibition, organized on the occasion of the centennial of his birth,

showcases 21 of the artist's distinctive paintings and works on paper from the National Gallery of Art's collection.

Paintings and works on paper are grouped together in a loose chronological sequence, allowing viewers to examine how Rothko developed ideas and experimented with forms on canvas and on paper simultaneously. The earliest drawings in the show include a gouache on construction paper that may be a self-portrait and other representational works from the 1930s. The exhibition concludes with Rothko's last painting on canvas, a striking work soaked in vibrant variations of red.

For further information about the exhibition, visit www.rothko100.org.

FILMS

The National Gallery of Art hosted the American premiere of a new biographical film on Rothko by French filmmaker Isy Morgensztern on November 30. *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: An Abstract Humanist* (2003, 55 minutes) can still be seen on Sunday, January 11, at 12 noon; Wednesday, February 4, at 12:30 p.m.; Thursday, February 5, at 12:30 p.m.; Friday, February 6, at 12:30 p.m.; and Sunday, February 8, at 12 noon. Another film shown in conjunction with the exhibition tells the story behind the creation of the room designed for Rothko's Seagram murals in London's Tate Modern. *Rothko's Rooms* (2000, 45 minutes) is filled with anecdotes about the artist culled from friends, family members, and curators. The showtimes for this film are: January 14 through 17 at 12:30 p.m.; February 4 through 6 at 12:30 p.m.; and Sunday, February 8, at 12 noon. For more information on the film programs, visit www.nga.gov/programs/film.htm.

WORKS ON PAPER CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

The National Gallery of Art is conducting a worldwide search for works on paper by Rothko for inclusion in *Mark Rothko: The Works on Paper*. This multi-volume catalogue raisonné will include approximately 2400 drawings and paintings on paper in graphite, crayon, ink, watercolor, gouache, acrylic, and oil, often used in combination. The catalogue, scheduled for publication in 2007, is being written by Ruth E. Fine, curator of special projects in modern art, National Gallery of Art, with assistance from Laili Nasr and René Maurer. Anyone with information regarding works on paper by Mark Rothko should contact Laili Nasr, Rothko Catalogue Raisonné Project, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 20565; phone: (202) 842-6779; fax: 202-842-6936; e-mail: l-nasr@nga.gov.

25th ANNIVERSARY OF EAST BUILDING, JUNE 1, 2003- JUNE 1, 2004

The National Gallery of Art's East Building is celebrating its 25th anniversary with activities and events scheduled through most of the year. In honor of the occasion, the special installation **The East Building: Celebrating 25 Years**--on view through June 1, 2004 in the East Building reception room-- explores the history of the East Building from 1967 to the

building's opening in 1978. Highlights include copies of I.M. Pei's drawings, photographs, and other archival materials, many of which are on public display for the first time. A three-dimensional model of the West and East Buildings provides additional insight concerning the building's design and relationship to the surrounding city. For more information, visit www.nga.gov/exhibitions/anniversaryinfo.htm.

National Gallery of Art, Press Office

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