#### Finding Aid for the Mark Rothko Foundation Records, 1958-2003 (bulk 1976-1995)

#### **Summary Information**

**Repository** National Gallery of Art Archives

Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20565 archives@nga.gov

**Title** Mark Rothko Foundation Records

**Identifier** SC.040

**Creator** Mark Rothko Foundation

**Date** 1958-2003 (bulk 1976-1995)

Extent 13 cubic feet (26 boxes)

**Abstract** Records created or collected by the Mark Rothko Foundation, a nonprofit

entity responsible for the administration of the artist's estate. Materials  $\frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{1}{2} \right) = \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{1}{2} \right) \left($ 

include board and administrative records, curatorial and collection management files, documents related to gift distribution, papers pertaining to the National Gallery of Art, and Rothko legal case files.

#### **Historical Note**

In 1969, Mark Rothko established the Mark Rothko Foundation with the broad mission to provide financial grants and assistance to artists and named the entity as the primary beneficiary of his estate. After the artist's suicide in 1970, his executors moved quickly to sell and consign the most desirable works in the estate to Marlborough Gallery and its affiliates. In 1971, Rothko's children, Kate and Christopher, filed a lawsuit against the executors and Marlborough Gallery for selling their father's artworks at deflated prices. In 1975, the court ruled in favor of Rothko's children and Kate was appointed as the estate's sole administrator. All sold paintings were restituted and the original executors and Marlborough were held jointly liable in damages and fines.

In early 1977, a new foundation board was recognized following a series of unsuccessful appeals, including a case brought to the Supreme Court of the State of New York by the previous foundation board members challenging the legitimacy of the new board. Donald M. Blinken, a friend and collector of Rothko's work, was appointed president of the new foundation. In 1979, the

Rothko estate was distributed in equal shares between the artist's children and the Foundation. Under Blinken, the Foundation funded artists and arts organizations and lent works for exhibitions. In 1980, David Roger Anthony oversaw a comprehensive inventory and photographic documentation of the collection. Curator Bonnie Clearwater and conservator Dana Cranmer catalogued the collection and performed conservation treatments. In 1984, the Foundation announced a planned distribution of its collection of more than 1,000 works through gifts to museums in the United States and abroad, including the National Gallery of Art, which would receive the largest share.

The Foundation effectively concluded its activities in 1988. It donated its non-art holdings including records, correspondence, photographs, and its library to the National Gallery to become the core repository of the collection and study center of Rothko's works.

#### **Scope and Content**

The Mark Rothko Foundation Records document the functions and activities associated with the administration of the artist's estate. Materials in the collection include files relating to auctions, catalogue raisonné, exhibitions, loans, gift distribution, grants, oral history projects, publicity, rights and reproduction, and collection management. Files consist of meeting minutes, inventories and lists, correspondence, legal and tax documents, and publications pertaining to the artist. The collection also includes contracts with a storage facility and blueprints for the temporary housing of Rothko's artworks prior to dispersal.

The bulk of this collection spans 1976 to 1995, a period which encompasses the appointment of the second board of the Mark Rothko Foundation and its ultimate dissolution. The Foundation and its curators were primarily responsible for documenting, managing loans, and distributing Rothko's artworks before the collection final dispersal. The collection also contains records produced by the National Gallery of Art, primarily pertaining to the publication of an authoritative Rothko catalogue raisonné.

#### **Arrangement**

Materials are arranged in the following series:

Series 1 Board and Administrative Files, 1958-2003

Series 2 Curatorial and Collection Management Files, 1961-1997

Series 3 Gift Distribution Files, 1978-1989

Series 4 National Gallery of Art Files, 1974-2001

Series 5 Rothko Legal Case Files, 1968-1987

#### **Administrative Information**

Conditions Governing Access This collection is open for research by appointment under

the conditions of the National Gallery of Art Archives

Access Policy. For all inquiries or to schedule an appointment, please contact archives@nga.gov.

Preferred Citation National Gallery of Art Archives. Mark Rothko Foundation

Records.

Rights Status In Copyright

Rights Holder National Gallery of Art

**Language** English

**Acquisition Information** Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, 1987

**Processing Information** Arranged and described by archives staff, 1998, 2023.

#### **Series Descriptions**

#### Series 1 Board and Administrative Files, 1958-2003

Documents relating to the activities of the Mark Rothko Foundation board, including correspondence, estate management information, grants, legal files, meeting minutes, press and publicity materials, storage documentation, tax files, and writings pertaining to the artist. The files mainly date from 1976 to 1988 and cover the activities of the Foundation under the second appointed board.

#### Series 2 Curatorial and Collection Management Files, 1961-1997

Files relating to the activities of the Mark Rothko Foundation curatorial staff, including catalogue raisonné research materials, collection lists and inventories, exhibition and loan approval forms, and rights and reproductions issuances. The files mainly date from 1979 to 1988.

#### Series 3 Gift Distribution Files, 1978-1989

Records documenting the selection and transfer process of Rothko works to recipient institutions and related distribution issues. The files consist primarily of correspondence between the Foundation's registrar and potential gift recipients.

#### Series 4 National Gallery of Art Files, 1974-2001

Files relating to the core Rothko collection given to the National Gallery of Art. The series also contains materials related to the Rothko catalogue raisonné project undertaken by the National Gallery. The files consist primarily of correspondence, provenance research materials, and logistical information associated with the Rothko gift to the National Gallery.

#### Series 5 Rothko Legal Case Files, 1968-1987

Various documents including affidavits, court opinions, lawyer correspondence, and news clippings. This series also contains correspondence with the artist's daughter and executor, Kate Rothko-Prixel.

## Series 1 **Board and Administrative Files** Box 1 1-1 Annual reports, 1980-1987 1-2 Auction contacts - collection items inventory, 1985 1-3 Auction contacts - division of the estate of Mark Rothko, 1980-1981 1-4 Auction contacts - foundation facts prior to restructure, undated 1-5 Auction contacts - inventory and architectural documents, undated 1-6 Auction contacts - inventory lists blank, undated 1-7 Auction contacts - photography inventories, 1982 1-8 Auction contacts - policies, undated 1-9 Auction contacts - preliminary solicitation of advice from museum directors, 1981 1-10 Auction contacts - screen inventories, 1983-1985 1-11 Auction contacts - technical consultant report, 1980 1-12 Auction contacts - technical data, 1980 1-13 Board minutes, 1975-1977 1-14 Board minutes, 1978 1-15 Board minutes, 1979 1-16 Board minutes, 1980 1-17 Board minutes, 1987

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5-6	Publications and writings - The Mark Rothko Foundation: 1976-1986: Eliminating the obstacles between the painter and the observer, circa 1986
5-7	Publications and writings - The Techniques Employed by Mark Rothko in those Paintings in the Rothko Room at the Tate Gallery by Carol Sproule, 1985
5-8	Publications and writings - Tracking the Marvelous by John M. Myers (review), 1984
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2-10	Collection lists and inventories - master list, circa 1980
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3-7	Exhibitions and loans - Europe, 1981-1991
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3-9	Exhibitions and loans - Haus der Kunst, American Painting: 1930-1980, 1981-1982
3-10	Exhibitions and loans - High Museum of Art, 1983-1984
3-11	Exhibitions and loans - High Museum of Art, Mark Rothko: Subjects, 1982-1984
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