

Update: February 4, 2008

## National Gallery of Art Seeks Drawings, Watercolors, and Paintings on Paper by Mark Rothko for Essential Reference Volumes



Mark Rothko  
American, 1903 - 1970  
*Untitled*, 1969  
acrylic on paper  
sheet: 127.63 x 107.32 cm (50 1/4 x 42 1/4 in.)  
Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.

Washington DC—As part of a worldwide initiative, the National Gallery of Art is seeking information about drawings, watercolors, and paintings on paper in public and private collections by the American artist Mark Rothko (1903-1970). The National Gallery of Art is publishing a multivolume catalogue raisonné, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Paper*, which will document more than 2,700 objects that are largely unknown to both art specialists and the public. Demonstrating the range of Rothko's creative achievements,

these volumes will be the definitive historical record of Rothko's oeuvre on paper for decades to come.

"Assistance from both public and private collectors will be essential to the success of this catalogue raisonné," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "In turn, we can assure collectors of Rothko's art absolute confidentiality, if they so desire. In the interest of compiling the most comprehensive record possible, we hope that owners and previous owners will contact us to provide information about these drawings, watercolors, and paintings on paper. In addition, we are grateful to the artist's children, Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko, for their continuing support of this historic project."

### **Rothko's Works on Paper**

During the 1920s and 1930s Rothko produced hundreds of figurative works in watercolor, graphite, crayon, and ink on small sheets of paper and in sketchbooks, both as studies related to paintings and as independent works. These include images of nudes, portraits of family and friends, subway riders, and the geometry of the city, most of which have never before been reproduced.

In the 1940s Rothko's work underwent radical changes as he explored a range of styles rooted in expressionism, symbolism, and surrealism. The experimental spirit and unique mastery of his watercolors and gouaches from this period contributed greatly to the development of his contemporaneous canvases as he moved increasingly toward abstraction. Rothko's compositions at the end of the decade, which are often titled "Multiforms," were marked by the translucent rectangles of color within a chromatic field that would become his signature style.

The classic paintings on paper in gouache, acrylic, and oil that Rothko made during the last two decades of his life were often mounted on panel or stretched canvas, which can lead to their being mistaken for paintings on canvas rather than works on paper. In fact, he worked on paper intermittently throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, and after a debilitating illness he turned almost exclusively to painting on paper from 1968 until his death in 1970.

## **The Authors**

The catalogue raisonné, scheduled for publication in 2010, is being written by Ruth Fine, curator of special projects in modern art, National Gallery of Art, who has previously overseen several similar Gallery projects, noted below. She is assisted by Laili Nasr and Janet Blyberg. All information associated with the ownership of works of art documented in the catalogue raisonné is held in strict confidence by the authors, and all wishes for anonymity will be fully respected.

Anyone with information regarding works on paper by Mark Rothko should contact Laili Nasr, Rothko Catalogue Raisonné Project. Mailing address: National Gallery of Art, 2000B South Club Drive, Landover, MD 20785; phone: (202) 842-6779; fax: 202-789-3204; e-mail: [l-nasr@nga.gov](mailto:l-nasr@nga.gov).

It is recommended that individuals and institutions should telephone or send e-mail to Ms. Nasr before mailing any information or images. Because all mail sent to the National Gallery of Art currently undergoes additional processing by the U.S. Postal Service, it is important to send packages through commercial couriers such as Federal Express or UPS to avoid any possible damage to the contents of the package.

## **Mark Rothko and the National Gallery of Art**

In 1986 the Mark Rothko Foundation determined that its mission to conserve its collection of Rothko's art and to enhance and promote Rothko's legacy through scholarly research and exhibitions would best be served by strategically placing his canvases and works on paper in major museums internationally. Before disbanding they selected 35 institutions, among them the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark; the Tate Gallery, London; and The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

As the principal recipient of the Rothko Foundation's largesse, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, received 296 paintings on canvas and paper, a study collection of more than 600 works on paper, and research materials, including conservation records and exhibition reviews.

In 2007 Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko further enhanced the Gallery's

holdings by donating to its library the manuscript for their father's book, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, which was edited by Christopher Rothko and published in 2004 by Yale University Press.

A rotating selection of Rothko's canvases is consistently on view at the National Gallery, including the 2003-2007 installation *Rothko's Mural Projects*, which was mounted to mark the centennial of Rothko's birth. In 1998 Jeffrey Weiss, then the Gallery's curator of modern and contemporary art, organized *Mark Rothko*, a retrospective that traveled to New York and Paris. In 1984 *Mark Rothko: Works on Paper*, circulated by the American Federation of Arts, opened at the Gallery and traveled throughout the United States. Additionally, since receiving the gift from the Mark Rothko Foundation in 1986, the Gallery's National Lending Service has lent more than 125 works by Rothko to temporary exhibitions in almost 100 museums, galleries, and embassies worldwide.

### **Catalogue Raisonné Scholarship at the National Gallery of Art**

*Mark Rothko: The Works on Paper* follows the 1998 catalogue raisonné, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas* by David Anfam, copublished by the National Gallery and Yale University Press, which documented 835 known paintings.



The Rothko catalogues raisonnés join numerous similar scholarly projects undertaken by the National Gallery, including: *The Prints of Roy Lichtenstein: A Catalogue Raisonné*, by Mary Lee Corlett with Ruth Fine (1994); *Georgia O'Keeffe: Catalogue Raisonné*, by Barbara Buhler Lynes (1999; in collaboration with the Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation); *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set*, by Sarah Greenough (2002); and one of the first online catalogues raisonnés (launched 2001), *Gemini G.E.L.*, compiled by Charles Ritchie, Claude L. Elliott, and Jonathan F. Walz, under the direction of Ruth Fine and Judith Brodie.

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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