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MARK ROTHKO'S BLACK PAINTINGS UNVEILED "IN THE TOWER" AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

**On view February 21, 2010 through January 2, 2011;
Accompanied by Brief Documentary and Morton Feldman
Musical Composition**



Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1964

oil and mixed media on canvas

Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.

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Washington, DC—A new exhibition featuring seven of the enigmatic black paintings made in 1964 by American artist Mark Rothko (1903–1970) is the second in a series of shows installed in the National Gallery of Art's Tower Gallery, East Building, that center on developments in art since midcentury. On view February 21, 2010 through January 2, 2011, *In the Tower: Mark Rothko* includes works drawn largely from the Gallery's own vast collection of Rothko's oeuvre and features a short film created for the exhibition. These austere paintings—each presenting a single black rectangle on a black or nearly black field—are among the most mysterious of Rothko's career.

This is the first exhibition devoted to Rothko's black paintings since the show that celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Rothko Chapel at the Menil Collection in Houston in 1996. The dozen or so black paintings of 1964 were precursors to the 18 canvases Rothko painted for the chapel between 1964 and 1967.

Rothko Chapel, a musical composition by the artist's close friend Morton Feldman (1926–1987), plays frequently in the Gallery's dramatic and meditative Tower Gallery. Among the most elegant in the I.M. Pei building, the Tower Gallery has housed the popular exhibition of Matisse "cutouts" for nearly a decade. It now showcases 16 major paintings by Rothko that reveal the artist's use of black over three decades—seven black paintings of 1964 and nine paintings featuring black from the 1930s and 1940s.

"Dedicating the Tower space to a series of focus exhibitions will enrich the visitor's experience of the East Building and bring to light the works of pivotal and emerging artists of the past 50 years," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "As the most important repository of and study center for Mark Rothko's art, the National Gallery has a special interest in bringing exhibitions of his work to the public."

Organization and Support

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is made possible by the generous support of the Aaron I. Fleischman Foundation.

The film was made possible by the HRH Foundation.

In the Tower: Mark Rothko

Black is a frequent, often imposing presence in Rothko's earlier paintings, from the figurative works of the 1930s and the surrealist-inspired canvases of the mid-1940s to the "multiforms" of the late 1940s. These phases are represented by nine works in the exhibition. In Rothko's classic work of the 1950s black did not play a major role; the artist's turn to black in 1964 was therefore a return.

In 1964, the collectors Dominique and John de Menil commissioned Rothko to create series of paintings for a Catholic chapel in Houston, today the non-denominational Rothko Chapel. Having recently worked on multicanvas commissions for the Four Seasons Restaurant (1958–1959) and Harvard University (1961–1963), Rothko was

already painting in the series format. He worked on the chapel commission from the fall of 1964 through the spring of 1967, producing 14 large paintings and four alternates, many of them direct successors to the black paintings of 1964.

When the chapel opened in 1971, a year after Rothko's death, the de Menils asked Morton Feldman to compose a tribute to the artist. *Rothko Chapel* premiered in the octagonal-shaped chapel in 1972 with two facing choirs.

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 around the world. Before disbanding, the foundation selected 36 institutions, among them the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek; the Tate Gallery, London; and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

As the principal recipient of the foundation's largesse, the National Gallery of Art, 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 has been exhibited at the Gallery, including the 2003–2007 installation *Rothko's Mural Projects*, which was mounted to mark the centennial of Rothko's birth. In 1998, the Gallery organized *Mark Rothko*, a retrospective that traveled to New York and Paris. In 1984, *Mark Rothko: Works on Paper*, organized by the American Federation of Arts with the Mark Rothko Foundation, opened at the Gallery and traveled throughout the United States. Since 1986, the Gallery's National Lending Service has also lent more than 125 works to temporary exhibitions in almost 100 museums, galleries, and embassies worldwide.

Mark Rothko: The Works on Paper Catalogue Raisonné Project

As part of a worldwide search, the National Gallery of Art is seeking information about Rothko's drawings, watercolors, and paintings on paper including those mounted on canvas. These works will be published in a multivolume catalogue raisonné that is expected to document more than 2,700 objects, many of which are largely unknown to both art specialists and the public. Demonstrating the range of Rothko's creative achievements on paper, these volumes will be the definitive historical record of this aspect of Rothko's oeuvre for decades to come.

The catalogue raisonné, scheduled for publication in 2012, is being written by Ruth Fine, curator of special projects in modern art, National Gallery of Art, with 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 are fully respected.

Mark Rothko: The Works on Paper follows the 1998 catalogue raisonné *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas* by David Anfam, published by the National Gallery in association with Yale University Press and documenting 834 known paintings.

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 at 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. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. The Gallery is now on Facebook—become a fan at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering the East and West Buildings. 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 x 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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