

Mark Rothko

By Grace Gardella

"Unveiling of higher truth"



Rudy Burckhardt. *Photograph of Mark Rothko*. 1960. Gelatin silver print, 4 5/16 x 9 11/16". Photographic Archive, Artists and Personalities. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

Abstraction

*"The **familiar identity** of things has to be **pulverised** in order to **destroy the finite associations** with which our society increasingly enshrouds every aspect of our environment." -Mark Rothko*

Alongside other artists in the New York School of painters, Rothko led the way in developing abstraction in the visual arts. While he began his artistic career with figuration, his move towards reductionism defined his career, as art critic Clement Greenburg called his style, "color-field" painting (Kandel 88).

*"We favor the **simple expression of the complex thought**. We are for the large shape because it has the impact of the unequivocal. We wish to reassert the picture plane. We are for flat forms because they **destroy illusion** and **reveal truth**." - Mark Rothko*

Biography

1903: Born in Dinsk, which was the only area in Russia where Jews were legally allowed to live.

1913: Moved to Portland, Oregon with his family.

1921: Attended Yale University.

1923: Moved to New York City.

Late 1940s: The New York School made up of a group of young expressionist painters developed abstract art technique.

By 1950: Rothko's style is solely focused on "color-field" reductionism.

1960s: Completes commissioned works for the Seagram Restaurant in New York City and the Chapel at University of St. Thomas in Houston.

Late 1960s: Begins to struggle with physical health issues as well as depression.

1970: Death, commits suicide.

Seagram Mural Sketches



Mark Rothko. 1959. *Untitled (Seagram Mural Sketches)*. Painting. The National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.

https://library.artstor.org/asset/ANGAIG_10314023747.

Featured Work



Rothko, Mark. 1957. *Orange and Red on Red*. The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1960.
https://library.artstor.org/asset/APHILLIPSIG_10310732947.

"Silence is so accurate"

While Rothko spoke freely regarding his early works, as his art became more abstract, his explanations became more silent, giving the viewer more interpretive freedom.

Critical Reception

With the emergence of the New York School, contemporary art critics such as Harold Rosenberg of *The New Yorker*, Clement Greenberg of the *Partisan Review* and *The Nation*, Meyer Schapiro, professor at Columbia University, and art historian Robert Rosenblum contributed to conversation on reductionism and abstraction. Greenburg is credited with labeling Rothko's style as "color-field" painting. In his essay, "After Abstract Expressionism" Greenburg emphasizes the importance of color-field paintings, which he saw as "radical" (Kandel 13).

"A painting is not a picture of an experience.

It is an experience."

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