



Rothko, 1960  
Photograph: Regina Bogat

Rothko was the first painter of his generation to be offered [a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art](#) in New York in 1961. Fifty-four works dating from 1945 to 1961 flooded MoMA's galleries in the artist's largest exhibition to date. Eleven murals (1958-59) completed for Rothko's recent [commission for the Seagram Building](#) and the new Four Seasons Restaurant, from which he withdrew and retained possession of the paintings, were included, visible for public consumption for the first time. Rothko [gifted the murals to the Tate Modern](#) in 1970.

Between 1964 and 1967, Rothko created 14 murals [commissioned by Dominique and John de Menil](#) for a non-denominational chapel in Houston. Rothko also helped design that space to hold them, creating an immersive and deeply affecting environment fondly known as the [Rothko Chapel](#).

The series was showcased in [the Tate Modern's 2008 thematically-driven exhibition](#), the first on British shores in twenty years. Extensive digital resources include [a tour of the galleries](#), a trio of [music compositions inspired by the murals](#), an interview with contemporary artist Brice Marden about Rothko's enduring influence, and [a history of the red pigment](#) made famous by Rothko in the Seagram murals. [Watch Tate curator discuss](#) the exhibition, and [Tate conservation team complete an 18-month restoration](#) on Rothko's [Black on Maroon \(1958\)](#), which was vandalized in 2012.

Rothko's daughter Kate [spoke to The Guardian in 2008](#) about the embattled aftermath of her father's death, fighting for control of his estate, and coming to peace with his legacy.

[The Gemeentemuseum Den Haag](#) celebrated Rothko with a retrospective in 2015, highlighting early works alongside the vivid ethereal canvases for which he is celebrated. [Watch curators, artists, and scholars reflect](#) on the significance, impenetrability, and magic of Rothko's paintings.

Rothko's son Christopher – a clinical psychologist who now runs Rothko's estate – contributed to [The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's retrospective](#) and [published a new scholarly work](#) on his father's career in 2015: [Mark Rothko: From the Inside Out](#).

In 2019, [the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna \(with an extensive digital offering\)](#) organized Austria's first Rothko retrospective, which traced the painter's development from Surrealist figuration in the 1930s to abstraction in the 1950s and '60s, focusing on the influence of three trips to Europe taken by Rothko beginning in 1950. [Curator Jason Sharp and Sotheby's specialist Saara Pritchard discuss significant themes and moments](#) in Rothko's career.

Christopher Rothko spoke in Vienna [about the "drama" and emotional resonance of his father's work](#). "At the core of Rothko's work is the interaction between viewer and painting, or rather viewer and painter. Seeing the paintings not as a culmination of formal means or painterly processes but instead as acts of communication...For this was my father's career-long goal, not to express himself but to interact, indeed to hold a conversation with his viewer," he explained. "Meaning occurs when the content from the painting and the content from the viewer come together."

PBS series *American Masters* produced the 2019 documentary, [Rothko: Pictures Must be Miraculous](#) with archival footage and interviews from his children.



Rothko, 1952-1953  
Photograph: Henry Elkan



Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)

**Olive over Red**, 1956

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2023:132.1

Mark Rothko's family immigrated to the United States in 1913 to escape the Russian Empire and political unrest preceding the Russian Revolution. The family settled in Portland, Oregon, where Rothko grew up before moving to the East Coast for school. His abstract approach to painting, with washes of intense color in simplified, blurry, geometric compositions, made him a pioneer of the Abstract Expressionist and later Color Field movements in New York. **Olive over Red** is an iconic example of Rothko's work in the 1950s. The tall, thin canvas is saturated with one-third red and two-thirds olive green with soft, fuzzy edges. This painting was once in the collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art and is now in a private collection.

*On view January 10 – April 14, 2024*



Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)

**Mural, Section 6 {Untitled} [Seagram Mural], 1959**

Mixed media on canvas

Private Collection; L2023:1.7

In 1958, Mark Rothko was asked to produce a series of murals for a dining room at the Four Seasons Restaurant in New York's Seagram Building. The prolific artist was active in the postwar American art scene, and the building designers were interested in his large-scale abstract works. Rothko was famously against the capitalist greed that such a project represented but accepted the challenge, saying: "I hope to paint something that will ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room." **Mural, Section 6 {Untitled} [Seagram Mural]** is an early attempt of Rothko's design that the artist later abandoned. He ultimately pulled out of the project a year later, and nine of the intended murals now make up the Rothko Room at the Tate Modern. Rothko made the decision to decline the commission after eating at the restaurant himself, when he said: "Anybody who will eat that kind of food for those kind of prices will never look at a painting of mine."

*On view June 14 – September 17, 2023*

Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)

**Untitled (Shades of Red)**, 1961

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2022:69.1

“I’m not an abstractionist. I’m not interested in the relationship of color or form or anything else. I’m interested only in expressing basic human emotions: tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on.” Mark Rothko is best known for his paintings of softly rectangular, saturated blocks of color that evoke strong emotions. Born in Latvia, the artist emigrated to the United States at age 10 and grew up in Portland, Oregon. In 1920, Rothko moved to New York, where he developed his style in the rich artistic landscape of the city’s interwar years. **Untitled (Shades of Red)** was completed in 1961, the same year as the artist’s seminal mid-career retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition was the largest display of Rothko’s work to date. It received wide critical praise and played an instrumental role in catapulting the artist’s work to the upper echelons of the American contemporary art market.

*On view August 17 - December 4, 2022*





Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)

**Untitled**, 1968

Acrylic on paper laid on panel

Private Collection; L2022:53.1

As a pioneer of Abstract Expressionism and a precursor of color field painting in postwar New York, Mark Rothko often created saturated swaths of intense color in soft, geometric forms. **Untitled** features three blocks of brown, red, and black in fuzzy brushstrokes that lightly bleed into one another. The painting itself is significantly smaller than the artist's earlier work. In 1968, Rothko suffered an aortic aneurysm and doctors recommended he simplify his practice. The opportunity to employ acrylics on paper, rather than oil on canvas, allowed Rothko flexibility to explore new techniques and materials. As such, **Untitled** offers a unique glimpse into Rothko's oeuvre at a particular moment in his health and career.

*On view July 21 – October 23, 2022*

Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)

**Untitled**, 1969

Oil on paper laid down on board

Private Collection; L2022:7.1

*On view March 23 – June 26, 2022*





Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)

**Untitled (Dark Gray, White, Light Gray on Maroon)**, 1968-1969

Acrylic on paper

Private Collection; L2021:184.1

As a pioneer of Abstract Expressionism and a precursor of color field painting in postwar New York, Mark Rothko often created saturated swaths of intense color in soft, geometric forms, situated in simplified compositions. This trio of paintings – **Untitled (Dark Gray, White, Light Gray on Maroon)**, **Untitled (Orange and Maroon on Red)**, and **Untitled (White and Dark Gray on Light Gray and Orange)** – feature the somber and muted color palette Rothko began using in the 1950s. However, these paintings are significantly smaller than the artist's earlier work. In 1968, Rothko suffered an aortic aneurysm and doctors recommended he simplify his practice. The opportunity to employ acrylics on paper, rather than oil on canvas, allowed Rothko flexibility to explore new techniques and materials. The works also feature lighter colors on top and darker colors below, a composition the artist usually avoided to prevent his paintings from being read as landscapes. As such, this trio offers a unique glimpse into Rothko's oeuvre at a particular moment in his health and career.

*On view January 19 – April 24, 2022*

Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)  
**Untitled (Orange and Maroon on Red)**, 1968-1969  
Oil on paper laid down on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:184.2

*On view January 19 – April 24, 2022*







Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)

**Untitled (White and Dark Gray on Light Gray and Orange), 1968-1969**

Oil on paper laid down on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:184.3

*On view January 19 – April 24, 2022*

Mark Rothko (Latvian-American, 1903-1970)

**Untitled (Orange and Blue)**, 1960-61

Oil on paper laid down on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:99.1

Born Markus Rothkowitz in the Jewish settlement of Dvinsk in Imperial Russia (now Daugavpils, Latvia), Mark Rothko arrived in Ellis Island in 1913, after which the family quickly settled in Portland, Oregon. Rothko returned to New York as a young man after leaving Yale 1923, taking classes at the Art Students League and developing close friendships with other artists. Figures, urban scenes, and landscapes marked his early output, to which he integrated increasingly expressive, symbolic, and biomorphic motifs before finding the compositional template for which he is best known in the late 1940s. In these canvases, which he developed for the rest of his career and left unnamed – occasionally individuated by notation of colors as in **Untitled (Orange and Blue)** – Rothko achieved a delicate, nuanced balance between formal concerns and emotional utterance.

Diluted pigment applied in thin, transparent washes achieves an extraordinary depth and luminosity, establishing a tangible atmospheric mood through the chromatic conversations of floating rectangles and colored ground. The deceptively simple composition generates an expressive complexity that transcends the surface of the painting to communicate, elicit, and envelope its viewers in what Rothko considered “basic human emotions” one of his principle goals. He was also deeply interested in the spiritual dimensions of art, including the capacity of abstraction to communicate beyond the reach of words.

*On view November 12, 2020 – February 14, 2021*

