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.
Mark Rothko (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.

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