

## **Robert Motherwell Biography**

1926 Receives a scholarship to the Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles

1930 Because of asthma is sent to Moran Preparatory School, Atascadero, in the Southern California desert. Begins a self-directed education in art, learning to draw by copying Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes, Rembrandt's portraits, and Peter Rubens' Marie de Medici series from book illustrations.

1932 Begins college at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, majoring in art. Frustrated by the limitations of Stanford's art department, which allowed students little room for experimentation, Motherwell changed the focus of his studies several times, ultimately earning a degree in philosophy in 1936

1935 Travels to Europe. Reads Joyce's Ulysses for the first time

1936 Interest in the writing of Joyce intensifies during his last undergraduate year at Stanford University. Fascinated by the elaborate organization of Joyce's work, in particular the dynamism of its style, and its fabric of indirection, ambiguity, and plurality

1936 Enrolls at Harvard University. Continues to study art, attending Lovejoy's yearlong seminar on the history of the idea of romanticism, where he is assigned The Journal of Eugene Delacroix.

1936 Attends a rally in San Francisco at which André Malraux speaks about the Spanish Civil War

1938 In May travels to Paris to research Delacroix's writing and enrolls at the University of Grenoble to study French. Translates Paul Signac's D'Eugene Delacroix au neo-impressionisme. Both his Delacroix notes and the translation of Signac's text were lost in the early days of World War II. Rents a studio on the rue Viscount in Paris, where Honore de Balzac had his printing presses, and begins to paint

1938 While in France, becomes interested in the works of Pablo Picasso, who had exhibited Guernica for the first time in 1937 at the Spanish Republic's pavilion of the Paris World's Fair. Becomes acquainted with Picasso's 1935 series of etchings Minotauromachy and the works that Picasso executed during 1937 that related to the Spanish Civil War

1939 Is given his first exhibition of twelve paintings in the spring at the Raymond Duncan Gallery in Paris, where the gallery owner himself a Californian, devoted an exhibition each year to the work of a Californian artist living in Paris. Studies briefly at the Academe Julian. Visits Delacroix exhibition in Zurich

1940 Returns to the United States and, at the suggestion of a family friend and artist Lance Hart, accepts a one-year teaching post at the University of Oregon, Eugene, where he begins to paint full-time, strongly influenced by Matisse, Picasso, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, Maurice Utrillo, and Georges Braque. On the advice of Arthur Berger, an American composer whom he met in Paris, applies to and is accepted into the Art History Department of Columbia University's graduate division in New York

1941 Travels to Mexico by boat on may 21st and spends the summer in Taxco with Matta and his wife, Ann Matta-Clark. Barbara Reis, another engraving student of Seligmann's, travels with the Mattas and Motherwell. Through Matta and with the introduction of Seligmann, meets Wolfgang Paalen who was living in a suburb of Mexico City. At the end of the summer the Mattas and Reis return to New York, but Motherwell, after meeting Paalen, decides to stay in Coyocan, near Paalen's studio, through November.

1942 Despite his challenging relationship with Surrealists, is invited - along with William Baziotes, Joseph Cornell, and David Hare - to participate in First Papers of Surrealism, an exhibition organized by Breton and installed at the Whitelaw-Reid Mansion in New York, October

1943 In response to Peggy Guggenheim's invitation to participate in a collage exhibition featuring European masters, constructs his first collage with Pollock in Pollock's Greenwich Village studio. The medium has a nominal impact on Pollock, but for Motherwell the collage technique was a passage to multidimensionality. His *The Joy of Living* made its debut in Guggenheim's exhibition and was purchased by Masson's benefactor Sadie May and later bequeathed to the Baltimore Museum of Art

1944 Makes the collage *Mallarmes Swan*. Aspects of Mallarmes *vers libre* exerted a singular influence on Motherwell's work and throughout, notably the symbol of the swan from Mallarmes *Les Vierges, le vivace et el bel aujourd'hui* (The virgin, the vivid and the splendid new day, 1887); Mallarme's fascination with the idea of azure as expresses in his early poem "L'Azur" 1864 as a symbol of purity; and Mallarme's imperative, "To paint, not the thing but the effect it produces"

1950 - 1959 Took teaching post at Hunter College in New York

During the 1960s He turned to landscape of the mediteranean, favouring powerful blue and green chromatic accents

**Selected collections:**

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo

Arizona State University Art Museum, Phoenix

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Cleveland Museum of Art

Denver Art Museum

Hara Museum, Tokyo

High Museum of Art, Atlanta

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

In 1940, a young painter named Robert Motherwell came to New York City and joined a group of artists - including Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko and Franz Kline - who set out to change the face of American painting. These painters renounced the prevalent American style, believing its realism depicted only the surface of American life. Their interest was in exploring the deeper sense of reality beyond the recognizable image. Influenced by the Surrealists, many of whom had emigrated from Europe to New York, the Abstract Expressionists sought to create essential images that revealed emotional truth and authenticity of feeling.

Robert Motherwell was the youngest and most prolific of the group. Born in Aberdeen, Washington, in 1915, Motherwell first hoped to be a philosopher. His studies at Stanford and Harvard brought him into contact with the great American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, who first challenged him with the notion of abstraction. What he took from Whitehead was the sense that abstraction was the process of peeling away the inessential and presenting the necessary. After moving to New York and becoming acquainted with a number of artists, Motherwell recognized in them similar desires. Forming a community and living on what little they had, the Abstract Expressionists made daring experiments in painting and in the intellectual investigations surrounding it. Their break with the traditional art conventions often provoked the harshest criticism from the establishment. Despite this, these early years were an incredibly productive period for Motherwell-seeing him experiment in a range of media, from painting to collage. His work often expressed the actions of the artist through dramatic and bright brush strokes. Valued for their energetic imagery, they attempted a pure emotional response made real in paint. His collage also concerned itself with an awareness of the presence of the artist in a work. Using torn paper on minimalist backgrounds, he created work that was at once discordant and lyrical.

Beyond his individual efforts as an artist, Motherwell played a major role in the intellectual and artistic development of the underground New York art world of the time. Reflecting on those early years, he spoke of their belief that "if the abstraction, the violence, the humanity was valid in Abstract Expressionism, then it cut out the ground from every other kind of painting." It was this revolutionary sensibility that determined both his life and his art. This work, however, grew not simply from a desire to present a new American art form, but a need to express the major human themes in paint. Like the great masters, Motherwell's importance can be seen in his attempts at expressing something monumental.

With the advent of Pop Art and its concentration on popular culture themes, the art public began to long for the idealism of the Abstract Expressionists. In relation to Andy Warhol's soup cans, Motherwell's large abstract paintings began to achieve a majesty in the public eye. Motherwell's politics and spirituality were welcome reminders of a time when one could make art that did not engage the cynicism of a post-modern era. No longer the black sheep of the art world, Motherwell began to enjoy the fruits of years of dedicated work. It seemed, however, for many of the Abstract Expressionists that

the newly found appreciation could not counteract the turbulence of those early years-many dying young or taking their own lives. Though somewhat alone, Motherwell committed himself to producing highly experimental work of emotional depth for the rest of his life. On July 16, 1991, at the age of 76 he died: the last of the great Abstract Expressionists.

**Selected Exhibitions**

- 2008 The Hands of Art, SMAK Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Gent
- 2008 Museum Morsbroich, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen
- 2007 Temptations, The Columns, Seoul
- 2006 Black, Black & White, White, Leonard Hutton galleries, New York City, NY
- 2005 Looking at Words, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York city, NY
- 2004 Leverkusen, Museum Morsbroich, V.I.P. 2 - Die Neuen
- 2004 Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie, Das MoMA in Berlin
- 2004 Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Robert Motherwell and Frank Stella: Prints from the Permanent Collection
- 2004 2003 Warsaw, Zentrum für Zeitgenössische Kunst Schloss Ujazdowski, Von Picasso bis Warhol
- 2004 Munich, Trökes Galerie Dube-Heynig, Fruhtrunk, Motherwell, Sonderborg, Hartung, Vedova 1983  
Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery 1959, 1964
- 2004 Kassel, Documenta 2, 3 1944 New York, Art of This Century
- 2003 Leverkusen, Museum Morsbroich (solo)
- 2003 Los Angeles, Getty Museum, Robert Motherwell (solo)
- 2001 Munich, Galerie Bernd Klüser (solo)