ROTHKO AND ARCHITECTURE

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by
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ABSTRACT

The overall goal of this dissertation is to identify and examine the neglected aspects of the literature on Mark Rothko's 1958-1959 project to make murals for the Four Seasons restaurant (see Figs. 1-12) in the then-newly opened Seagram Building in Manhattan. These include Rothko's attempts to merge the mediums of painting and architecture in order to create an antagonistic environment in the restaurant; how his visits to Italy before and during the project reinforced this goal; how a good deal of the figurative paintings from Rothko's earliest career anticipated his blend of aggression and architecturally-related themes; the connection between Rothko and Mies van der Rohe, the architect of the building, in regard to the theme of transcendence; and how his experiments with architectural subjects and motifs aligned Rothko with some of the most influential vanguard artists in New York in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Discussions of these topics will suggest that his career-long references to architecture functioned, for him, as something intended to produce discomfort in the viewer. I will show that his acceptance of a lucrative commission to make paintings for a lavish restaurant that might seem at first to suggest pandering to an élite audience had the paradoxical effect of condemning that audience. I intend also to demonstrate that Rothko understood that the project was not merely about making paintings. Instead, for him, it dealt more with the challenge of uniting architecture and painting.

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of this dissertation is to identify and examine the neglected aspects of the literature on Mark Rothko's 1958-1959 project to make murals for the Four Seasons restaurant (see Figs. 1-12) in the then-newly opened Seagram Building in Manhattan. These include Rothko's attempts to merge the mediums of painting and architecture in order to create an antagonistic environment in the restaurant; how his visits to Italy before and during the project reinforced this goal; how a good deal of the figurative paintings from Rothko's earliest career anticipated his blend of aggression and architecturally-related themes; the connection between Rothko and Mies van der Rohe, the architect of the building, in regard to the theme of transcendence; and how his experiments with architectural subjects and motifs aligned Rothko with some of the most influential vanguard artists in New York in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Discussions of these topics will suggest that his career-long references to architecture functioned, for him, as something intended to produce discomfort in the viewer. I will show that his acceptance of a lucrative commission to make paintings for a lavish restaurant that might seem at first to suggest pandering to an élite audience had the paradoxical effect of condemning that audience. I intend also to demonstrate that Rothko understood that the project was not merely about making paintings. Instead, for him, it dealt more with the challenge of uniting architecture and painting. Two comments he made during the project especially suggest this. In 1958, he remarked that "my paintings are sometimes

described as facades, and indeed they are facades."[1] Secondly, while at Paestum (in 1959) he declared: "I have been painting Greek temples all my life without knowing it."[2] Taken together, both form a crucial springboard for the current discussion.

Throughout this dissertation, I will use the terms "architecture" and "architectural." Various definitions of what constitutes "architecture" have been proposed throughout the long history of architectural discourse. In antiquity, Vitruvius presented the notion that good architecture ought to contain durability, utility, and beauty. In Rothko's era, Le Corbusier promoted the view that "you employ stone, wood, and concrete, and with these materials you build houses and places…But suddenly you touch my heart…That is Architecture."[3] Taking these and other definition into consideration, the term "architecture" will be used in its most rudimentary form, to connote what Alex Maller has referred to as a "built structure…realized by human beings," or what Christian Norberg-Schulz called a "dwelling."[4] "Architectural" will be used more fluidly, referring to something that is not architecture per se but refers to or signifies it, as in a painting of a building. "Space" will be used to refer to the space within and created by architecture or environments. As Rudolf Arnheim described in *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, architectural space is both "a self-contained entity, infinite or finite, an empty vehicle,

[1] Mark Rothko, from a 1958 lecture, quoted in Anfam, "To See, or Not To See," *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding*, *The Rothko Chapel*.

[2] Dore Ashton, *About Rothko*, 147.

[3] *Vitruvius: Ten Books on Architecture*, Ingrid Drake Rowland, trans. (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999). Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, John Goodman, trans. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2007): 215.

[4] Alex Maller, "Signs, Systems, Structures, Spaces in Basic Architectural Design," *Leonardo*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1986): 71-77. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space, & Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1971).

ready and having the capacity to be filled with things…[what] Plato spoke [of] in *Timaeus*…as a nothingness."

This dissertation will examine Rothko's most architectural work in order to position architecture as one of the most important concerns throughout his career. I will also maintain that Rothko's interest in architecture was longstanding, with evidence stemming from his very first known canvas. It is also important to examine the different types of architecturally grounded iconographic subjects Rothko painted. Often his use of these types, such as hybrid architectural spaces that are both interiors and exteriors, reveal an awareness of important contemporary developments in architecture. Locating the reasons why he used architectural themes throughout his career will be the driving force of this dissertation.

Rothko's written accounts on the subjects of architecture, Italian art, antagonism, transcendence, space, and other relevant subjects form an indispensible component of this project.[5] Two important collections of Rothko's writings will be referenced throughout. These include Rothko's unfinished manuscript *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art,* which he probably wrote while in a state of depression in 1940 and 1941, during a period when he had temporarily abandoned painting.[6] The second is *Writings on Art*, a

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[5] For more on the role of artists' statements within the Abstract Expressionist community, see Ann Eden Gibson, "The Rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments," in *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments*, 64-93; "Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language," *Art Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 3, *New Myths for Old: Redefining Abstract Expressionism* (Autumn, 1988): 208-214; and *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1990).

[6] Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, Christopher Rothko, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004). A registrar of the Rothko estate discovered the 226-page sloppily-constructed manuscript in a warehouse in 1988.

compilation of nearly one hundred letters and statements that Rothko authored at various points throughout his career.[7] Commentary from the individuals who knew Rothko well, as well as the ideas about his work as promoted by art critics and art historians, will naturally factor prominently. I will also be reference the art and architectural works that he admired, along with his experiences with these objects and places, in addition to the key works by Rothko from throughout his oeuvre. All of these sources will bring into clearer focus Rothko's many comments about his work in relation to architecture. "They are not pictures," Rothko said to Dore Ashton in October 1959, when she visited his studio and saw his Seagram works. Instead, as he told Ashton, "I have made a place."[8]

In 1954, the Joseph E. Seagram and Sons Corporation announced that its new headquarters would be located at 375 Park Avenue.[9] The new building would commemorate the corporation's one-hundredth anniversary. Its design was overseen by Phyllis Bronfman Lambert, the daughter of Samuel Bronfman, C.E.O. of Seagram's and an important figure in the world of art, architecture, patronage, and collecting.[10] As she described in her 1959 essay, "How a Building Gets Built," Lambert explained why she

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Rothko's son Christopher Rothko, a psychotherapist by training, spearheaded its publication.

[7] Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art*, Miguel Lopez-Remiro, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2006).

[8] Mark Rothko, quoted in Dore Ashton, *About Rothko* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983): 155.

[9] For more on the many stages of the building's design, see Philip Johnson, *The Philip Johnson Tapes: Interviews by Robert A. M. Stern*, Kazys Vernelis, ed. (New York: Monacelli Press, 2008): 136-150.

[10] Lambert was so dissatisfied with the California-based firm Luckman and Pereira (who landed the initial commission for the project) that her father turned the decision of an architect up to her. After consulting with Philip Johnson (then Director of the Department of Architecture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York), she made a short-list of the most important architects. Included in this list were Walter Gropius, Louis Kahn, Eero Saarinen, Marcel Breuer, I. M. Pei, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Mies van der Rohe.

ultimately selected Mies. She noted that Frank Lloyd Wright wasn't "the statement that is needed now" and that audiences might have been "blinded by" Le Corbusier's style. In her view, Mies's design was different in part because "the younger men, the second generation, are talking in terms of Mies or denying him."[11] She thus conceived this building from the start as something especially revolutionary. This is precisely why the corporation gave Mies free reign over the project, a factor that led to the lavish budget for that time of $45 million to complete the building. Lambert succeeded in this task. Upon its completion, the building became the triumphant symbol of modernist architecture. Ada Louise Huxtable described it as one of the "sleek-walled buildings that are the pride of modern cities and the symbol of modern life…a glittering, soaring, straight-lined tower of today's urban world."[12] The building has maintained importance decades later. Nearly thirty years after its completion, Huxtable observed, "after so many vanities, the simple logic of the despised Miesian vernacular is beginning to look good."[13] Mies's biographer Franz Schulze noted something unique about the building. While Mies "had a reputation for designing architectural objects as self-referential bodies independent of...the context in which they found themselves...it is decidedly not true of the Seagram Building."[14] In other words, Mies considered the location of the building and its relationship to adjacent structures to be essential to the project. In this way, it became part of an architectural tapestry, dissolving itself into its surroundings. Along with the

[11] Phyllis Lambert, "How a Building Gets Built," *Vassar Alumnae Magazine* (Feb. 1959): 13.

[12] Ada Louise Huxtable, "The Soaring Towers That Gave Form to an Age," New *York Times* (Aug. 19, 1969), reprinted in Huxtable, 166.

[13] Ada Louise Huxtable, "The Making of a Master," *New York Times* (Dec. 1, 1985), reprinted in Huxtable, 174.

[14] Schulze, 272-73.

then-newly opened Skidmore, Owings & Merrill-designed Lever House (completed in 1952 at 390 Park Avenue), Mies's building promoted the International Style in America.[15] All of these details point toward the building's unique position within American postwar architecture, and it is unthinkable that Rothko was unaware of how lavish the building was when he accepted the commission for the murals.

In 1958, Philip Johnson invited Rothko to paint a series of works for the Seagram corporation's new headquarters. The contract was finalized on June 25, 1958, and the corporation issued a purchase order for "Building Decorations". The commission stipulated that Rothko would receive $35,000 for "500 to 600 square feet of paintings" destined to be installed in the Grill Room of the Four Seasons restaurant, located at the ground floor of the Seagram Building.

Commissions given to painters to make something for an architectural environment are often problematic, something Harold Rosenberg understood:

> Architects have different problems than studio painters and sculptors, but many are very knowledgeable about painting and sculpture. Occasionally, an architect wishes to include paintings or sculptures into buildings he is planning – and offers a commission to some well-known artist. Quite often such offers are turned down by the artist, though he needs the money and the prestige. Why? Whatever conditions may have been in the Renaissance – the Renaissance is always brought as an argument in these situations – a great difference exists today between the architect producing his work according to public conditions and the artist pursuing his aims more or less in solitude. The difference is so great as to make genuine cooperation between the two professionals very difficult, if not impossible – the fact is that most serious contemporary artists who have executed

[15] The style was coined in 1931 by Alfred Barr after a debate with Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, thus replacing Hitchcock's term "New Pioneers" from his 1930 book *Modern Architecture*. See Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Missionary for the Modern* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989): 85. It was popularized by the Johnson/Hitchcock-organized exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art* at the Museum of Modern Art.

> architectural commissions have been dissatisfied and avoid doing more if they can help it.[16]

However, even with the complexities the project must have presented for Rothko, it appears that at least three factors compelled the artist to go along with it. First, he needed an outlet for his experiments with uniting painting and architecture. Secondly, by 1958, he desired to evolve beyond his signature style, in which he had been painting for nearly a decade. As Dan Rice, his assistant on the project, recalled:

> I believe he actually felt that he had gone as far as he could in painting until the proposal for the Seagram Building murals was presented to him…For many years, he had the concept that his work must or should hang together in a permanent environment, fixed only by the work itself.[17]

Although the Grill Room only had enough space for a few of his paintings, Rothko worked intensely for eight months at the end of 1958 and the earlier part of 1959, producing thirty mural-sized canvases.[18] While the works are variously titled in the catalogue raisonné as sketches or murals, it is unclear which Rothko believed to be more finished works, or which might have been preparatory mock-ups of later works.[19] The

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[16] Harold Rosenberg, "Problems in the Teaching of Artists," *Art Journal* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Winter, 1964-65): 135. Rosenberg delivered the essay as a speech in1962 at the Midwest College Art Conference at Ohio State University.

[17] *The 1958-1959 Murals*, ex. cat., Dan Rice interviewed by Arnold Glimcher (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1978): n.p. The contract for the Seagram project gave Rothko carte blanche, with no stipulation for the size, shape, or color, of the paintings, nor of how they would be lit or installed. He was essentially guaranteed that he would have the absolute control over the project that he notoriously craved[craved the project; carved control; or both, please clarify]. While he exhibited such control at various points throughout his career, Rothko was especially careful in planning the installation of the Seagram paintings.

[18] See Anfam cat. nos. 634-663

[19] For his donation to the Tate Gallery, which will be discussed later in this dissertation, Rothko grouped together what Anfam refers to as four "sketches" and five "mural sections."

murals are now dispersed, with ten at the National Gallery in Washington,[20] nine at the Tate Gallery,[21] seven at the Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art in Chiba-Ken, Japan,[22] and four in private collections.[23] In 1958, Rothko described the various stages and the evolution of his style throughout the project. He noted:

> So far [as of October 1958] I've painted three sets of panels for this Seagram job. The first one didn't turn out right, so I sold the panels separately as individual paintings. The second time I got the basic idea, but began to modify it as I went along – because, I guess, I was afraid of being too stark. When I realized my mistake, I started again, and this time I'm holding tight to the original conception.[24]

In all thirty, two formal ingredients can be found. In addition to a much darker palette, all are in a mural scale and have clearly discernible architectural forms. Beginning with the large scale, the smallest painting *Mural Sketch [Seagram Mural Sketch]* (1958, Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, Chiba-Ken) is sixty-six by sixty inches, and the largest *Untitled [Seagram Mural Section]* (1959, National Gallery of Art) measuring just over one hundred six by one hundred eighty inches. At this scale, they are larger than anything Rothko painted previously. The largest work he painted before the Seagram series is *No. 16 (Red, Brown and Black)* (1958, The Museum of Modern Art, New York) at just over one hundred six by one hundred seventeen inches. *No. 16* was an exception to the standard scale of his signature abstractions. Rothko's paintings from the 1950s generally fall within the range of approximately between six to seven feet tall to

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[20] See Anfam cat. nos. 634, 640, 643, 646, 649-53, and 655.
[21] See Anfam cat. nos. 636, 642, 644, 647, 657, 658, 660, 661, and 663.
[22] See Anfam cat. nos. 635, 638-39, 641, 654, 656, and 659.
[23] See Anfam cat. nos. 637, 645, 648, and 662.
[24] Mark Rothko, according to John Fisher. See Fischer, "Mark Rothko: Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Man," in "The Easy Chair," *Harper's Magazine* (July 1970): 16-23. The set of thirty stemmed from the second and third phases.

roughly four to five feet wide. The expansive fifteen-feet canvases thus overwhelm the space in which they are installed. Rothko conceived of a space for the restaurant defined by multiple large-scale paintings surrounding and enveloping the viewer. Finally, all of the canvases in the series have an unmistakable red or black door/window form. These forms draw attention to architecture more strongly than anything Rothko had painted since he first embraced abstraction, ca. 1946-47, as they reference specific architectural ornamentation Michelangelo used in the Laurentian Library. While Rothko denounced a link between landscapes and his signature abstractions, he promoted a connection between the Laurentian forms and his Seagram shapes.

Another important innovation during the project is Rothko's embrace of an exaggerated horizontal format for the majority of the paintings in the series, seventeen of the thirty. This format mirrored the rectangular shape of the Grill Room, at fifty-six by twenty-seven feet. It also mimicked the shapes of the three non-windowed walls in the room. It is impossible to know where exactly in the Grill Room Rothko intended to install the paintings. As curator Thomas Kellein proposed, in his arrangement of some of the murals into an environment for the exhibition *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York* at the Kunsthalle Basel, held in the first half of 1989, the east/entry wall of the room greeting visitors was likely meant to have included three of the largest horizontal canvases.[25] As the chapters progress, it will become clearer that Rothko employed the vertical/signature format for nearly all of his signature abstractions to mirror the upright proportions of viewers, and adopted the horizontal configuration for most of the murals to

[25] From north to south (left to right on the wall) they are Anfam cat. nos. 641, 645, and 642. See Thomas Kellein, *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel Publications, 1989).

make the Seagram paintings more architectural. In Dan Rice's view, the horizontal format draws more attention to the vertical shapes in the paintings, making them seem more like "columns."[26] As a result, for Rice, the architectural character prevented the paintings from being associated with landscapes, despite the fact that the horizontal format is conventionally associated with landscapes.[27]

Excerpts from a four-page draft Rothko wrote in 1961, in preparation for his 1961 retrospective at MoMA, clarify how the thirty works fit into the various stages of production. Rothko's written passage never accompanied the important grouping of the Seagram paintings at MoMA that year, raising the intriguing question of whether he had yet to fully come to terms with why he took and later rejected the commission. It is essential that key excerpts be included in this context:

> In the spring of 1958 I received a phone call. It proved to be a commission to fill a space which was to be used as a private room. My one condition that the place be an enclosed space. In so far as I have always maintained that if I should be given an enclosed space which I could surround with my work it would be the realization of a dream that I have always held…
>
> What was obvious that there was in me the need to undertake a conception of a place contained and absolutely mine…
>
> The first pictures I made were in my old style [as defined by large-scale canvases with translucent washes of color and non-objective rectangular colorfields]. But soon I discovered that the old image would not serve the purpose. It became clear that to be a public man required a different attitude. Other pictures are made for nowhere. But once a specific place and permanence and the heterogeneousness of a public situation were involved a new image would have to be evolved.
>
> There followed a series of steps in which every step was further and further reduced and at the last the extent of reduction was acceptable…

[26] Dan Rice, in Thomas Kellein, *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel Publications, 1989): 23.

[27] Ibid., 23.

> I locked the door and did not see the pictures for the next two months. When I saw them again their conviction persisted. By this time the place and the spirit for which they were made was functioning. Then I saw the completed destination. It was obvious that the two were not for each other.
>
> Then if not for this place, what other places. Banks, lobbys [sic], chapels.[28]

During Rothko's lifetime, nine paintings from the Seagram series were exhibited in seven venues, at exhibitions in New York, London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Basel, Rome, and Paris.[29] The first exhibition to include all nine works was *Mark Rothko*, held from January 18-March 12, 1961 at the Museum of Modern Art. There they occupied a key position: installed in a gallery by themselves. Robert Goldwater, who reviewed the exhibition, condemned what he believed to be curator Peter Selz's oversight. He observed that:

> The exhibition as hung at the Museum of Modern Art magnifies the static, apparitional character of Rothko's work. It ignores the first sixteen of Rothko's thirty-two exhibiting years. Half the canvases in the show have been done during the last six, and many of these belong to the large mural series of 1958-59. Thus even the movement of development has been underplayed, and the insights of origins has been denied the spectator, who is confronted by a vision without sources, posed with a finality that permits no questions and grants no dialogue. It demands acquiescence, and failing that, stimulates rejection.[30]

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[28] Mark Rothko, in *Rothko*, Oliver Wick (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2007): 169-170.

[29] For *Mark Rothko*, The Museum of Modern Art (January 18-March 12, 1961), see Anfam cat. nos. 639, 641, 642, 645, 657, 658, 660, 661, 663. With the exception of no. 641, the other eight works were exhibited in *Mark Rothko: A Retrospective Exhibition, Paintings 1945-1960*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (October 10-November 12, 1961); and the exhibition *Mark Rothko*, which travelled to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (November 24-December 27, 1961), Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (January 6-29, 1962), Kunsthalle Basel (March 3-April 8, 1962), Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (April 27-May 20, 1962), and the Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris (December 5, 1962-January 13, 1963).

[30] Robert Goldwater, "Reflections on the Rothko Exhibition," in Ibid., 21-25.

The Seagram paintings are shown, even highlighted in their own space, but are not sufficiently explained in the context of Rothko's other work. In her biographical essay for the catalogue, Assistant Curator Alicia Legg included a brief mention about the Seagram paintings:

> In 1958 he began a series of murals for a large private dining room on Park Avenue, New York. After eight months of work, when the paintings were completed, the artist decided they were not appropriate for the setting and therefore did not deliver the work. Some of these panels are being shown in the exhibition.[31]

With this passing comment, art historical scholarship on the murals commenced. Selz's remarks, in his catalogue essay, are worth including in detail, as they laid the groundwork for how the Seagram works came to be understood:

> In 1958, when he began to paint murals commissioned for a large private dining room, they turned out to be paintings which may be interpreted as celebrating the death of civilization. In these vast canvases he abandoned solid color areas for rectangular frames of a single hue set in a field of solid color.
>
> The open rectangles suggest the rims of flame in containing fires, or the entrances of tombs, like the doors to the dwellings of the dead in Egyptian pyramids, behind which the sculptors kept the kings "alive" for eternity in the *ka*. But unlike the doors of the dead, which were meant to shut out the living room from the place of absolute might, even of patrician death, these paintings—open sarcophagi—moodily dare, and thus invite the spectator to enter their orifices. Indeed, the whole series of these murals brings to mind an Orphic cycle; their subject might be death and resurrection in classical, not Christian, mythology: the artist descending to Hades to find the Eurydice of his vision. The door to the tomb opens for the artist in search of his muse.
>
> For about eight months, Rothko was completely occupied with the execution of his mural commission. When it was finished, and the artist had actually created three different series, it was clear to him that these paintings and the setting did not suit each other. One may go so far as to say that this modern Dance of Death had developed into an ironic commentary on the elegant Park Avenue dining room for which it had originally been intended. Like much of Rothko's work, these murals really seem to ask for a special place apart, a kind of sanctuary,

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[31] Alicia Legg, *Mark Rothko* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961): 8.

> where they may perform what is essentially a sacramental function. This is not an absurd notion when one considers the profoundly religious quality of much apparently secular modern art—indeed the work of art has for a small but significant number of people (including spectators as well as artists) taken on something of the ecstatic and redeeming characteristics of the religious experience. Perhaps, like medieval altarpieces, these murals can properly be seen only in an ambiance created in total keeping with their mood.[32]

Perhaps due to the psychic depth of the works just mentioned, the installation of the ten murals provoked diametrically opposed critical interpretations. Max Kozloff called the works Rothko's "first major mistake."[33] Offering a completely different view, Robert Goldwater praised the installation of the Seagram murals in the exhibition. In his catalogue essay for the exhibition *Mark Rothko: A Retrospective Exhibition, Paintings 1945-1960*, held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London later that year, Goldwater called the installation of Rothko's Seagram paintings the "most successful arrangement" of the New York exhibition.[34] After the close of the exhibition *Mark Rothko* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, on January 13, 1963, no Seagram painting was exhibited until after Rothko's death.[35]

In the mid-1960s, Rothko assembled a set of nine works from the series, what he likely believed to be the best of the thirty, and donated them to the Tate Gallery in

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[32] Peter Selz, in Ibid., 13-14.

[33] Max Kozloff, "Mark Rothko's New Retrospective," *Art Journal* Vol. 20 No. 3 (Spring, 1961): 148.

[34] Robert Goldwater, "Reflections on the Rothko Exhibition," in *Mark Rothko: 1903-197*0 (London: Tate, 1987): 34. The essay was originally printed in *Arts* Vol. 35 (March 1961): 42-45, and was published later in 1961 in the catalogue for the London exhibition. See *Mark Rothko: A Retrospective Exhibition, Paintings 1945-1960* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1961): 21-25. Eight of the nine Seagram works included in the 1961 New York show were sent to London. See Anfam cat. nos. 639, 642, 645, 657, 658, 660, 661, and 663.

[35] The first work to be exhibited after his death was Anfam cat. no. 635, which was included in the exhibition *Mark Rothko* at the Museo d'Arte Moderna Ca'Pesaro, Venice (June 21-October 15, 1970).

London.[36] In October, 1965, Norman Reid, then-Director of the Tate, visited Rothko in New York, proposing a permanent gallery at the Tate for the Seagram paintings. Rothko jumped at the chance. The two corresponded and visited again, before the so-called Rothko Room (see Fig. 13) officially opened on May 28, 1970.[37] Former Tate Director Alan Bowness explained that Rothko had agreed to Reid's offer and had chosen the Tate because he "came to feel, correctly, that his luminous paintings had found an unusually warm reception in the country of [Joseph M. W.] Turner, and he had many friends and admirers among painters, critics and general public alike."[38] Rothko's cloudy color fields had already been compared, by that point, to Turner's airy landscapes, which, as Robert Rosenblum observed, "carry us beyond reason to the sublime" because they stimulate the viewer's imagination.[39] The nine paintings arrived in London on the day of Rothko's suicide, on February 25, 1970.

In addition to the nine works on view at the Tate, three Seagram works were exhibited in the early 1970s.[40] The first important posthumous exhibit of part of the

[36] See Anfam cat. nos. 636, 642, 644, 647, 657, 658, 660, 661, 663.

[37] Currently, the works are in the Rothko Room of the Tate Modern, as opposed to the Tate Gallery. Rothko's donation was the only one of its kind. That it occurred after his debilitating aneurysm on April 20, 1968, which exacerbated his already failing mental/physical health and forced him to deal with the inevitability of his own looming death, suggests that he likely viewed the works as a key component of his posthumous legacy.

[38] Alan Bowness, preface to *Mark Rothko: 1903-197*0 (London: Tate, 1987): 7.

[39] Robert Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," *ARTnews* Vol. 59, No. 10 (Feb. 1961): 58. See also Burke, 55-56 (Section IV, Part II): "It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it affecting to the imagination."

[40] Anfam cat. no. 635 was exhibited in the exhibition *Mark Rothko* at the Museo d'Arte Moderna Ca'Pesaro, Venice (June 21-October 15, 1970). Nos. 635, 640, and 659 were included in the exhibition *Mark Rothko*, Kunsthaus Zürich (March 21-May 9, 1971). The exhibition travelled to Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (May 26-July 19, 1971); Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (August 24-October 3, 1971); Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam (November

series occurred later in the decade, with the exhibition *Mark Rothko: The 1958-1959 Murals* at the Pace Gallery in New York, held in October and November of 1978. Ten paintings were included in the show.[41] The nine works on view in London at that time along with the additional ten shown in New York made this the first occasion when nearly two-thirds of the set were on public display at one time, though in different locales, Another milestone within the scholarship of the murals was Arnold Glimcher's vital interview of Rothko's assistant Dan Rice, printed in the exhibition catalogue.

Also in 1978, a major exhibition of Rothko's work was mounted at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.[42] Organized by Diane Waldman, then Curator of Exhibitions, it was the most comprehensive gathering of Rothko's work up to that point. In the catalogue, Waldman identified the changes to Rothko's style in the late 1950s, including his shift to larger canvases, more opaque colors, and more somber mood. While no Seagram works were included in the exhibition, she also rightly pointed out that Rothko had achieved, with the Seagram project, a series of firsts: the first time he painted in a series, his first acceptance of a mural commission, the first time he used door-like shapes in his abstract phase, and the first time he used the horizontal format for his abstractions. These are some of the reasons why the project became, Waldman argued, "the first time...the work is brooding, forbidding, and tragic."[43] But, rather than position the series as the catalyst for the drastic shift, Waldman instead argued that the shift was

20, 1971-January 2, 1972); and in part to the Hayward Gallery, London (February 2-March 12, 1972).

[41] See Anfam cat. nos. 635, 638, 639, 641, 649, 650, 652, 654, 656 and 659.

[42] See *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: A Retrospective*, Diane Waldman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in collaboration with The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1978).

[43] Ibid., 65.

"clarified and emphatically reflected in "the Seagram series.[44] Prior to the Seagram paintings, Rothko's scale of choice was indeed large scale but never mural sized. Similarly, he made significantly dark paintings only occasionally before the Seagram set.

Five years later, in 1983, Dore Ashton's biography *About Rothko* provided a personal account of the artist's life and art as told through the lens of someone who knew him firsthand.[45] Ashton devoted nearly an entire chapter to the Seagram project, reinforcing the importance of a lecture Rothko gave at Pratt Institute in New York, on October 29, 1958. Ashton attended the talk, and published her notes originally in 1958.[46] Since the lecture occurred during the Seagram project, excerpts derived from Rothko's comments form a crucial piece of the foundation of scholarship on the Seagram project. Two additional contributions in Ashton's chapter clarified how Rothko understood the 1958-59 project. First, she noted:

> At the time he was working arduously on the Seagram commission, he was having an intense debate with himself about the meaning of art. He sought out friends who themselves were given to searching questions. There were long philosophical evenings.[47]

Ashton's contention that "Rothko's peculiar fusion of architectural tact and painterly individualism" is a crucial springboard for the current project.[48]

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[44] See *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: A Retrospective*, Diane Waldman, ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in collaboration with The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1978): 65.

[45] See Dore Ashton, *About Rothko* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983).

[46] The first thorough account of the lecture was by Dore Ashton, "Art: Lecture by Rothko," *New York Times* (Oct. 31, 1958). See also Dore Ashton, *About Rothko* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983): 44. A transcript was later published as "Address to Pratt Institute, November 1958" in Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art*, Miguel Lopez-Remiro, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2006): 125-128.

[47] Ibid., 150.

[48] Ibid., 154.

The late 1980s were a period of reinvigorated investigations of Rothko's work and in particular his Seagram paintings. This fruitful period of scholarship followed the decision by the Mark Rothko Foundation, earlier in the decade, to encourage more research of the Foundation's collection. In 1986, Donald Blinken, then President of the Foundation, clarified the function of the organization. The collection should be used "in a thoughtful manner for making long-term loans and outright gifts, or a combination of both, to deserving institutions at home and abroad," and the Foundation should consider itself "a fiduciary and intermediary for the works it had received."[49] As a result, Bonnie Clearwater, who became the curator of the Foundation, worked with the Foundation board and staff to donate works of art to twenty-nine American and foreign museums, an undertaking completed in 1986. The National Gallery of Art in Washington received the lion's share of the works, or, two hundred ninety-five paintings and six-hundred additional pieces. The Foundation also paved the way for the *Mark Rothko: 1903-1970* retrospective at the Tate Gallery, in 1987, and the catalogue raisonné of Rothko's works on canvas, published in 1998.[50]

A significant amount of important scholarship accompanied the London exhibition, which showcased the Tate's nine Seagram murals. Curated by Michael Compton, then Keeper of Museum Services at the Tate, the exhibit provided a greater context for the murals within the larger span of Rothko's oeuvre. With catalogue essays by Irving Sandler, Robert Rosenblum, Robert Goldwater, David Sylvester, Michael Compton, Bonnie Clearwater, and Dana Cranmer, the research presented in the exhibition

[49] Donald Blinken, "Introduction and Overview," *Eliminating the Obstacles Between the Painter and the Observer* (New York: Mark Rothko Foundation, 1986): 16.

[50] See David Anfam, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1998).

was by far the most thorough to date. As a result, the murals were touted, finally, as one of Rothko's great achievements. Sandler's introductory essay summarized the main themes of Rothko's work and scholarship.[51] These include Rothko's frustration with the commentary of art critics, the role of artists' statements in decoding their work, the influence of Henri Matisse and Milton Avery's work, Rothko's disapproval of Clement Greenberg's formalist analyses of his work, and the key ingredients of tragedy, the sublime as Edmund Burke defined it, spirituality, and myth. Continuing the line of inquiry into Rothko's Pratt lecture, Sandler speculated as to why Rothko gave the talk at that time, noting that Rothko "felt the need to refute his critics and chose to do so by giving" the talk.[52] Moreover, Sandler argued that Rothko, at Pratt, "formulated his self-image as an artist."[53] Compton references Rothko's 1959 Italy trip, key details of his Bowery studio, pictorial characteristics of the three sets of Seagram murals, and a theory concerning how Rothko might have installed the murals in the restaurant. No references are given to Rothko's desire to unite pictorial-architectural concerns. Compton's explanation for why Rothko rejected the commission follows the scholarly consensus that Rothko "did not want his pictures to be a background to the eating of the privileged."[54]

Two exhibitions in 1989 made important contributions to the study of the Seagram works. In Basel, the largest grouping of Seagram canvases, even up to the present, was assembled for the exhibition *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York* at the

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[51] The essay was published three years earlier. See *Mark Rothko: Paintings1948-1969*, Irving Sandler (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1983). The exhibition at the Pace ran from April 1-30, 1983.

[52] Irving Sandler, "Mark Rothko (in memory of Robert Goldwater)," *Mark Rothko: 1903-197*0 (London: Tate, 1987): 15.

[53] Irving Sandler, in Ibid., 16.

[54] Michael Compton, "Mark Rothko, the Subjects of the Artist," *Mark Rothko: 1903-197*0, 62.

Kunsthalle Basel, held in the first half of 1989. Twenty-eight out of the original thirty works were displayed.[55] As Thomas Kellein explained in his catalogue essay, the main thrust of the Basel show was, as mentioned, to attempt to reconstruct how Rothko might have arranged the series at the Four Seasons [56] The exhibition was quickly followed by the exhibition *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project* at the Tate Gallery, Liverpool. In his catalogue essay for the Liverpool show, Michael Compton repeated some of the major threads of preexisting scholarship on the Seagram paintings, referencing the Boscoreale frescoes and Rothko's 1959 European trip. To these, Compton added two important additions to the literature: the inclusion of architectural plans of the Four Seasons as well as photos of the spaces Rothko was commissioned to augment. Both encouraged a more in-depth reading of the paintings in relation to the architecture of the space.

James E. B. Breslin's analysis of the Seagram project, in his biography *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (1993), also added significantly to the Seagram literature.[57] That the book begins with an account of the Seagram works suggested that Breslin attempted to challenge the marginalization of the project within most Rothko scholarship to date. As with his predecessors, Breslin provided details of the Bowery studio, the logistics of the commission, Rothko's ambivalence about exhibiting his work, and the question of why Rothko might have taken on such a project. Unlike prior Rothko scholars, Breslin provided more detailed information both about the Seagram corporation and the reasons

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[55] The two works not included were Anfam cat. nos. 643 (the weakest of the set) and no. 648 (the only Seagram work owned exclusively by Christopher Rothko).

[56] Thomas Kellein, *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel Publications, 1989): 2-9.

[57] See James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993): 371-410.

its leader Samuel Bronfman sought to make such an impressive and attention-seeking building.[58] Its publication provided an even clearer biographical context for the exhibitions and publications that followed. Breslin's biography was quickly followed by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum-issued book *Mark Rothko in New York* by Diane Waldman. It highlighted the forty-nine works by Rothko in New York City's five major art museums at that time: the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Guggenheim's own collection. In her review of Rothko's oeuvre, Waldman devoted four paragraphs to the Seagram project, locating the works in the context of Rothko's career.

Later in the decade, the *Mark Rothko* retrospective held at the National Gallery in Washington in 1998, became the most comprehensive exhibition of Rothko's work since the 1978 Guggenheim show. The ambitious installation reflected the donation of nearly one thousand Rothko works by the Foundation to the Gallery, in 1985 and 1986. Various catalogue essays provided key details about the Seagram project. John Gage reviewed the literature on Rothko's color, and in the process found compelling links between the color juxtapositions of the Seagram paintings and similar juxtapositions found throughout Rothko's abstract period.[59] Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty focused on issues of tragedy, spectatorship, and spirituality, highlighting the ways that Rothko employed the theme of tragedy in various career phases. They argued that the Seagram paintings "launch the viewer on a sea of paint stretched literally over vast canvases, searching in

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[58] See also Michael Robert Marrus, *Samuel Bronfman: The Life and Times of Seagram's Mr. Sam* (Boston: University Press of New England [for] Brandeis Univ., 1991). Marrus suggests that Bronfman's need to compensate for the insecurity of being Jewish might have triggered his desire to have such a high-profile and lavish headquarters.

[59] John Gage, "Rothko: Color as Subject," Jeffrey Weiss, *Mark Rothko*, ed., 247-263.

the darkness for whatever incident may be offered."[60] The authors also raised the issue of whether the paintings are dark enough in mood to trigger a darkened response from viewers. Here they seem to suggest that this in fact does not generally occur. Novak and O'Doherty observe that the color, composition, and overall non-representational nature of the paintings "may return to the watcher self-generated illusions that he or she mistakes for profundities."[61] Their assessment that the Seagram paintings reflect Rothko's "spiritual quest" encourages interpretations of the transcendental nature of Rothko's abstractions.[62]

Two important recent exhibitions focused even more attention on the Seagram murals. The first was *Mark Rothko*, held at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, in 2007-08.[63] The second show, *Rothko*, held at the Tate Modern, in 2008-09, was the first comprehensive examination of Rothko late works, ca. 1958-1970.[64] It included galleries devoted to the Seagram murals, with one main gallery housing the Tate's nine murals from the series installed together in a single oversized gallery with an additional five murals. Installing the works in this manner, in close proximity to one another, drew attention to the serial nature of the Seagram paintings in order to show how repetition influenced Rothko's subsequent work, including his two mural projects from the 1960s

[60] Rothko's preoccupation with the theme of transcendence forms the thesis of a later chapter. Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko's Dark Paintings: Tragedy and Void," *Mark Rothko*, Jeffrey Weiss, ed., 271.
[61] Ibid., 271.
[62] Ibid., 272.
[63] See *Rothko*, Oliver Wick, ed. (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2007).
[64] See *Rothko*, Achim Borchart-Hume, ed. (London: Tate, 2008).

and the black/gray paintings he made just before his death. As Rothko declared, "if a thing is worth doing once, it is worth doing over and over again."[65]

Several ideas, however, have either not been addressed in the literature, or have been significantly downplayed. Aiming to correct this, the next chapter will examine issues of space, as defined by the environments created by the installation of a set of abstractions by Rothko. Rothko's many attempts to oversee the installation of his abstractions will be revisited in this context as evidence for his desire to combine painting and architecture. His interest in what is now considered to be spectatorship, or the types of relationships we can have with a work of art, will also play a role here, to flush out that Rothko was more interested in what he wanted the viewer to do within an environment of his works rather than in the individual paintings that made up that environment.[66] It will

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[65] Breslin, 707.

[66] For pioneering works on spectatorship, see David Carrier, "Art and Its Spectators," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 45-1 (1986): 5-18, Michael Ann Holly, "Past Looking," *Critical Inquiry* 16-2 (1990): 371-96, and Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of an Image*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996). For specific spectatorial analyses by the authors mentioned, see also Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969) and Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, (London: Phaidon, 1963); Leo Steinberg, *Michelangelo's Last Paintings*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972) and Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972); Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1980), and Fried, "The Structure of Beholding in Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (June 1983): 666, 676; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, David Couzens Hoy, ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986); Robert Rosenblum, *On Modern American Art: Selected Essays*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999); Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1993), and Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966); and *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments*, Michael Auping, ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987).

also clarify how Rothko ultimately prioritized space(s) over object(s) in the Seagram project. I will show that assembling spaces with his canvases was, throughout the 1950s, just as important for Rothko as making individual paintings, and that his fascination with space provided one of the primary reasons why he accepted the commission. The second chapter will also analyze Rothko's interest in installation, lighting, and other curatorial issues to the architecturally-minded concerns of key contemporary artists and curators. While the Seagram project was an extension of his life-long interest in architecture, it also seems to have been specifically influenced by a reinvigorated interest in the intersections between painting and architecture.

The third chapter will probe Rothko's two visits to Italy, in 1950 and 1959. As established in the literature, Rothko was well aware of the art of Italy from antiquity to the then present. Re-examining his experiences in Pompeii, Tarquinia, Paestum, and Florence will allow us to dig deeper into the roles played in the Seagram paintings by color, space, pictorial-architectural relationships, and mood in relation to the various Italian sites he visited. The goals of the chapter are to identify the aggressive aspects of the pictorial-architectural environments Rothko saw in Italy, as well as providing potential reasons why he wanted to antagonize his targeted audience with his Seagram works. The uneasy qualities of the Seagram paintings provides further evidence that supports the central thesis of Meyer Schapiro's classic essay "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art" (1957), that vanguard art has a provocative potential.

The fourth chapter will continue the thread of locating Rothko's aggression, specifically in relation to Rothko's earliest canvases. Select works from Rothko's figurative period ca. 1924-1940 will be discussed to reveal precisely how he employed

architectural settings is an aggressive manner throughout the first phase of his career. Key influences on the early works, and in particular on their aggressive character, will be considered. These will be traced to the painters under whom he studied, Arshile Gorky and Max Weber, in addition to the work of the artists with whom he was most closely associated in his early period, Milton Avery and Adolph Gottlieb. The goal here is to show that Rothko did not arrive at such an aggressive pictorial-architectural style in the late 1950s, but that he instead had been developing it since his first extant canvas in 1924.

In the fifth chapter, I will hone in on the shared theme of transcendence in Rothko's abstractions and in Mies van der Rohe's architecture, an important link also never before addressed. The issue of transcendence in relation to Rothko's work often generates conversations that aim at identifying the more spiritual/religious and "sublime" experiences viewers often have with Rothko's abstractions. I will also demonstrate that the Seagram paintings actually transcend the traditional categorical separation of painting and architecture per se. Seeking to overcome the limitations of the two mediums compelled him to engage in two additional mural projects, for Harvard University and for the de Menils. I will show how Rothko, with the Rothko Chapel in particular, went beyond the medium of painting in order to create an environment within which he envisioned viewers would have spiritually transcendent experiences.

The last chapter investigates another ignored aspect of the Seagram paintings: their connection to what is perhaps best considered the post-Abstract Expressionist avant-garde art in New York ca. 1955-65. I will identify the important role architecturally-grounded themes/motifs plays in the early work of Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Louise Nevelson, Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella, and in the work of the most important

Minimalists. Whether he sought to align himself with the output of a set of artists who essentially replaced him is unclear. There is also no way to state unequivocally that Rothko referenced architecture to fashion an aggressive space in the restaurant in order to reclaim an avant-gardist position he knew he had lost, on account of the rise of the artists who had emerged after the so-called triumph of American painting. His interrogation of the division between painting and architecture in the Seagram project, however, nonetheless aligned him with the younger, more cutting-edge generation of artists at the very moment his currency as an avant-garde kingpin withered.

CHAPTER 2:
SPACE

This chapter examines how Rothko's use of large scale canvases for his signature abstractions, coupled with his fixation on how they should be installed and lit, point toward his desire to create architecturally-minded paintings and environments for the Four Seasons. His ideas concerning space will be examined, in addition to how those ideas related to attempts by some of his contemporaries to merge painting and architecture in 1950s vanguard art in New York. The goal here is to show that one of the central reasons why Rothko wholeheartedly embraced the Seagram project, despite its problematic identification with the world of corporate establishment, was because it afforded him the opportunity to take his experiments with interweaving paintings and architecture to another level.

For Rothko, space meant different things at different times.[67] In 1934, he used the term to describe the basic pictorial condition of plastic illusionism, within which one

[67] One of the earliest pioneers of space was August Schmarsow, a late nineteenth-century German professor of art history (mostly at the University of Leipzig), whose investigations concerning the relationship between architectural space and form profoundly changed the discussion of both subjects. As Bernard Berenson argued, Schmarsow's theories changed how space was understood, from the idea of space as a void, to, as Berenson saw it, a place where "objects, no matter how large or how small, exist only to make us realize mere extension." See Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* (New York: Pantheon, 1948): 88. Schmarsow's emphasis on space over form, what Berenson read as the extension of objects into space, critiqued the dominant thinking in architectural history at that time, one that prioritized form over space. As Mitchell W. Schwarzer observed, Schmarsow was "the first to formulate a comprehensive theory of architecture as a spatial creation," and, as such, differed "most from other theorists in his insistence that bodily movement through space rather than stationary perception of form was the essence of architecture." See Mitchell W. Schwarzer and August Schmarsow, "The Emergence of Architectural Space: August Schmarsow's Theory of 'Raumgestaltung,'" *Assemblage* No. 15 (Aug. 1991): 50. As viewers positioned in the labyrinth of an installation of Rothko's abstractions (and, of

could “limit space arbitrarily and then heroify [sic] his objects,” or, conversely, “infinitize [sic] space, dwarfing the importance of objects, causing them to merge and become a part of the space world.”[68] Writing ca. 1940-41, in his chapter on “Space” from his manuscript, he described what he termed “different kinds” of pictorial space, comparing two “divergent spatial philosophies.” The first is what he called “tactile space,” which he defined as the “air, which exists between objects or shapes in the picture,” giving a “sensation of a solid.” The second is “illusory plasticity,” or “an appearance of weight for objects themselves and none for the air that surrounds them.”[69] Examining how space functions in various styles, such as Impressionism, Italian Renaissance, Egyptian, or child art, among others, he concludes the small chapter with a “philosophical basis” for space, which, he argues, is “the chief plastic manifestation of the artist’s conception of reality.”[70] By 1943, his comment that his paintings do not “create or…emphasize a formal color-space arrangement” suggested that he had moved beyond a limited definition of space in the pictorial-illusory sense.[71] Throughout the early 1950s, Rothko reiterated his rejection of space as a measure of depth or flatness. In 1952, he declared that his paintings “do not deal in space.”[72] In 1953, he told William Seitz that “space has nothing to do with my work,” and, in 1954, argued to Katharine Kuh that “If…I were to undertake the discussion of ‘space’ I would first have to disabuse the word from its current meaning in books on art…and then I would have to redefine

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course, those of other painters), we are free to define and negotiate the liberating space as Plummer explained it, thus prioritizing space over form and experience over object, as Schmarsow defined.

[68] Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 10.

[69] Rothko, *The Artist’s Reality: Philosophies of Art*, 56.

[70] Ibid., 59.

[71] Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 39.

[72] Ibid., 78.

and distort it beyond all recognition in order to attain a common meeting ground for discussion.[73]

By the mid-1950s, however, his comments that some of his works "do very well in a confined space," that his pictures "have space," and, finally, his assessment of which types of space work best for the installation of his canvases all suggest that Rothko had shifted away from thinking about space only as a plastic concept.[74] Thus, by the mid-1950s, just before the Seagram paintings, Rothko had prioritized the role of space in an architectural sense.[75] In other words, when we stand in a gallery in the midst of an environment of Rothko's abstractions, we stand in architectural space.[76] As Peter Selz observed, in 1961:

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[73] Ibid., 85, 92-93.

[74] Ibid., 100, 112, 117.

[75] There are, of course, many types and functions of architectural space, as defined by a variety of architects and scholars of architecture. On the issue of types of space, see, for example, Alexander Purves' differentiation of centric space (as in the igloo, the tipi, the Roman Pantheon, and so on) and linear space, which emphasizes line and a straight path of movement through space. Alexander Purves, "The Persistence of Formal Patterns," *Perspecta* Vol. 19 (1982): 138-163. In regard to function of architectural space, Kenneth D. B. Carruthers has observed that "space, not form" is "the primary focus" of architecture, defending his assertion socio-culturally (in relation to the differences between modern western houses and their Islamic counterparts). See Kenneth D. B. Carruthers, "Architecture is Space: The Space-Positive Tradition," *Journal of Architectural Education (1984-)* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Spring 1986): 17. The architect Pietro Belluschi has shown that "architecture is space and form serving a social purpose beyond esthetic satisfaction." See Pietro Belluschi, quoted in Louis Kahn, Paul Weiss, and Vincent Scully, "On the Responsibility of the Architect," *Perspecta* Vol. 2 (1953): 47.

[76] Pioneering installations during the Second World War in New York explored issues of space, with the result of uniting pictures with architecture. [you know Lewis Kachur's book?] Among the most important include Marcel Duchamp's *Mile of String* installation for the *First Papers of Surrealism* retrospective (see Fig. 14) organized by André Breton, and temporarily installed on the second floor of the former Whitelaw Reid Mansion, in 1942). Peggy Guggenheim's short-lived galleries *Guggenheim Jeune* (1938-39) in London and *The Art of This Century Gallery* (1942-47) in New York were important venues for exhibitions that explored the spatial intersections of pictures and architecture. Rothko's first solo exhibition was held at the New York gallery from January 9-February

> The "space" is not really *in* these pictures of Rothko's, but rather it inheres in the sensations of actual physical imminence…which they evoke in the viewer…And since man can be cognizant of existence…only in a continuum of space, the space sensations in these pictures actually occur outside of the picture plane, on some meeting ground between the picture and the viewer.[77]

Once he arrived at this realization, he quickly moved to structure his canvases into sets that created space, in order to aggressively confront viewers with his abstractions.

For Rothko, large scale canvases facilitated the creation of these environments.[78] In 1949, he abandoned the tradition of easel painting and embraced this scale, a shift that allowed him to focus on strengthening the relationship between his paintings and viewers. His large canvases, as Radka Zagoroff Donnell observed, "respond to the picture plane more as to a part of architecture," defining that architecture "by [an]

4, 1945. For more on the New York space, see Susan Davidson and Philip Rylands, eds., *Peggy Guggenheim & Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century* (Venice: Peggy Guggenheim Collection, 2005); and Mary V. Dearborn, *Mistress of Modernism: The Life of Peggy Guggenheim* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004): 124-136. As Clement Greenberg described, in a 1943 description of the New York gallery, artworks exhibited in that environment "enter the actual presence of the spectator…as do the walls, the furniture, and people…[in a space where] unframed paintings are suspended in mid-air by ropes running from ceiling to floor, hung on panels at right angels to the wall, thrust out on concave walls on arms, placed on racks at knee level, or, with seeming paradox, put into peepshows and view-boxes." Clement Greenberg, "Review of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection," *The Nation* (Jan. 30, 1943), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Perceptions and Judgments, Vol. 1*, John O'Brian, ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986): 140.

[77] Peter Selz, *Mark Rothko*, 1961, 12.

[78] Rothko's embrace of large-scale canvases by 1950 also recalls the influence of Edmund Burke's writings. According to Irving Sandler, Rothko had read Burke's 1756 treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* before 1948, and was quite interested in the sublime as Burke had defined it. See Sandler, "Mark Rothko (In Memory of Robert Goldwater)," *Mark Rothko 1903-1970*, 11. [do you feel, then, that you might discuss the "sublime" in relation to issues of transcendence in Rothko's work]

intrusion" into the spectatorial space.[79] In 1954, Rothko explained our encounter with his oversized paintings further:

> [I] hang the largest pictures so that they must be first encountered at close quarters, so that the first experience is to be within the picture…I also hang the pictures low rather than high, and particularly in the sense that the largest ones, often as close to the floor as is feasible.[80]

Rothko thus viewed intimacy as something to preserve.[81] By the end of the 1950s, in the midst of the Seagram project, he described, in his Pratt lecture, how he wanted "to create a state of intimacy – an immediate transaction…[because] large pictures take you into them…Scale is of tremendous importance to me – human scale…large pictures are like dramas in which one participates in a direct way."[82] "In his move to a larger format," Anna Chave noted, Rothko "acted on what was for him a new awareness of scale as a function of the relation between the size of a human body and the size of an object and its parts."[83] As Glenn Phillips observed, "most Rothko enthusiasts would agree that the act

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[79] Radka Zagoroff Donnell, "Space in Abstract Expressionism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter, 1964): 240.

[80] Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 99-100.

[81] Ashton, (*About Rothko*, 135) explained Rothko's fondness for large-scale canvases: "In 1956 when he still worked in a cramped room and could never have more than one or two of his large canvases visible, he used to keep one of his earliest huge abstractions, Number 22 (1949), against a wall in a narrow storage area."

[82] Recorded from the Pratt lecture. See also Mark Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," in *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, where Rothko explains, "I think of my pictures as dramas; the shapes in the pictures are the performers…Neither the action nor the actors can be anticipated, or described in advance. They begin as an unknown adventure in an unknown space."

[83] Chave, 119. See also Diane Waldman, *Mark Rothko in New York* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1994): 22. Waldman asserts: "Despite the large scale and commanding presence, even the largest of Rothko's canvases…are intimately and emotionally compelling. Rothko was well aware of this, and in a symposium held in the spring of 1951 he talked about his desire to retain a sense of intimacy within even the largest of his paintings and to avoid the bombast that characterizes so many large paintings throughout history."

of looking at a classic Rothko painting can be synonymous with an unmistakable perceptual and bodily affect."[84] Both assessments parallel Peter Selz's contention, that, for Rothko, "the painting itself is the proclamation; it is an autonomous object and its very size announces its eminence."[85]

Rothko also understood that his large-scale canvases function as theatrical stages that transform the viewer into an actor who performs a scene from his/her own life.[86] The drama between the artwork and spectator is intensified with a larger canvas. The "dramatic" notion would have been underscored by the fact that one enters the Grill Room (see Figs. 11-12) from the Pool Room by walking a few steps up. This would have produced a the "stage set" quality for the murals in the room, as Compton called it, in line with Rothko's ideas concerning "dramas" from his essay "The Romantics were Prompted" (1947).[87] The paintings would have been like actors, all performing respective parts of a play designed to affect those dining in the restaurant. Compton also argued that the Seagram paintings were designed to be installed in the restaurant "rather high up, [to] be seen from a variety of angles and would be scanned as a group by eyes moving predominantly in a horizontal plane, that is, they would be seen as architecture."[88]

Employing the scale-space binary after 1949 positioned Rothko within an increasing trend in New York's avant-garde at that time. As Clement Greenberg

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[84] Glenn Phillips, "Introduction: Irreconcilable Rothko," *Seeing Rothko*, 1.
[85] Peter Selz, in *Mark Rothko*, 1961, 9.
[86] Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*, 183.
[87] Michael Compton, "Mark Rothko: The Subjects of the Artist," *Mark Rothko: 1903-1970*, ex. cat. (London: Tate, 1987): 60.
[88] Michael Compton, Introduction, *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project*, ex. cat. (The Tate Gallery, Liverpool) (London: Tate, 1988): 12.

asserted, in 1948, the tension between large-scale painting and easel painting was in fact a central component of American postwar abstract painting, which gave even more agency to the role of the large scale.[89] Robert Motherwell, an unofficial spokesperson for the Abstract Expressionists as contributor and editor of various small periodicals read by many members of New York's avant-garde at that time, disseminated his ideas about scale and space to Rothko and his contemporaries.[90] Writing in 1949, Motherwell clarified what space was, and how it functioned:

> The nothing the painter begins with is known as Space. Space is simple: it is merely the canvas before it has been painted. Space is very complex: it is nothing wrapped around every object in the world, soothing or strangling it.[91]

Motherwell's colossal signature paintings embraced the space of the viewer, most notably those from his *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* series. "The large format, at one blow," he wrote, "destroyed the century-long tendency of the French to domesticize [sic] modern painting, to make it intimate. We replaced the nude girl and the French door with a modern Stonehenge, with the sense of the sublime and the tragic."[92] In addition to Motherwell, the massive scale of Rothko's Seagram murals is also indebted to Jackson Pollock, and to his massive *Mural* (1943-44, University of Iowa Museum of Art, Fig.

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[89] Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," *Partisan Review* (Jan. 1948), reprinted in John O'Brien, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2*, ed., 192-196.

[90] Motherwell helped edit *Possibilities* and *Modern Artists in America*. For more on the role of the small periodical in disseminating ideas throughout the Abstract Expressionist community, see Ann Eden Gibson, *Issues in Abstract Expressionism: The Artist-Run Periodicals* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1990).

[91] Robert Motherwell, *The Intrasubjectives* (New York: Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, 1949); in Landau, 156.

[92] Statement by Robert Motherwell from *Artforum* Vol 4, No. 1 (September 1965), quoted in Sandler, Tr*iumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*, 156.

15).[93] Following Francis O'Connor, Lawrence Alloway has argued that Pollock's major work was an important catalyst for Rothko's most architectural projects. "Pollock, in 1947," Alloway wrote, "…opened the way with his version of the death-of-easel painting topic which led him to propose paintings that were halfway between easel and wall," ultimately inspiring Rothko's "environmental ambitions."[94]

The first important project that crystallized the importance of pictorial-architectural relationships within the Abstract Expressionist community was the exhibition *Murals in Modern Architecture*, in 1949, at the Betty Parsons Gallery. It

[93] At more than eight by nineteen feet, it is among the most architectural work of the Abstract Expressionist generation. Pollock augmented the architecture of his apartment, removing a wall between two separate rooms in his studio to make a space large enough to accommodate the canvas. He also made the work for a specific architectural space (Guggenheim's Manhattan townhouse), and painted it on canvas (taking Marcel Duchamp's advice) so that it would be portable, ultimately altering the canvas (by trimming eight inches off one end of the work) to fit into that space. See Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1989): 469. Moreover, Pollock composed it with paints and brushes designed for architectural use (for house-painters), embracing such non-traditional materials as a "natural growth out of a need." Jackson Pollock, quoted in Pepe Karmel and Kirk Varnedoe, *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, eds. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999): 21. Pollock's essays, from 1947, for a Guggenheim grant, reference not only the large scale (describing how he wants his work to "function between the easel and mural," and that "the easel picture" is a "dying form"), but also the architectural space of his studio, the "hard wall or the floor," where he preferred to work. See Jackson Pollock, Application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, 1947, in Ibid., 17. Pollock's declaration from 1947 of being "in the painting" drew even more attention to the growing trend to interrogate the intersections between painting and architecture. Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* Vol. 1 (Winter 1947-48): 78-83. The exhibition of *Mural* (1943-44) (at the *Large Scale Modern Paintings* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, in 1947) drew further attention to the spectatorial space suggested by such large-scale works. What became clear with this exhibition was that such massive paintings are not meant to be read as mere objects. Instead, they are vehicles that encourage spectatorial performance.

[94] Lawrence Alloway, "Residual Sign Systems in Abstract Expressionism," *Artforum* (Nov. 1973): 36-43, reprinted in Ellen G. Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005): 319. See also Francis V. O'Connor, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967): 40, 313.

included a model Peter Blake made, within which miniature replicas of Pollock canvases were installed inside a rectangular glass pavilion.[95] The model allowed Pollock's paintings to be "suspended between the earth and the sky, and set between mirrored walls so as to extend into infinity," as Blake wrote.[96] With glass walls, the ideal museum would seem to dissolve into its targeted natural setting, not unlike how the paintings housed within it would dissolve into adjacent architecture. Both with the model and with the actual installation at the Parsons, Blake made a space for Pollock's murals that equalized the architecture and the paintings, in a scheme within which neither gained prominence over the other. Arthur Drexler emphasized this breakthrough in his review of the exhibition, referring to the paintings as "walls," and observing how the project "suggests a re-integration of painting and architecture wherein painting is the architecture."[97]

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[95] In the fall of 1949, Jackson Pollock asked Peter Blake (the official head of the Department of Architecture and Industrial Design at the Museum of Modern Art, but unofficially in a subordinate role to Philip Johnson) to design the installation for his upcoming exhibition. Enamored with how Pollock (in the summer of 1949) employed the architecture of his studio (walls, floors) to arrange his signature canvases so that the paintings dissolved [into] the architecture, Blake made what he called an "Ideal Exhibition" model, and placed it on view in the exhibition. Blake pulled inspiration from, among other places, Mies van der Rohe's Museum for a Small City project (of 1942, details of which were published in Architectural Forum in 1943). See "Museum: Mies van der Rohe, Architect," explanatory text by Mies van der Rohe, *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 78 (May 1943): 84-85. This would also be the central thrust of Blake's first realized design (for the Blake House in Water Mill, Long Island, of 1952). The implications of the model were far-reaching, ultimately suggesting that paintings and architecture could be designed in tandem. This was quite different from simply installing paintings in an already-conceived architectural space.

[96] Peter Blake, *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept* (New York: Knopf, 1993): 111-112.

[97] Arthur Drexler, "Unframed Space: A Museum for Jackson Pollock's Paintings," *Interiors* (Jan. 1950): 90-91. Unlike traditional wall painting or murals, designed to encourage a penetration of the wall, Pollock's paintings, like all colossal Abstract Expressionist canvases, are flat, a quality that is reinforced by their tactility, further

Measuring the impact of the Pollock-Blake collaboration points toward why Rothko evolved in the early 1950s toward a more architecturally-minded practice. First, Marcel Breuer, whom Pollock brought to the exhibition, was so taken by the challenge of uniting painting and architecture that he commissioned Pollock to make a mural for the Geller House on Long Island, a project for which Breuer used glass walls among other ingredients to negotiate pictorial-architectural ideas.[98] Secondly, the gallery owner Samuel Kootz, also a key member of the board of the Museum of Modern Art, seeing the potential for forging connections between paintings and architecture, conceived his 1950 exhibition *The Muralist and the Modern Architect* around the idea of collaborations between avant-garde painters and architects.[99] "The modern painter is in constant search of a wall," Kootz wrote in the exhibition catalogue.[100] Due to the size constraints of Kootz's small gallery, and borrowing from the impact of the model at Pollock 1949 show

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suggesting that they should be read as new types of walls. The paintings were not only independent of the actual walls on which they were installed, but also devoid of the perspective that seems to penetrate the wall behind the painting. Thus, at the moment of the first triumph of Abstract Expressionism, the Pollock-Blake collaboration signaled a new chapter in the relationship between paintings and architecture, one in which the actual wall of the gallery and the pictorial competed with one another for the attention of the viewer, a situation in the western tradition that William Rubin described as the "window" becoming the "wall." See William Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition," *Artforum* Vol. 5, No. 6 (March 1967): 36. The model occupied a central position in Pollock's Long Island studio after the exhibition (see Naifeh and Smith, 613), suggesting that Pollock continued to work through the challenge of how to achieve a union between painting and architecture, one crystallized his famous "death of easel painting" phrase.

[98] Naifeh and Smith, 600, 607.

[99] The pairings included Adolph Gottlieb and Marcel Breuer (on a Vassar dormitory), David Hare and Frederick Kiesler (Kiesler's Endless House project), Hans Hofmann and José Luis Sert (civic center in Peru), Robert Motherwell and Walter Gropius's Architectural Collaborative (public schools in Attleboro, Massachusetts), and William Baziotes and Philip Johnson (Wiley House in New Canaan).

[100] *The Muralist and the Modern Architect*, ex. cat. (Oct. 23, 1950 (New York: Kootz Gallery, 1950).

at Parsons, models of the collaborative projects that weren't for sale, sufficed to give a sense of the pictorial-architectural impact. Artists provided smaller versions of their intended paintings for sale. A review of the exhibition highlighted a problem of the marriage of artists and architects: that "all five architects gave their artists space in buildings for which they had already drawn plans," in the sense that "in most cases the space was not planned for an artist."[101]

All of this laid the foundation for the Philip Johnson-organized symposium "The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture," held at the Museum of Modern Art, in March 1951, during which Johnson essentially promoted the supremacy of architecture over the other arts. Rothko's attempts to "invert this endemic condition," as Eric Lum observed, however, drew more attention to just how architecturally-minded his goals were for the project.[102] James Johnson Sweeney, then Guggenheim Museum director and one of the speakers at the symposium, noted:

> The combination of painting, sculpture, and architecture is desirable….First, from the viewpoint of the individual arts, because the conception of any one of these in isolation is a limitation. Interrelated, as they have been in all the greatest periods of art, they contribute to one another. Isolated they dry up, lose their associative values, become inbred, spiritually dwarfed. Second, from the viewpoint of the public, a failure to interrelate them is a deprivation, a limitation of the full emotional stimulus their orchestration provides—for the whole of these arts properly combined is greater than the sum of its parts. Finally, from the viewpoint of architecture, the discouragement of their combination would be a fatal impoverishment, for painting and sculpture in architecture are an extension

[101] Review in *Interiors* (Nov. 1950).

[102] Eric Lum has also studied the Parsons and Kootz exhibitions, along with the MoMA symposium in the context of Rothko's architectural practice in the 1950s. However, this current project expands on his analyses. See Eric Lum, "Pollock's Promise: Toward an Abstract Expressionist Architecture," *Assemblage*, No. 39 (Aug. 1999): 62-93. I propose to build on Lum's important contribution, however, by locating the genesis of Rothko's pictorial-architectural concerns much earlier in his career (in his figurative period). See Eric Lum, "Pollock's Promise: Toward an Abstract Expressionist Architecture," *Assemblage*, No. 39 (Aug. 1999): 77.

> of its imaginative factor just as representation is an extension of the imaginative factor in painting and sculpture.[103]

Sweeney's call for a new American *Gesamtkunstwerk*—one that symbolized the postwar era, uniting artists and architects—was decidedly at odds with Clement Greenberg's repeated claims for the purity of painting.[104] But, it wasn't at odds with Rothko, who also spoke at the symposium:

> I paint very large pictures, I realize that historically the function of painting large pictures is something very grandiose and pompous. The reason I paint them however – I think it applies to other painters I know – is precisely because I want to be intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience, to look upon an experience as a stereopticon view or with a reducing glass. However you paint the larger picture, you are in it. It isn't something you command.[105]

Johnson pressed Rothko on the issue of the large scale. "I hope all these big painters, from Rothko to Motherwell," he said, "are all tending towards more architectural work,

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[103] "A Symposium on How to Combine Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture," *Interiors* (Aug. 1951): 102.

[104] Despite his insistence on modernist purity and the separation of painting from other mediums, Clement Greenberg recognized the central role of architecture in large scale Abstract Expressionist works.[he also talks about the mural] In 1948, he observed that large works "spread over" and "acknowledge…[the] physical reality" of the wall. See Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collective Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2,* John O'Brian, ed., 194-95. Such comments, as William Kaizen observed, suggest the "dissolution [of painting] into the space of architecture," a tendency Greenberg sought "to repress." William Kaizen, "Framed Space: Allan Kaprow and the Spread of Painting, *Grey Rom*, No. 13 (Autumn, 2003): 85.

[105] "The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture," March 19, 1951, Archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, transcript 42. First published as "A Symposium on how to Combine Architecture, Painting and Sculpture," *Interiors* Vol. 110, No. 1 (May 1951); see also Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 74, and Breslin, 613.

but they are still not. They are still in the trend of easel painting" to which Rothko replied "I don't think it all comes [down] to easel painting."[106]

Rothko's intense focus on how his large-scale abstractions should be, in his view, exhibited also reflects a type of hybrid, pictorial-architectural enterprise. Wilder Green, who assisted Rothko on the installation of his 1961 retrospective, recalled that "Rothko feared that his works, if not appropriately displayed, would be considered too easy and decorative, and he agonized over every decision to their installation."[107] The promotion of the decorative qualities of an abstraction by Rothko, in an essay from the April 1950 issue of *Vogue* magazine, helps to explain why Rothko defended the installation of his canvases so strongly. In the article, his *Number 8* (1949) is treated as merely one of many ingredients in an overall interior design scheme. The author goes as far as to instruct the reader to install such a "non-objective painting" by itself, so that it "suggests a single guest of honor, serenity, undefined vistas, and as intangible excitement," quite different from the idea of the ensemble.[108] Similarly, Elaine de Kooning's 1958 essay, "Two Americans in Action: Franz Kline and Mark Rothko," also promoted the idea that Rothko's paintings "do not stay on the wall,"[109] but did so in the context of her contention that Rothko's works suited the comfortable décor of Jeanne Reynal's house. When she showed him a draft of the essay, he, of course, completely rejected it, in part

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[106] "Symposium: 'The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture,'" typescript March 19, 1951, Philip Johnson Papers, 1.22.a., The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, 99a, 44.

[107] Bonnie Clearwater, "How Rothko Looked at Rothko," *ARTnews* Vol. 84, No. 9 (Nov. 1985): 101.

[108] Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism* ( ): 404-05. See also Bonnie Clearwater, "How Rothko Looked at Rothko," *ARTnews* (Nov. 1985): 100-103.

[109] Elaine de Kooning, "Two Americans in Action: Franz Kline and Mark Rothko," (1958), reprinted in *Elaine de Kooning, The Spirit of Abstract Expressionism: Selected Writings* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1994): 67.

because of her suggestion that his paintings were decorative. He felt that his paintings were too foreboding to be merely ornamental. In an often-quoted letter to Katharine Kuh, from 1954, Rothko elaborated his concerns:

> Since my pictures are large, colorful, and unframed, and since museum walls are usually immense and formidable, there is the danger that the pictures relate themselves as decorative areas to the walls. This would be a distortion of their meaning, since the pictures are intimate and intense, and are the opposite of what is decorative.[110]

Rothko thus did not see his work integrating with architecture in an ornamental or decorative way, but in a more profound manner. As artist Gerhard Richter observed, Rothko's mature paintings "apparently had a transcendental aspiration…[but] were used for decorative purposes, and looked overly beautiful in collectors' apartments.[111] De Kooning's notion that "people looked very well against" Rothko's paintings, and that "they made a wonderful graceful décor" would have certainly infuriated Rothko.[112]

Rothko also carefully oversaw the installation of his abstractions at the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1955 and 1958, at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1954, at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, and, among other venues, at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, in 1961. As Michael Compton observed, Rothko would have "come to feel that even his own separately conceived works might make too many disparate demands on the viewer."[113] Rothko's obsessive prescriptions for the installations of his works indicate

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[110] Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 99.

[111] Gerhard Richter, quoted in Jacob Baal-Teshuva, *Mark Rothko* (Köln: Taschen, 2003): 66.

[112] Elaine de Kooning, interview conducted by Phyllis Tuchman August 27, 1981 (Smithsonian Archives of American Art).

[113] Michael Compton, Michael Compton, Introduction to Michael Compton, *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project*, ex. cat. (The Tate Gallery, Liverpool) (London: Tate, 1988): 10. Others have commented on Rothko's installation concerns. See

how seriously he considered the space outside his canvases, namely, the architectural space of the gallery. In 1952, for example, he stopped letting his works be included in group exhibitions, and described why he wouldn't let the Whitney Museum of American Art purchase only one of his paintings, on the grounds that a grouping of his pictures provided the ideal experience for him and his viewers, even despite the fact that he was fine with letting a work of his stand along, separate from anything else. In a letter to Lloyd Goodrich, then assistant director at the Whitney, he explained why he felt so strongly about how his pictures ought to be viewed:

> I will with gratitude accept any form of their exposition in which their life meaning can be maintained, and avoid all occasions where I think that this cannot be done. I know the likelihood of this being viewed as arrogance. But I assure you that nothing could be further from my mood which is one of great sadness about the situation…Nevertheless, in my own life at least, there must be some congruity between convictions and actions if I am to function and work.[114]

Sidney Janis, describing Rothko's first solo exhibition at his gallery, in 1955, said that Rothko "placed and re-placed every canvas…he juggled them until completely satisfied."[115] In 1961, Rothko visited the "Rothko Room" at the Phillips Collection in Washington (Fig. 16), the first permanent gallery in a public collection devoted to a specified arrangement of Rothko's works. Rothko insisted that his changes to the installation be implemented. Duncan Phillips, shortly thereafter, reversed Rothko's changes.

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especially Bonnie Clearwater, "How Rothko Looked at Rothko," *Art News* Vol. 84, No. 9 (Nov. 1985): 100-103; and Christoph Grunenberg, "Mark Rothko: Painting and Environment," Master's thesis, Courtauld Inst. of Art, 1988.

[114] Rothko, Letter to Lloyd Goodrich, Dec. 20, 1952, see Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 83-84.

[115] Sidney Janis, quoted in Bonnie Clearwater, "How Rothko Looked at Rothko," *ARTnews* Vol. 84, No. 9 (Nov. 1985): 102.

Rothko not only related his paintings to the architecture and space of a gallery, but also to each other, from canvas to canvas. As Jeffrey Weiss observed, Rothko denied the location of a fixed "top" and "bottom" in his abstractions. In this way, inversion becomes a key agent, that "across sequences of multiple works…takes the form of permutation: a series of paintings show vertical color relationships that are reversible or interchangeable…from canvas to canvas."[116] In a situation in which a sequence of Rothko's mature panels are installed collectively and in relative close proximity to one another, such color inversions link the otherwise disparate canvases into a more unified quasi-architectural "structure." Rothko's interest in the cycle-effect of his paintings is suggested by his prescription for how his works should be installed for a 1961 exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London:

> Walls should be made considerably off-white with umber and warmed by a little red…The light, whether natural or artificial, should not be too strong…The larger pictures should all be hung as close to the floor as possible, ideally not more than six inches above it…it is best not to follow a chronological order but to arrange them according to their best effect upon each other.[117]

In the letter, he specifically addressed three of the Seagram paintings, which he felt should be hung in a separate gallery, four-and-a-half feet above the floor. Such conditions would give the works "an excellent indication of the way in which the murals were intended to function."[118] While he initially developed this painting-to-painting relationship throughout the 1950s by mandating that his signature canvases be installed as groups, the Seagram project was his first design of works for a particular architectural

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[116] Jeffrey Weiss, "Dis-Orientation: Rothko's Inverted Canvases," *Seeing Rothko*, 143.

[117] Rothko, *Writings on Art*: 145-46.

[118] Ibid., pp 146

space. Moreover, Rothko endeavored to exhibit his large-scale pictures in small rooms in order to increase this sense of intimacy between his pictures and his audience, as in the Phillips gallery. These are the conditions Rothko wanted for the Seagram space. Rather than encouraging the relationships between a particular canvas and the individual who viewed it, Rothko endeavored to surround the spectator in a room consumed by his works. Such exhibitions of his canvases mounted jointly, what he intended for the initial Seagram's installation, intensified the various effects of his multiple abstract fields. As a result, paintings, space, and architecture all work together.

In addition to the space his paintings would occupy, and thus how they would be read in relation to the architecture of the room, Rothko also fastidiously deliberated over how his work should be lit, inspired in part by Edmund Burke's philosophical treatise on the sublime. Burke observed that "when … you enter a building … to make the transition thoroughly striking, you ought to pass from the greatest light … to darkness" because "darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light."[119] Throughout his career, Rothko made many comments about lighting, prompting Bonnie Clearwater's comment that "almost everyone who knew him has a story to tell about how he fussed over the lighting of his paintings."[120] In his manuscript, for example, he references light and its effects, noting how Leonardo's use of it forms "for the next five centuries…the basis of the expression of the subjective quality."[121] This subjective light, in his estimation, is "the instrument of the new unity," one that an artist could enlist it to "elevate the particular to the plane of generalization through the subjective feelings that

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[119] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophic Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, David Womersley, ed. (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998): 73.

[120] Bonnie Clearwater, "How Rothko Looked at Rothko," 100.

[121] Rothko, *The Artist's Reality, Philosophies of Art*, 31.

light can symbolize."[122] Varying types of lighting also intrigued Rothko. For the *15 Americans* exhibition curated by Dorothy C. Miller at the Museum of Modern Art in 1952, Rothko suggested that his group of paintings be brightly lit. For his first solo exhibition at Sidney Janis three years later, he asked for a lower lighting scheme. By 1961, Rothko framed his preferences for lighting an installation of his works in no uncertain terms:

> The light, whether natural or artificial, should not be too strong. The pictures have their own inner light and if there is too much light, the color in the picture is washed out and a distortion of their look occurs. The ideal situation would be to hang them in a normally lit room – that is the way they were painted. They should not be over lit or romanticized by spots; this results in distortion of their meaning. They should either be lighted from a great distance or indirectly, by casting lights at the ceiling or the floor. Above all, the picture should be evenly lighted and not too strongly.[123]

Anna Chave, in her review of the Rothko retrospective at the National Gallery of Art in Washington (1998) addressed what she considered to be a crucial absence from the catalogue essays:

> To my mind, an opportunity was missed in the present retrospective to retrieve an under-appreciated and, indeed, forward-looking dimension of Rothko's practice, namely his efforts to create particular aesthetic contexts affording specific kinesthetic experiences for viewers by keeping as a strict control as possible over the arranging and lighting of his art. Excessive or eccentric as these efforts may have seemed to curators and dealers at the time, they eased the path for innumerable, environment-minded artists to follow (Segal self-professedly among them).[124]

Recognizing the centrality of the space created by the Seagram works, curators have been presented with the difficulty of how to honor Rothko's desire for the paintings

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[122] Ibid., 33.

[123] Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 145.

[124] Anna Chave, "Mark Rothko. Washington and New York," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 140, No. 1147 (Oct., 1998): 713.

to be inexorably linked to or to create an architectural space. In his review of Rothko's 1961 retrospective at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, Robert Goldwater described how a set of Seagram murals were installed in a "small chapel-like room," and that as a result they "reinforce each other, as they were designed to do."[125] Rothko's grouping together, later in the decade, of nine Seagram paintings for a permanent setting within the Tate Gallery reinforced the importance of space. He carefully planned the gallery, and hoped that the works would remain unchanged as a permanent temple or chapel to what he seems to have believed, just before his death, was his life's work. Norman Reid, then-Director of the Tate, assured him that the paintings would be permanently exhibited according to the artist's exact specifications. Preparing for this eventuality, Rothko made minuscule replicas of the murals and fastened them to the tiny walls of a miniature model of the gallery. This was meant to ensure that the placement of the works would follow the formula Rothko dictated. Using maquettes and tiny reproductions of his work in the models suggests how seriously he considered the architectural space his works created. Each work mirrors the work nearby, and those throughout the space, thereby forming the borders of a space/environment.

For the 1978 Guggenheim retrospective, not a single Seagram work was included among the nearly two-hundred works in the exhibition. Such a selection might suggest that priority was given to Rothko's more generally embraced mature work at the expense

[125] Robert Goldwater, "Reflections on the Rothko Exhibition," in *Mark Rothko: 1903-1970* (London: Tate, 1987): 34-35. The essay was originally printed in *Arts* Vol. 35 (March 1961): 42-45, and was published later in 1961 in the catalogue for the London exhibition. See *Mark Rothko: A Retrospective Exhibition, Paintings 1945-1960* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1961): 21-25. Eight of the nine Seagram works included in the 1961 New York show were sent to London. See Anfam cat. nos. 639, 642, 645, 657, 658, 660, 661, and 663.

of his pivotal Seagram or figurative works.[126] Such a claim might even be reinforced by the fact that the Seagram commission garnered a scant mention of two paragraphs in Waldman's catalogue essay. However, the show's organizers likely faced the problem of isolating individual works of the series and exhibiting those works out of context. This was probably also the case in the 1998 retrospective in Washington. In his catalogue essay, Jeffrey Weiss, who curated the exhibition, again raised the issue of Rothko's ambitions to create an environmental space with his murals. However, he downplayed the importance of the Seagram project overall, choosing not to give the project more of a climactic position within Rothko's career trajectory. With over one-hundred works on view, only two Seagram paintings were included. With no shortage of important Seagram paintings in the Washington collection, this oversight seems puzzling, echoing the absence in the 1978 show. Doubtlessly recognizing this as an issue, the Gallery mounted, five years later, the exhibition *Mark Rothko: The Mural Projects*, originally installed in 2003-04. Ten Seagram works were included, all exhibited in close proximity, suggesting a spatial environment created by the paintings.[127]

As Dore Ashton observed, in her seminal biography, Rothko "desire[d] to immerse himself in the spaces his paintings proposed…[and] that the most satisfying means would be the most literal: that canvases would surround the viewer as murals."[128] Robert Rosenblum, in his essay from the catalogue for the *Mark Rothko: 1903-1970* 1987 retrospective at the Tate Gallery, argued that that the space created by the Seagram works

[126] There was a similar exclusion to Rothko's figurative works. Only one canvas from the 1920s was included, along with only fourteen canvases from the 1930s (those from before his Surrealist phase).

[127] See Anfam cat. nos. 634, 640, 643, 646, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, and 655.

[128] Dore Ashton, *About Rothko*, 146.

was a "meditative enclosure."[129] The primary implication for thinking of the Seagram environment in this manner is that it suggested that the cycle, as it has been presented in its various incarnations, mostly assembled posthumously by curators, is best understood as something that frames/forms a space, architecturally-speaking. It is not a mere assembly of individual canvases. The 1989 exhibitions in Basel and Liverpool embraced the challenge of creating an environment with the Seagram paintings.[130] As Sir Alan Bowness observed, the Liverpool show sought to "create the ambience which would have resulted from the murals had they ever been completed and installed in the restaurant."[131] The Tate's nine Seagram works, along with two additional murals, were assembled.[132]

The recent exhibitions in Rome and London mentioned earlier also underscored Rothko's environmental ambitions. Achim Borchardt-Hume, who curated the London show, installed nearly all of the murals included in the exhibition together in one gallery. In this way, viewers were encouraged to see the works as a set rather than as individual canvases. Borchardt-Hume reinforced installed the set higher on the main gallery's four walls, intentionally evoking a unified frieze. Moreover, he declared: "Rather than seeing them as this very enveloping environment, as you usually see them in the Rothko Room at Tate, you now see them, I think, in a far more architectural way. They seem to be

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[129] Robert Rosenblum, "Notes on Rothko and Tradition," in *Mark Rothko: 1903-197*0 (London: Tate, 1987): 30.

[130] See Thomas Kellein, *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel Publications, 1989): 2-9; and

[131] Sir Alan Bowness, *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1988): 7.

[132] See Anfam cat. nos. 636, 642, 644, 647, 656, 657, 658, 660, 661, 662, and 663.

much more engaged. They appear like portals or windows. They seem to almost break through the wall."[133]

What all of the curators just mentioned have in common is a desire to approximate an environment that never was manifested.[134] Moreover, all of these venues have spaces that are completely different from those in the Four Seasons, with none of the museums or galleries possessing the distractions, furnishing, and sounds of the restaurant. Exhibited in this manner, the Seagram works can never have the relationship with the restaurant space or with the building overall. Reimagining different grouping of the disparate works offers the only way to present works from the series, and to

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[133] Interview with Achim Borchardt-Hume, Tate Modern website, http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/markrothko/exclusivevideo.shtm

[134] The reality of these various curatorial attempts to "reproduce" Rothko's project is also problematic, especially considering that we don't exactly know how Rothko intended these works to be viewed in the first conception, in 1958/1959. Moreover, by the late 1960s, when he groped together some of the paintings for the Tate donation, he had moved beyond his initial ideas for the murals. The problem of whether this "new" Seagram project, for the Tate, was an "original" one is complicated by postmodern notions of what originality actually means in relation to artistic production. See especially Jean Baudrillard, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, *Simulacra & Simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994). Are we supposed to interpret such constructions of the cycle as "autographic" or "allographic" in the binary Nelson Goodman first proposed in his *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, in 1968? As one of the most important voices within contemporary aesthetics, Goodman categorized different types of artforms on a kind of spectrum, generally divided into the two categories. The first type exists only when an art object has some sort of direct connection to the production of the original work. A twenty-first century copy of a Rodin sculpture, for example, would not be considered autographic, but a sculpture made from one of his molds is. The allographic, on the other hand, generally encompasses music, dance, and theater, works of art that are not directly tied to how a work was produced. A contemporary re-enactment of a composition by a composer, for example, will never be the same as the original. Remei Capdevila Werning has recently explored this problem, in her analysis of Mies's Barcelona Pavilion, which was recreated in 1986 in relation to Goodman's autographic-allographic binary. See Remei Capdevila Werning, "Constructing Reconstruction: The Barcelona Pavilion and Nelson Goodman's Aesthetic Philosophy," Master's Thesis, Dept. of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007. See also Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 221.

emphasize Rothko's desire to control space with his canvases, to create quasi-architectural places.

CHAPTER 3:
APPROPRIATING ITALY'S AGGRESSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

This chapter examines the connection between several architectural sites Rothko visited in Italy and his project to make an aggressive environment in the Four Seasons. The first subject that will be addressed concerns the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, and how the sense of confinement it often triggers is exacerbated both through color and also through its pictorial-architectural hybridity. This will be followed by an examination of how the architecture of the Etruscan tombs Rothko visited similarly provoke discomfort. Lastly, Michelangelo's Laurentian Library will be revisited, to provide a third example of something architectural Rothko experienced in Italy that triggered in him an uneasy sensation, one he wanted the viewers of his murals to experience.[135] Since it is unclear how many of the Seagram paintings Rothko completed before his 1959 visit to Italy, it is quite possible that his experiences with the three sites just mentioned directly influenced the aggressive character of the murals, and certain that how he felt about the architecture reinforced the antagonistic aspects of the project. While Michael Compton argued that all paintings from the three phases were "virtually complete" before Rothko left for Europe, Dore Ashton contended that Rothko had completed only the first series

[135] Long before he visited Italy, Rothko would have almost certainly experienced a degree of uneasiness with architecture, especially buildings with which he was intimately familiar. Among the first structures in America that likely impacted him in this way was Lincoln High School in Portland, Oregon, which he attended from 1918-21. The awkwardness and vulnerability Rothko felt during his years there doubtless made him especially sensitive to the cold, somewhat oppressive architecture of the building. At that same time, Rothko's employment in the shipping department of New York Outfitting Company likely also put him in intimate contact with quasi-aggressive architectural spaces. The lost sketches he made at the Company on the store's wrapping paper, according to Ed Weinstein, whose relatives owned the store, raise the intriguing question of whether they were Rothko's first pictorial-architectural mediations. For more on Rothko's experiences at Lincoln and at the Company, see Breslin, 34-35.

before his trip.[136] By the third series of murals, Rothko had darkened his palette, used a heavier painting technique, and had merged his shapes with the background, making the gloomiest set of all three. What is clear, however, is that Rothko, from mid-July 1959 to June of 1960, continued to shift his paintings around in his studio into mock environments after his Italian trip, structuring and re-structuring simulations of the aforementioned architectural sites he visited in Italy. Following Thomas Kellein's suggestion that Rothko "travelled to Europe to gather information about comparable situations," potential reasons why Rothko's encounters with architecture and architectural painting were so profound in Italy in particular will be addressed, as well as evidence of his hostility in the late 1950s.[137]

On March 29, 1950, Rothko and his wife Mell left New York on the Queen Elizabeth for Europe. They stayed for five months, visiting Paris, Cagnes-sur-Mer, Venice, Florence, Arezzo, Siena, Rome, London. As Robert Motherwell said, Rothko returned to New York a "transformed man."[138] Two of the many sites he visited that are central to the current discussion were the convent of San Marco and the Sistine Chapel. On June 15, 1959, Rothko, along with his wife Mell and his daughter Kate, sailed again, this time on the USS Constitution, to Italy. The trip took him to many sites in Europe: after visiting Paestum, Pompeii, Tarquinia, Rome, Venice, Florence, Paris, Chartres, Bordeaux, Brussels, Antwerp, Bruges, The Hague, Amsterdam, London, and St. Ives, they left Europe for New York on July 15th. Rothko was "treated like a king" in Italy that

[136] Michael Compton, *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York*, 14. Dore Ashton, *About Rothko*, 154.
[137] Thomas Kellein, "Mark Rothko – Kaaba in New York, 40 Seagram Murals and a Conclusion," *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York*, 33.
[138] Robert Motherwell, in *Rothko*, Oliver Wick (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2007): 214.

summer, according to Dore Ashton.[139] As Dan Rice stated, Rothko "responded more to architecture and music than to painting" while in Europe in 1959.[140] Rothko's second European trip was especially fruitful for him. It afforded him the opportunity to revisit some of his favorite sites, with the goal of coming to terms with key works of Italian art and architecture that he believed served the same purpose as he imagined his Seagram environment would. Kate Rothko Prizel noted that "it was a working trip…we went to see art…and spent three days at the beach."[141]

Rothko's Italian experiences in 1950 and 1959 have not gone unnoticed by scholars in relation to the Seagram project. In 1961, Robert Goldwater observed that the chapel-like space of the Seagram murals, as they were installed at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, was like the "frescoes of some no longer used ancient chapel in an Italian church."[142] Dore Ashton's chapter on the Seagram works, from her 1983 biography, pinpoints the Italian pictorial-architectural works Rothko admired and visited on his 1959 trip. These include churches in Rome, wall paintings at Tarquinia and Pompeii, Michelangelo's Laurentian, and Fra Angelico's murals in the Convent of San Marco. Michael Compton, in his essay for the 1987 Tate retrospective, described how Rothko met "a very respectful response from artist he met" in Italy during the project, at

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[139] Dore Ashton, *About Rothko*, 146.
[140] Dan Rice, in Breslin, 400.
[141] Kate Rothko Prizel, in Breslin, 399.
[142] Robert Goldwater, "Reflections on the Rothko Exhibition," in *Mark Rothko: 1903-197*0 (London: Tate, 1987): 34-35. The essay was originally printed in *Arts* Vol. 35 (March 1961): 42-45, and was published later in 1961 in the catalogue for the London exhibition. See *Mark Rothko: A Retrospective Exhibition, Paintings 1945-1960* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1961): 21-25. Eight of the nine Seagram works included in the 1961 New York show were sent to London. See Anfam cat. nos. 639, 642, 645, 657, 658, 660, 661, and 663.

a moment when his reputation in Europe "had been growing for some years."[143] Additional references to Italy populate the Seagram literature. That Rothko worked on the project at the moment some of his paintings were exhibited both throughout Europe[144] and at the Venice Biennale in 1958[145] further reinforces the transatlantic connection.

The issue of why Rothko was so drawn to Italy has also been addressed, as his love for Italy was especially strong during the Seagram project.[146] Several factors made

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[143] Michael Compton, "Mark Rothko, the Subjects of the Artist," in *Mark Rothko: 1903-197*0 (London: Tate, 1987): 60.

[144] *The New American Painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958-1959* was curated by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., organized by the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and exhibited in eight locations throughout Europe, in 1958-59. See Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *The New American Painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958-1959* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1958).

[145] See *29th Biennale internazionale d'arte*, Sam Hunter (Venice, 1958). Works by David Smith, Seymour Lipton, Mark Tobey, and Rothko were exhibited at the United States Pavilion, from June 14-October 19, 1958. Ten works by Rothko were included in gallery devoted just to his work. This Italian "Rothko Room" prefigured the creation of the so-called Rothko Room at the Philips Collection in Washington. The Phillips was the first museum to permanently install a Rothko Room, in November 1960. At that time, the installation included *Green and Maroon*, 1953, Fig. 53, *Green and Tangerine on Red*, 1956, Fig. 54, and *Orange and Red on Red*, 1957, Fig. 55.

[146] Rothko's engagement with Italian art in the late 1950s was, moreover, part of a larger transatlantic dialogue—one that had steadily increased after the Second World War and had, by the late 1950s, climaxed—between the New York avant-garde and that of Italy (and, of course, elsewhere in Europe). Among the best examples of this was the groundbreaking exhibition *The New American Painting*, curated by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., organized by the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and exhibited in eight locations throughout Europe, in 1958-59. See Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *The New American Painting: As Shown in Eight European Countries, 1958-1959* ex cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1958): 9-12. The American-centric catalogue promoted the "independence" of work by Rothko and his contemporaries, attempting to argue that the New York School had become the new epicenter of avant-garde art, an effort that paradoxically had the effect of bridging the gap between American and European artistic milieus. "Upon entering the room," Mercedes Molleda wrote, when the exhibition was in Barcelona, in 1958, "a strange sensation like that of magnetic tension surrounds you, as though the expression concentrated in the canvases would spring from them." See Mercedes Molleda, *Revista*, Barcelona (Aug. 30, 1958), reprinted in Ellen G. Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005). Such an embrace was quite different from how

it so. Peter Selz, in his catalogue essay for Rothko's 1961 retrospective at MoMA, made several important references to Rothko's connection to Italian art, citing both Rothko's 1959 trip to Italy and his admiration for Fra Angelico's frescoes in the monastery of San Marco. In a discussion of the large scale of Rothko's signature canvases, Selz related that scale to "man's scale and his measure."[147] Later in 1961, in November of that year, Rothko had finalized a contract with the Italian art collector Giuseppe Panza di Biumo for the sale of five Seagram murals.[148] Two years later, the contract fell through, and Panza instead acquired three signature Rothko canvases, from 1953, 1957, and 1960, all now in the collection of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.[149] That Rothko agreed within the terms of the initial 1961 contract to oversee the installation of the Seagram murals in Varese may further indicate his willingness to promote the connection between his Seagram work and Italy. As Jeffrey Weiss has recently shown, Rothko had a special affinity for Michelangelo Antonioni's films.[150] And, as architectural historian William MacDonald recalled, Rothko and MacDonald talked for hours in Rome about ancient

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Rothko's work was more negatively received abroad a decade prior, in 1948, at the Venice Biennale of that year. See Italo Faldi, "Le Personali Straniere," *Ulisse* Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 1950): 742-53; Renato Guttuso, "Osservazioni generali a proposito della XXIV Biennale," *Rinascita* Vol. 5, No. 6 (June 1948): 227-28; and Giorgio Castelfranco, "La XXIC Biennale Internazionale d'Arte di Venezia," *Bolletino d'Arte* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1948): 283.

[147] Peter Selz, *Mark Rothko*, 1961, 9.

[148] See Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, letter to Rothko (November 11, 1961), Mark Rothko Foundation.

[149] See Anfam cat. nos. 492, 597, and 678.

[150] See Jeffrey Weiss, "Temps Mort: Rothko and Antonioni," *Rothko*, Oliver Wick (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2007): 45-56. Antonioni visited Rothko at his Bowery studio, where Rothko analyzed *L'Avventura* (1960) in the context of narrative and figuration. Robert Motherwell recalled this exchange in his essay "On Rothko," commenting that the link between the two was in part rooted in the sense of "nothingness" both shared. See Robert Motherwell, "On Rothko," 1970, copyright Motherwell Archive, Dedalus Foundation, 1998.

buildings. Rothko even devised a plan with Peter von Blanckenhagen, a scholar of Roman art, to meet in Rome to discuss ancient monuments, a rendezvous prevented by Rothko's failing health.[151]

Recently, Oliver Wick made several provocative observations about Rothko's relationship to Italy. His catalogue essay for the *Mark Rothko* exhibition in Rome appropriately begins with Rothko's proclamation, made in 1957 just before the Seagram project, that "I am not an abstractionist."[152] This comment raises several questions. Did Rothko see his colorfield abstractions as representing something tangible, something he could identify with a source? Or, as what Wick seems to be suggesting here, was there a source in Italian art for Rothko's compositions? Wick follows along the path of several scholars of the Seagram project and answers the second question in the affirmative. Wick compares Leonardo's "Vitruvian Man" (ca. 1492, Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice, Fig. 17) with a Rothko pen drawing from 1947-1949 (see Fig 18). Rothko's sketch contains a prototype for his classic compositions, with two rectangles nearly in the center divided by a bisecting horizontal band where the rectangles meet. Wick acknowledged that Rothko didn't actually appropriate the Leonardo drawing directly. Instead, Rothko seems to have quoted the ideal human proportions in the Leonardo work. Given Rothko's interest in equating the scale of his signature works to the scale of visitors, this comparison is intriguing. "The size I am speaking about is the size of a

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[151] See Vincent J. Bruno, "Mark Rothko and the Second Style: The Art of the Color Field in Roman Murals," in R. T. Scott and A. R. Scott, eds., *Eius Virtutis Studiosi: Classical and Postclassical Studies in memory of Frank Edward Brown*, Studies in the History of Art, Symposium Papers 23, National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC, 1993): 251-52.

[152] Mark Rothko, quoted in Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art*, Miguel Lopez-Remiro,119.

man," he wrote in 1954, "or rather my own relation to my own decisions as to the best size a man can be. To this extent I am again a Renaissance man, for my pictures [are] a personal tape measure of my moral values."[153] For this reason, Rothko generally made vertical canvases throughout the 1950s (and before the Seagram murals), those which mirrored the upright proportions of a standing viewer. David Anfam has also recently proposed comparisons between works by Rothko and their presumed Italian sources.[154]

Rothko continued to experiment with painted-architectural connections in relation to Italian sources after the Seagram project. As Dore Ashton noted, Rothko "[brought] back with him the memory of his experiences in Italy," strengthening "his allusions to post and lintel," resulting in a clarity of the "architectural character of his enterprise."[155] Rothko's close friend the sculptor Herbert Ferber recalled that Philip Johnson had lent Rothko a book on Florentine Renaissance architecture to use during the Rothko Chapel project, probably Mary McCarthy's *Stones of Florence*, 1959.[156] Rothko kept it "open for days to photographs showing the exteriors of fortresslike buildings," photographs that were taken in "strong Italian light."[157] Ashton's recent remarks concerning the shape of the Rothko Chapel in relation to Italian art and architecture are also revealing.

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[153] Mark Rothko, *The Property of (A. Seltzer & Co., Inc.)*, sketchbook, 21.

[154] The first concerns Rothko's *Untitled [Nude]* (1937/38, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 19), within which the figure pushes on the architecture she inhabits not unlike how Leonardo's "Vitruvian Man" presses against the geometric boundaries (made by the square and circle) surrounding him. David Anfam, "To See, or Not to See," *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding, The Rothko Chapel Art Series*, 70-71.

[155] Ashton, 154.

[156] See also Anfam, "To See, or Not to See," *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding, The Rothko Chapel Art Series*, 71; and Mary McCarthy, *Stones of Florence* (New York, Harcourt, 1959).

[157] Herbert Ferber, interview by Dominique de Menil and Susan Barnes, Sept. 6, 1981, The Menil Collection Archives, Houston. Sheldon Nodelman has asserted that this book was probably Mary McCarthy, *Stones of Florence*. See Nodelman, 349, note 22.

"Dominique de Menil wrote that Rothko was pleased with Philip Johnson's original floor plan for the chapel, which was octagonal," she wrote, "because he had a special liking for the twelfth-century octagonal baptistery of Santa Maria Assunta, on the island of Torcello, in the Venetian lagoon."[158]

What has not been addressed, however, is the extent to which Rothko sought to interweave painting and architecture in order to antagonize the visitors he imagined would dine at the Four Seasons Restaurant, and how key works of Italian art and architecture he saw both in 1950 and 1959 reinforced his intentions. Another notable absence in the scholarship is a deeper consideration of the Michelangelo connection, specifically the subject of the Laurentian Library.[159] This chapter will address these shortcoming, beginning with a contextualization of Rothko's aggression during the project.

In 1958, Rothko wrote that "what I like about the [Seagram] commission is that it has steamed up enough anger in me to imbue the pictures with the unbearable bite, I

[158] See Dominique de Menil, "The Rothko Chapel," *Art Journal* Vol. 30 (1971): 249 and Dore Ashton, "Rothko's Frame of Mind," in *Seeing Rothko*, 23.

[159] Pope Clement VII (Giulio de' Medici), after he brought the Library's collection, in 1523, back to Florence from Rome (where it ended up after the banishment of the Medici family from Florence, in 1494), immediately commissioned Michelangelo to begin designing the space, in 1524. It would house the Medician collection of manuscripts, the large number of which, as James F. O'Gorman observed, points to the expansion of the monastic library system in Italy from 1300 to 1600 in the service of university students and Humanists. Two hundred illuminated codices in the San Lorenzo collection exhibited at the Library from October 1974 to May 1975 indicated the impressiveness of the Medician collection. See Detlef Heikamp, "Manuscripts and Treasures from San Lorenzo: An Exhibition at the Laurentian Library," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 117, No. 867 (Jun. 1975): 422-27. The collection is arguably the most important repository of antique books in Italy.

hope."[160] Such a prickly feeling was not born in the late 1950s but was, for Rothko, a longstanding one. In his signature essay "The Romantics Were Prompted," written in 1947 and first published in the first edition of *Possibilities*, Rothko, in the third sentence, observed an antagonism between the painter and society. "The unfriendliness of society to his activity," he wrote, is difficult for the artist to accept. Yet this very hostility can act as a lever for the true liberation."[161] As Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit have found, Rothko provoked viewers by removing legible form and meaning from his abstract work.[162] This is why, as Thomas B. Hess commented, there was a famous joke within the Abstract Expressionist community, that "Barnett Newman closed the doors, Mark Rothko pulled down the shades, Ad Reinhardt turned out the lights."[163]

In his Pratt lecture, Rothko prescribed five "ingredients" of a "recipe" for a work of art. The first and the third shed light on his aggressive stance. In the first, he notes that "tragic art, romantic art, etc., deals with the knowledge of death." In the third, he cites "tension. Either conflict or curbed desire" as an essential ingredient.[164] He went on to explain his admiration for Søren Kierkegaard's book *Fear and Trembling* (1843).[165] Rothko strongly believed that the story of Abraham and Isaac, as reiterated by

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[160] Mark Rothko, letter to Robert Motherwell, July 1958. Deadalus Foundation, New York.

[161] Mark Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," *Possibilities*, Vol. 1 (Winter 1947-48): 84, reprinted in Ellen G. Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005): 140.

[162] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993).

[163] Thomas B. Hess, "Private Art: Where the Public Works," *New York Magazine* (Oct. 13, 1975): 83.

[164] Mark Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute, November 1958," Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art*, Miguel Lopez-Remiro, ed., 125.

[165] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (1843), trans. Howard H. Hong and Edna H. Hong, eds. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983); and Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Random Vintage, 1967).

Kierkegaard, represented the struggle between the artist, represented by Abraham, and the act of that artist, as represented both by the sacrifice of Isaac and the creation of art. In the lecture, he described that "as soon as an act [such as the one Abraham believed he had to do] is made by an individual, it becomes universal. This is like the role of the artist."[166] Rothko went on to link his work to architecture. "My pictures are indeed facades…Sometimes I open one door and one window or two doors and two windows."[167] During the question and answer period after the talk, he was asked about the role of death in his work. He responded that "the tragic notion of the image is always present in my mind when I paint and I know when it is achieved, but I couldn't point it out, show where it is illustrated. There are no skull and bones."[168] Thus, even in the short talk, Rothko highlighted his connection to tragedy, sacrifice, architecture, and death. That he selected these particular ideas to highlight just four months after he began work on the Seagram project is significant.

More evidence for Rothko's hostility during the Seagram project is gleaned from an essay published just after Rothko's death by the then-former *Harper's* publisher John Fischer.[169] Fischer and Rothko met in the tourist class bar aboard the SS *Independence* en route to Europe in June of 1959, where Fischer had unfettered access to Rothko's ideas during the project. As Miguel López-Remiro observed, Fischer's essay "is one of those rare texts in which Rothko comments freely and explicitly on the art scene of which

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[166] Mark Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute, November 1958," Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art*, Miguel Lopez-Remiro, ed., 125.
[167] Ibid., 125.
[168] Ibid., 125.
[169] John Fisher, "Mark Rothko: Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Man," 16-23.

he was a part."[170] Once Fischer assured Rothko that he had no connection with the art world, Rothko made several comments that expressed his then-dismal view of that world. Key passages from the essay (in which Fischer quotes Rothko) point toward Rothko's aggression:

> [The Seagram building is] a place where the richest bastards in New York will come to feed and show off…
>
> I'll never tackle such a job again…In fact, I've come to believe that no paintings should ever be displayed in a public place. I accepted this assignment as a challenge, with strictly malicious intentions. I hope to paint something to ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room. If a restaurant would refuse to put up my murals, that would be the ultimate compliment…
>
> I keep my malice constantly in my mind. It is a very strong motivating force. With it pushing me, I think I can finish off the job pretty quickly after I get home from this trip.
>
> I hate and distrust all art historians, experts and critics. They are a bunch of parasites, feeding on the body of art. Their work not only is useless, it is misleading…[Rothko detested] the whole machine for the popularization of art – universities, advertising, museums and the Fifty-seventh Street salesman.
>
> When a crowd of people look at a painting, I think of blasphemy, I believe that a painting can only communicate directly to a rare individual who happens to be in tune with it and the artist…
>
> [The Museum of Modern Art] has no convictions and no courage. It can't decide which paintings are good and which are bad. So it hedges by buying a little of everything.[171]

Two years after he spoke with Fischer, Rothko wrote the following:

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[170] Miguel López-Remiro, "Introduction to 'The Easy Chair: Mark Rothko, Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Man," in *Rothko*, Oliver Wick (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2007): 205.

[171] Mark Rothko, quoted by John Fisher, "Mark Rothko: Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Man," 16-23.

> Already was the hope that I would paint something which they could not endure. In this wish was embodied…the horror of the great maw which had developed which had a mouth and teeth anything that was offered. Nothing could any longer shock or repel. But on the basis of the aesthetic everything could be consumed.[172]

That this last passage is taken from an unpublished manuscript that he likely prepared for his 1961 MoMA retrospective suggests that he sought reinforce his aggressive stance, and to promote it to those who came to the exhibition to honor his work.

Rothko's comments call to mind Meyer Schapiro's ideas concerning non-communication, which he articulated in his essay "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," first published in 1957, just before Rothko began working on the commission. "In comparing the arts of our time with those of a hundred years ago," Schapiro wrote, "we observe that the arts have become more deeply personal, more intimate, more concerned with the experiences of a subtle kind."[173] As such, by recognizing that he was living in a new era of art, one with indistinct boundaries between mediums, Schapiro hinted at a hybridity Rothko sought to achieve throughout his career. He continued:

> There is a sense in which all the arts today have a common character shared by painting… We note, too, that in poetry, music and architecture, as well as painting, the attitude to the medium had become much freer, so that artists are willing to search further and to risk experiments or inventions which in the past would have been inconceivable because of fixed ideas of the laws and boundaries of the arts.[174]

It is in this new era of abstraction that non-communication becomes an issue, in the sense that "you cannot extract a message from painting by ordinary means; [that] the usual

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[172] Mark Rothko, in *Rothko*, Oliver Wick (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2007): 169-170.

[173] Meyer Schapiro, "The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art," *ARTnews* (Summer 1957): 36.

[174] Ibid., 36.

rules of communication do not hold here[;]…painting, by becoming abstract and giving up its representational function, has achieved a state in which communication seems to be deliberately prevented."[175] Schapiro also mentions that avant-garde artists oppose conventional mass-communication because such communication has become perverted and deceptive.

In addition to Rothko's own aggressive statements, the darkened palette he used for the murals also suggests his unease. As mentioned, the Seagram works are much darker than any of his previous abstractions.[176] This darker palette is likely what Peter Selz had in mind when he observed, in 1961, that Rothko's color "may be savage" and that his "reds are oppressive, evoking a mood of foreboding and death; there are reds suggesting light, flame, or blood."[177] On the 1959 trip, Rothko visited the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii (ca. 50 BCE), which include the wall paintings from the *Dionysiac Mystery Cult* (ca. mid-first century BCE, Fig. 20). The subject of the scene is most likely a ritual related to becoming a member of a cult of Dionysius. As John Fischer recalled, it was at the Villa that Rothko exclaimed that his Seagram paintings had a "deep affinity" with the frescoes.[178] He explained that the Roman paintings had "the same feeling … the same broad expanses of somber color" as his Seagram paintings.[179] Scholars have debated the meaning of such comments. Michael Compton has argued that this comment

[175] Ibid., 36.

[176] Rothko's many ideas of how color functioned in his work, variously throughout his career, thus places him somewhere between the Poussinistes and the Rubenistes, in the centuries-old debate waged in the academy between color and line. He had both an Apollonian interest in line (intellect, thoughtfulness, meditation) and a Dionysian focus on color (sensory, pathos, body-rooted sensibilities).

[177] Peter Selz, *Mark Rothko*, 1961, 11.

[178] John Fisher, "Mark Rothko: Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Man," 16-23.

[179] Lee Seldes, *The Legacy of Mark Rothko* (New York: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1978): 45.

reflects Rothko's preoccupation with death.[180] John Gage, on the other hand, has argued that the "rather vivid red orange ground" of the Pompeian wall paintings actually makes them not seem somber enough to have warranted this link with mortality.[181]

Rothko's reactions in the Villa related to his belief that he had found the ideal ancient counterpart to his Seagram project. As a triclinium, a Roman formal dining room, the space provided the exact function as his Seagram murals would. Rothko not only painted scenes of dining rooms throughout his figurative period, but also accepted his second commission for a set of murals for another dining room, the then-new Holyoke Center at Harvard University (Fig. 26), giving himself another stab at trying to merge painting and architecture in the odd setting of a dining room. In the interim between the Seagram and Harvard projects, as he prepared for his 1961 MoMA retrospective, Rothko referenced the Seagram murals in the context of another dining room, what he mistakenly thought was a Fra Angelico work that he had seen in Italy, presumably on both his 1950 and his 1959 visits. "The question of the dining room," he wrote, "was always appealing to me for I immediately envisioned the refectory of the San Marco church with the wall painting by Fra Angelico."[182] Rothko seems to have meant to refer to Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Last Supper* (ca. 1486, San Marco, Florence, Fig. 27), since there is no Fra Angelico in the refectory, though it is safe to assume that the Fra Angelico is closer to Rothko's sensibilities concerning color and form. In either case, that Rothko likely wrote this passage in preparation for the retrospective, although it was

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[180] Michael Compton, *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project*, ex. cat. (The Tate Gallery, Liverpool) (London: Tate, 1988): 14.

[181] John Gage, "Rothko: Color as Subject," Jeffrey Weiss, *Mark Rothko*, ed., 258.

[182] Mark Rothko, "Notes on the Seagram Commission," undated, ca. 1960, reprinted in *Rothko*, Achim Borchart-Hume, ed. (London: Tate, 2008): 95.

not published in the catalogue for the exhibition, suggests that he was thinking of both his Italian sources and dining rooms in preparation for the largest celebration up to that point of his life's work. His profound reaction to the Villa Rothko during his 1959 Italian excursion was doubtlessly connected to his ongoing dining room project on hold back in New York.

Vincent J. Bruno has investigated Rothko's connection to Pompeian art on a broader scale. He analyzed what typifies the Roman Second Style including its colorfields, the sensuousness of those fields, the firm presence of buildings in the paintings, and how all of this differs from the other stages of Roman wall painting. Bruno observed that "Rothko's experience in the Villa of the Mysteries was founded upon an accurate, intuitive reading of the aims and aesthetic predilections that had guided the ancient artists."[183] Bruno's essay raises two more issues. The first concerns the question of why Rothko sought to alter his color suddenly during the Seagram project. Another question is why he translated the combination of color and architecture he saw in the Villa into a dark, brooding set of canvases for the Seagram's. As Bruno observed in a conference paper he delivered at the College Art Association's annual meeting, in 1984, Rothko, while inside the Villa, equated the architectural component of his own work to myth and drama.[184] The pictorial subject of the Villa's paintings, including the Dionysian initiation rituals, seems to have inspired Rothko's experiences there. Bruno's assessments overall suggest that while Rothko disliked comparisons of his paintings to those of other modernists, he welcomed the link to ancient Roman work. "In the history

[183] Ibid., 251.
[184] Vincent J. Bruno, "Mark Rothko and the Second Style," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, Toronto, 1984.

of mural painting," Bruno showed, "there is no parallel but the modern for the great sheets of intense, deeply saturated monochromatic fields of color that characterize Roman murals."[185]

Rothko's experience at the Villa satisfied his fascination with Greek tragic themes including those found in Aeschylus's *Orestia* trilogy, among other Greek literary works he admired. Rothko's connection to Greek literature and literature about ancient Greece has been addressed elsewhere.[186] Rothko recognized affinities with the art of antiquity, which may explain why he venerated Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872), which reinforced his own belief that ancient art played a significant role in the service of creating mythic and tragic art.[187] Moreover, Rothko wholeheartedly adopted Nietzsche's push for contemporary artists to adopt Dionysian themes such as catharsis, drama, struggle, terror, universal truths, myths, among others, in order to become more transcendent in a tragic sense. Dionysus, whom Rothko equated with tragic suffering, was ever-present in his mind when he visited the ancient sites of Italy.

Rothko's incorporation of ancient architectural motifs and symbols into his work of the late 1950s was hardly something new for him. As he and Adolph Gottlieb noted, in the often-cited 1943 draft of a letter to Edward Alden Jewell of the *New York Times*:

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[185] Vincent J. Bruno, "Mark Rothko and the Second Style: The Art of the Color Field in Roman Murals," in R. T. Scott and A. R. Scott, eds., *Eius Virtutis Studiosi: Classical and Postclassical Studies in memory of Frank Edward Brown*, Studies in the History of Art, Symposium Papers 23, National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC, 1993): 235.

[186] See especially Stephen Polcari, "Mark Rothko: Heritage, Environment, and Tradition," 37-50; Peter Selz, *Mark Rothko* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961): 12; Irving Sandler, *Mark Rothko/Paintings 1948-1969* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1983); Ashton, *About Rothko*, 50-57.

[187] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Random Vintage, 1967).

"the modern artist has a spiritual kinship with the emotions which…archaic forms imprison and the myths which they represent."[188] In the final version of the letter, they declared that "art is timeless," and that "the significant rendition of a symbol, no matter how archaic, has as full validity today as the archaic symbol had then."[189] As Stephen Polcari has shown, Rothko's incorporation of ancient forms continued after 1943 into his mature period, in the "columnar fluting" of *No. 7/No. 11 {Untitled}* (1949, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 21) or the "middle section of dentils" in *Untitled* (1949, Estate of Mark Rothko). Polcari characterizes both forms as, borrowing Barnett Newman's term, "idiographic…part figure, part architecture, part nature; part past, part present, part future; part entombment, part subconscious, and part emotion."[190] Polcari also observes that Rothko's *Untitled* (1939-40, Collection of Richard E. and Jane M. Lang) includes "horizontally segmented frieze bands" inspired in part by architecture and architectural sculpture, "classical Greek architectural fragments," and "ancient architectural ornaments (including acanthus leaves)."[191] Polcari links the untitled 1939-40 work to the Boscoreale frescoes Rothko adored and often viewed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which include a scene from a *cubiculum*/bedroom from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale (ca. 40–30 BCE, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Figs. 22-23).[192] Rothko, William Baziotes, and others were fascinated by the environmental wall

[188] Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 30.
[189] Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 35-36.
[190] Stephen Polcari, "Mark Rothko: Heritage, Environment, and Tradition," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 1988): 52, 54, 53.
[191] Ibid., 35, 36, 36.
[192] Ibid., 54-56.

paintings that had been removed from villas just north of Pompeii.[193] All of the information Polcari presents, however, leaves the reader wondering why there is no mention of the impact of the Pompeian works on the Seagram project.

Rothko was drawn to the Villa frescoes, and earlier to the Boscoreale works, because they are part of a unified series, not unlike one he had envisioned for his Seagram murals. In all of these works, color plays the important role of unifying disparate paintings into a cycle. The frescoes are painted together and literally interwoven. Rothko intended for the individual paintings of the Seagram series to span multiple walls, similarly encapsulating the viewer. In this way, he meant to underscore the three-dimensionality of the architectural space defined by the canvases. The two-dimensional reality of each individual Seagram work is subordinated to a larger total project. Color and architecture together create the springboard for a paramount spatial experience. Thinking of color, architecture, and scale in this way, while viewing the Villa works, afforded Rothko the opportunity to more directly control the mood he hoped the viewers of his Seagram cycle would experience.

Rothko's career-long bond with the art of Henri Matisse and Milton Avery, two artists he adored "when most other vanguard aritsts venerated Picasso and Mondrian," as Irving Sandler suggested, help to clarify Rothko's Seagram color and why he responded to the Pompeian color the way he did.[194] By 1949, when the Museum of Modern Art

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[193] Mona Hadler, "William Baziotes: The Subtlety of Life for the Artist," in Michael Preble, *William Baziotes: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Newport Harbor, Calif: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1978): 55.

[194] Irving Sandler, "Mark Rothko (in Memory of Robert Goldwater)," *Mark Rothko: 1903-1970*, ex. cat., (London: Tate Gallery, 1996): 12. This even impacted his pedagogy. A former student in Rothko's color course at Brooklyn College in the early 1950s

permanently installed *The Red Studio* (1911, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fig. 24), Rothko famously visited it repeatedly, telling Dore Ashton that he spent "hours and hours and hours" sitting in front of it.[195] Matisse's painting's large scale (71 ¼ by 7'2 ¼ inches) presents the viewer with a palette not unlike that of the *Dionysiac Mystery Cult*. Matisse allows everything in the painting, all of the contents of his studio, to meld into a unified colorfield. It is this colorfield that interrogates distinctions between the objects within the space depicted, allowing Matisse to play with the binaries of artifice/nature, color/line, and especially pictorial/architectural. In the Pompeian work, the uniform colorfield similarly ties together the various components. Moreover, the compositional structure of both the Matisse and Pompeian paintings relies heavily on imagined architecture. For the Matisse, that structure signifies an artist's studio. In the wall painting, the painted architectural frieze above and below the horizontal bands of figures provides a rational counterpart to the heavily sensual movements of the cult-figures. The blood/wine-toned color of the Pompeian fresco, the Matisse, and the murals appealed to Rothko's sensibilities concerning Dionysian art. Matisse's red, like the fresco, is sensual and hedonistic, while Rothko's is dark and tragic, all qualities Rothko would have related to the Dionysian narrative.

Avery's flattened colorfields (see, for example, Fig. 25) would have also made Rothko especially sensitive to the flattened fields in the Villa paintings, those which have

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mentioned that he "wanted us to do little Matisses…just to understand what color was about." Celina Tried, cited in Breslin, 615, note 44.

[195] Ashton, *About Rothko*, 112. Five years later, Rothko would translate his experiences with the painting into his *Homage to Matisse* (1954, Private Collection), which commemorated the French artist's death.

their analogue in the large-scale, flattened fields of the Seagram paintings.[196] More evidence of an Avery connection can be gleaned from the rekindling of the Rothko-Avery-Gottlieb triumvirate just before Rothko accepted the Seagram project. In 1957, all three spent the summer together in Provincetown. While they had not fallen out of touch socially, the three had by that point no longer vacationed together as they once had. Avery and Rothko would also spend the summers of 1958 and 1960 together in Provincetown.[197] Rothko returned alone for the summer of 1961. Selected works by all three artists, including two small paper sketches from the Seagram project, were exhibited together in 2002 at the Knoedler & Company gallery, in 2002. Pictorial influences were seemingly traded back and forth between the three. As E. A. Carmean, Jr. pointed out in his catalogue essay, it was in Provincetown that Avery experienced a breakthrough in his work. He shifted from easel-sized paintings to much larger ones, those mirroring the human scale of Rothko's signature abstractions. His work also became what Philip Cavanaugh referred to as a "belated shift toward abstraction, influenced by his two friends…[one also influenced by] a strange abstract quality to the shapes taken by sand dunes and scrub brushes, and a kaleidoscopic formalism in the bay

[196] Rothko first met Avery at the Art Students League, where Avery enrolled in 1926, just after Rothko joined Max Weber's course at the League in 1925. Their friendship began shortly thereafter when they were both included, in 1928, in an exhibition of eight artists selected by the Bernard Karfiol at the Opportunity Gallery. By the summer of 1934, when the Rothko's vacationed with the Avery's at Gloucester, Massachusetts, Avery had cemented his reputation as a father figure for Rothko. In the mid-1960s, Rothko's commemorative essay on Avery further acknowledged Avery's role in Rothko's artistic development. See Una E. Johnson, *Milton Avery: Prints and Drawings, 1930-1964* (New York: Shorewood Publishers, 1966).

[197] With some of the advance he received from the Seagram commission, Rothko purchased his first house, in Provincetown, in June 1958.

itself."[198] Avery explained that these changes were born from his desire to want to paint "like the abstract boys [Rothko and Gottlieb]."[199] Avery's borrowing from Rothko in this manner and at this time points toward a shared flow of artistic ideas between Rothko and Avery, as was the case in their earlier careers. Rothko's experiences on the shore might even, as Carmean suggested, explain Rothko's sensitivity to the interpretation of his abstractions as landscapes/seascapes, in the sense that Rothko might have recognized that he had in fact conceived of some of these images while at the beach. Carmean also raised the intriguing possibility that Rothko's shift to darker palette and the horizontal format of the Seagram works might have occurred earlier than prior scholarship had recognized, in 1957 rather than in 1958, employing Rothko's comment that 1957 was the year "the dark paintings began."[200] By dating the change to 1957, Carmean suggests that Rothko's experiences in Provincetown and thus the work of Avery and Gottlieb might have influenced two of the most important aspects of the Seagram paintings. Christopher Rothko has argued, however, that his father's comment that the dark works began in 1957 was misleading, since the artist made occasional dark paintings throughout his abstract phase. Rothko's color became exceptionally darker for a prolonged period beginning

[198] Philip Cavanaugh, in Ibid., 14.

[199] E. A. Carmean, Jr., "Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko: Provincetown Summers," *Coming to Light: Avery, Gottlieb, Rothko, Provincetown Summers 1957-1961* (New York: Knoedler & Co., 2002): 11.

[200] Mark Rothko to Ronald Alley, February 1, 1960. See Christopher Rothko, "Mark Rothko and the Quiet Dominance of Form," in *Coming to Light: Avery, Gottlieb, Rothko, Provincetown Summers 1957-1961*, E. A. Carmean, Jr. (New York: Knoedler & Co., 2002): 18.

with the Seagram project, or what Christopher Rothko acknowledged as a "general darkening of the palette in the last thirteen years" of Rothko's career.[201]

In addition to the color-architectural relationship Rothko carefully studied in Pompeii, in Tarquinia, he came to understand that several aspects of the Etruscan frescoes from the tombs he visited had the aggressive characteristics he sought for his Seagram paintings. One aspect of the tombs that would have immediately attracted Rothko was their basic function: as monuments to death, as an extension from the Etruscan obsession with death and the rituals of burying their dead.[202] Another aspect of the ancient site that would have appealed to Rothko was the sheer amount of tombs. The more than one hundred fifty painted tombs/tumuli might have conveyed a more impressive number of pictorial narratives of death. Rothko would have also appreciated the small scale of the tombs, mostly carved from rock. Such an intimate scale would have encouraged personalized experiences with viewers, something Rothko also sought. The scale of most of the tombs would have mirrored the human scale he desired for his own Seagram cycle. The scale of the Tomb of the Bulls, for example, creates such a sensation. It also facilitates the narrative of the frescoes, which include the scene of Achilles ambushing the Trojan prince Troilus in the *Ambush of Troilus by Achilles* (ca. 540 BCE, Fig. 28). The relationship between the large scale of the figures in this fresco and the compacted architecture depicted mirrors the sense of entrapment and claustrophobia one might feel in the enclosed space. Moreover, the awkward poses of the

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[201] See Christopher Rothko, "Mark Rothko and the Quiet Dominance of Form," in *Coming to Light: Avery, Gottlieb, Rothko, Provincetown Summers 1957-1961*, E. A. Carmean, Jr. (New York: Knoedler & Co., 2002): 18.

[202] See Stephan Steingräber, *Abundance of Life: Etruscan Wall Painting* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006).

figures, in the sense that they seem incapable of fluid movement or interaction, exacerbates a sense of tension in the work. Rothko employed not only a similar tension between many of his figures throughout his figurative period, but also the tightly controlled architectural settings.

Rothko's written statements about Italian art provide further evidence for why he was so drawn to the Italian works he visited. Long before he first went to Italy, in 1950, Rothko wrote eloquently about Italian art. In his posthumously published manuscript *The Artist's Reality, Philosophy of Art*, he made several comments about Giotto, to offer just one example of an Italian artist that intrigued him. In his chapter "Generalization Since the Renaissance," Rothko wrote a sophisticated analysis as to what made Byzantine (proto-Renaissance) art so special:

> Byzantine painters were in the habit of embellishing their works with actual precious stones, and the halos which encircled the heads of their saints were of real gold. These stones, this gold, and the brilliant colors which were really an extension of the same idea and would have not been used if additional materials of great intrinsic and sensuous value were available, were not employed to convey a picture of the garments of the dignitaries pictured, but rather, in themselves, in their own costliness, to give a sense of the power and sumptuousness of the church.[203]

In the passage, Rothko doesn't speculate what "additional materials of great intrinsic and sensuous value" to which he refers. But, his comments leave open the possibility that he is subtly insinuating that *his* paintings ought to be understood as evolved versions of such pictorial effects. In this way, his works achieve the same result but without stones and gold. Rothko praises Giotto throughout the passage, noting his "greatness" and

[203] Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, 51.

describing some of his strengths.[204] Considering Giotto's use of form, for example, he offers a comparison with Michelangelo. In his estimation, Giotto's figures "give us a physical sense of weight; when they lean we feel their potentiality of falling with a crash in a response to the force of gravitation," whereas Michelangelo's figures "look [more] powerful," so much so that there would be a "terrific crash" if *they* fell.[205] He summarized more of the difference as follows:

> There is a great difference between these two representations, because in the case of Giotto we perceive the feeling of weight and massive movement from the tactility of the form, divorced from our experience of a human being, while in the case of Michelangelo we simply know that a man with such a powerful and tortured expression must be powerful.[206]

This passage would suggest that Giotto is more meaningful to him in terms of abstraction.

The recent exhibition *Rothko/Giotto* (held at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin from February 5-May 3, 2009) drew more attention to their connection and to Rothko's fascination with Giotto's colorfields.[207] The exhibition included only Rothko's *No. 5 (Reds)* (1961, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Fig. 29) and two works by Giotto, *Death of*

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[204] Ibid., 51.
[205] Ibid., 53.
[206] Ibid., 53
[207] David Anfam, for example, has recently described his own seismic shift on the issue of European influences on Abstract Expressionists, from once believing that "Abstract Expressionism was no longer a narrative of various European modernist influences," to now thinking of the development as "inconceivable without the groundings of European thought, art, and culture." Linking Pollock to Luca Signorelli and Philip Guston to Piero della Francesca, among other old masters on both accounts, Anfam participated in the process of re-energizing the study of the transatlantic transmission within Abstract Expressionism. See David Anfam, "Transatlantic Anxieties, Especially Bill's Folly," Joan Marter, *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, ed. (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2007): 52.

the Virgin (ca. 1310, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Fig. 30) and *Crucifixion* (ca. 1315, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Fig. 31), drawing a set of intriguing parallels. The overall goal of Stefan Wepplemann and Gerhard Wolf, who curated the exhibition, was to suggest Rothko's indebtedness to Giotto. This was developed in many ways, not the least of which was, in a catalogue essay by Wepplemann, Rothko's contact with Meyer Schapiro in the 1940s. Schapiro uniquely shaped both modern/contemporary art historical discourse as well as that of the study of Giotto and his era.[208] In addition to spelling out the connection outright in the catalogue, Wepplemann and Wolf suggested one vis-à-vis the installation, which positioned the Rothko alongside the two Giottos on stark white walls. Viewed in this manner, the intense reds of the Rothko come into clearer focus in relation to the gold backgrounds of Giotto's two pieces. The relatively small, chapel-like gallery in which the paintings were installed encouraged viewers to experience all three works simultaneously, in relation to one another and on a more intimate level. The lighting was brighter than Rothko, in his lifetime, would have preferred. But, the implication that all three works were tied together by a shared desire to evoke something spiritual/metaphysical in the viewer was made clear. While Rothko never saw the Berlin Giottos, he possessed a keen awareness and an intuitive sense about Italian art history. The exhibition drew even more attention to Rothko's acute sensitivity about the placement of his mature abstractions in relation to their Italian predecessors.

[208] See Stefan Weppelmann, "'Giotto's Rumblings': Mark Rothko and the Renaissance as a Rhetoric of Modernism," in Stefan Weppelmann and Gerhard Wolf, *Rothko/Giotto* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2009): 42.

According to Robert Goldwater, however, Rothko did not believe he was a colorist.[209] In his review of the exhibition, Goldwater remarked that "we miss the point of his art" by viewing him as a colorist.[210] As Marjorie Phillips recalled, Duncan Phillips believed it was Rothko's "color of course" that contributed to the "magic" of Rothko's style.[211] For Rothko, color suggested a mood, but that mood was more important than the color. The issue of whether Rothko was in fact a colorist has been repeatedly addressed, especially in relation to the Seagram paintings. Christopher Rothko has observed:

> Color. Always the first word one associates with Rothko paintings…and yet I can say, that from my own lifelong involvement with my father's work, it is not color, but form, which directs the action. Color may be the dancer, engaging the viewer frontally with its undeniable energy, but it is kept on a deceptively tight rein by the forms which define the area.[212]

Dan Rice, Rothko's assistant in the late 1950s, explained further the issue of how color functioned in the Seagram paintings. In his view, the Seagram works were "no color

[209] Rothko's assessments were contrary to the assumptions that critics often held about his work. Harold Rosenberg, writing two years after Rothko's death, argued that "Rothko had reduced painting to volume, tone, and color, with color as the vital element." Harold Rosenberg, in David and Cecile Shapiro, eds., *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990): 414. Similar comments were likely the reason that Rosenberg was one of the art critics Rothko "especially despised," as James Breslin noted. Breslin, 385. Rothko expressed this outright in his assessment that "Rosenberg keeps trying to interpret things he can't understand," and called him presumptuous. Mark Rothko, in James Fischer, "Mark Rothko: Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Man," 17-18.

[210] Robert Goldwater, "Reflections on the Rothko Exhibition," *Arts* Vol. 35 (March 1961): 32.

[211] Duncan Phillips and Mark Rothko quoted in Marjorie Phillips, *Duncan Phillips and His Collection* (Washington: W. W. Norton & Co., 1982): 288.

[212] Christopher Rothko, "Mark Rothko and the Quiet Dominance of Form," in *Coming to Light: Avery, Gottlieb, Rothko, Provincetown Summers 1957-1961*, E. A. Carmean, Jr. (New York: Knoedler & Co., 2002): 18.

paintings – not dealing with color."[213] Color is thus instrumental in achieving the mood, but doesn't function as the key ingredient on its own. It is merely a springboard, but a crucial one. Rothko's shift from his more luminous mature work (before 1958) to the much darker Seagram work is perhaps best understood in Rice's view, as a "break from his previous work, where color was the impact."[214] The art historian Werner Haftmann's recollections from a visit to Rothko's studio during the Seagram project clarify this point. He saw a "darkly luminous frieze of [Seagram] pictures running round the whole room," works that Rothko believed were the "climax" of his career. That Rothko did not "hesitate to speak of the Sistine Chapel" during this visit suggests that Rothko's experiences with Italian art served as the catalyst for the progressive darkening of his Seagram paintings.[215] Moreover, John Gage has argued for a link between the juxtapositions between the reds and the blacks of the Seagram murals and the jarring color contrasts Rothko made throughout his abstract phase. Gage observed that Rothko "was less concerned to 'harmonize' than to create discordant, uneasy effects through the juxtaposition of [his colors]."[216]

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[213] From an interview with Dan Rice by Arnold Glimcher, *Mark Rothko: The 1958-1959* ex cat., Pace Gallery, New York, Oct. 28 – Nov 25, 1978.

[214] For a thorough review of Dan Rice's comments on the project, see Breslin, 371-409.

[215] Werner Haftmann, *Mark Rothko* (Kunsthaus Zurich, 1971): ix.

[216] John Gage, "Rothko: Color as Subject," Jeffrey Weiss, *Mark Rothko*, ed., 253. Gage also argued that Rothko's color might have been Max Doerner's 1921 handbook *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting, with Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters*, first published in English in 1934, and widely read among the Abstract Expressionists. See Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting, and Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters*, trans. Eugen Neuhaus (New York, 1934, reprinted San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984). Rothko would also have had access to Clement Greenberg's observations about Venetian color years before he visited Italy. See, for example, Clement Greenberg, "The Venetian Line" (1950).

As with the darkened palette, Rothko also employed aggressive architectural motifs in the Seagram paintings. All of the paintings in the cycle have a large rectangular door or window form (see Figs. 1-9). For Rothko, the rectangle was, as Christopher Rothko observed, "simply there: the most essential element in the spatial world he was exploring [and one that] came to define the universe in which he worked, but it was a universe of near infinite possibilities."[217] These forms are, however, much different than the rectangular shapes found in Rothko's work, from 1949-1958. They play the role of what Michael Auping referred to as illusionistic "portals" to other worlds.[218] By contrast, the signature forms before 1958 show more evidence of the artist's hand and are more painterly than the mural forms. The Seagram shapes are also a hollowed version of the mature fields. It is as if Rothko, with the Seagram works, painted only the frame of his archetypal fields over a darker and flattened color ground.

If these forms are in fact windows, Rothko's reuse of the motif during the Seagram project might have been influenced by key contemporary sources. The first is a classic essay by Lorenz Eitner, first published in a 1955 edition of the *Art Bulletin*, on the subject of the open window in Romantic art.[219] Rothko might have also seen the exhibition of one hundred thirty-one masterworks from the Kunsthistorisches Museum,

[217] See Christopher Rothko, "Mark Rothko and the Quiet Dominance of Form," in *Coming to Light: Avery, Gottlieb, Rothko, Provincetown Summers 1957-1961*, E. A. Carmean, Jr. (New York: Knoedler & Co., 2002): 19.

[218] Michael Auping, "Beyond the Sublime," *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments*, Michael Auping, ed., 146-166.

[219] See Lorenz Eitner, "The Open Window and the Storm-Tossed Boat: An Essay in the Iconography of Romanticism," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 37 (Dec. 1955): 281-290. Eitner's essay was the first investigation of the open-window motif in Romantic works.

Vienna on view in New York in early 1950 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[220] The major impact of the exhibition makes it tempting to assume that Rothko must have seen Johannes Vermeer's *The Artist in His Studio* (ca. 1666, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) and other major paintings on view with prominent window motifs.[221] Rothko was almost certainly aware of modernist paintings that prominently featured the subject of the window. As Carol Troyen has shown, this is true of both conceptually themed works[222] and in American modernist paintings.[223] Rothko's connection to the work of the

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[220] *Art treasures from the Vienna Collections, Lent by the Austrian Government* (New York. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1949). See also P.T.A. Swillins, *Johannes Vermeer: Painter of Delft, 1632-1675* (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950).

[221] It received major press (due to the 875,000 attendees at its previous venue, the National Gallery of Art in Washington). The *New York Times* "referred to it as "the most important show to come to these shores." See "Vienna Art Here for Loan Exhibit," *New York Times* (Feb. 3, 1950): 21.

[222] See, for example, two works by Marcel Duchamp. In *Fresh Widow* (1920, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fig. 32), the panes of a small French window are covered in black leather, blocking access and thus suggesting a frustrated sexuality. For this interpretation, see Arturo Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), cat. no. 265. Duchamp continued the use of the window to in part to convey the idea of frustrated sexuality in *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, (The Large Glass)* (1915-23, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Fig. 33). [is this germane to a discussion of Rothko]

[223] See Charles Sheeler's *View of New York* (1931, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Fig. 34), a work likely inspired by Sheeler's friendship with Duchamp. As Carol Troyen has observed, the open-window functions in the work as a metaphor both for an "ambivalence about the future" and "an unpredictable future."[223] See Carol Troyen, "The Open Window and the Empty Chair: Charles Sheeler's *View of New York*," 40; and Carol Troyen, "Photography, Painting, and Charles Sheeler's *View of New York*," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 86, No. 4 (Dec. 2004): 731. As with Sheeler's non-urban-based architectural paintings, his architectural photography, and his skyscraper-themed works, *View of New York* relies on images of architecture to ground the piece conceptually. In this case, the open window (in his studio) works with an empty chair and a shrouded camera to signify a change in Sheeler's career, namely that, by the early 1930s, he is moving away from his two decades as a commercial photographer and beginning another phase of his career. Rothko might have seen the painting (in the collection of the MFA since 1935), or could have read one of the glowing reports of its acquisition. Both raise the intriguing question of whether Rothko's first use of the open-window them, in 1935, might be connected to Sheeler's work. For more on the acquisition of the painting and the publicity it

Romantic painter Casper David Friedrich might also play a role.[224] As the recent exhibition *Rooms with a View* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in 2011, has shown, the theme of the window, specifically the open window, was central to key works by Casper David Friedrich.[225] As Sabine Rewald, who curated the show, observed, the window motif in two small drawings by Friedrich now in Vienna "inaugurated the motif of the open window in Romantic painting…[as] a potent symbol for the experience of standing on the threshold between an interior and the outside world."[226]

Rothko's door/window frames focus attention on the area within their borders and, like targets, isolate the central area of each canvas. The fields within the borders do not contain the "horizon lines" Robert Rosenblum defined, compositional devices that help us penetrate the canvases visually.[227] Instead, they encourage us to look through them, but curtail any illusionistic recession into space. Not long after Rothko painted the murals, Max Kozloff noted how they "stop the viewer short, and confine[s] his attention

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generated, see Troyen, "Photography, Painting, and Charles Sheeler's *View of New York*," 731, and 746, note 1.

[224] See especially Robert Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," *Artnews* (Feb. 1961): 38-41, 56-58; and *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

[225] See Casper David Friedrich, *View from the Artist's Studio, Window on the Left* (ca. 1805-6, Belvdere, Vienna, Fig. 35) and *View from the Artist's Studio, Window on the Right* (ca. 1805-6, Belvedere, Vienna, Fig. 36).

[226] Sabine Rewald, *Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2011): 3. What is known to us (as signified by the contents of the interior of Friedrich's Dresden studio depicted in the drawings) is thus thrust up against what is unknown (or, the space outside the window). As Rewald found, the hybrid space Friedrich creates in the drawings is neither a landscape nor an interior, a condition that reinforced a sense of "uncertainty…[something that] was immediately recognized as a metaphor for unfulfilled longing…[and] of yearning." Rewald, 3, 4. Here Rewald continues a discussion also found in Carol Troyen, "The Open Window and the Empty Chair: Charles Sheeler's *View of New York*," *American Art Journal* Vol. 18, No. 2 (Spring 1986): 24-41.

[227] Robert Rosenblum, "Notes on Rothko and Tradition," *Mark Rothko 1903-1970* (London: Tate Gallery, 1999): 25.

to a few diminishing nuances on their facades."[228] Anna Chave observed that "for those who see Rothko's classic paintings in architectural terms, in 1949 he quit moving through his imaginary doorway and made the viewer stop once and for all at the threshold with the door thrown open on an unknown, unmarked space or—depending on the picture and the viewer—with the door slammed shut in the viewer's face."[229] Chave also found that the doorway-sized scale of Rothko's signature paintings also points toward the doorway metaphor. Novak and O'Doherty have described a "blankness (or blackness)" that exists at such a threshold.[230] Clearwater called such an experience an "endless journey [that]…traps viewers in a claustrophobic labyrinth."[231] Moreover, Alfred Jensen said that Rothko "had always been haunted by the image of…[a square] grave" from a Czarist pogrom, and felt that "in some profound way it was locked into his painting."[232] By aggressively denying our access, the door/window forms of the Seagram paintings ought to be read in relation to the many architectural settings of his figurative work, within which a sense of isolation and entrapment is often communicated through imagined architectural spaces.[233]

The tense, bristly interplay between flatness and depth can be couched in terms of Hans Hoffmann's "push-pull" method, which similarly played with the notion of depth

[228] Max Kozloff, "Mark Rothko's New Retrospective," *Art Journal* Vol. 20 No. 3 (Spring, 1961): 148-149, citation pp. 149.
[229] Anna Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1989): 74.
[230] Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko's Dark Paintings: Tragedy and Void," *Mark Rothko*, Jeffrey Weiss, ed., 271.
[231] Bonnie Clearwater, *The Rothko Book* (London: Tate, 2006): 139.
[232] Alfred Jensen, quoted in Breslin, 326.
[233] See Michael Compton's introduction to the *Mark Rothko The Seagram Mural Project* ex. cat., (London: Tate Gallery, 1988): 8. He explained: "The figures [in the subway work] are isolated and seem capable of no mutual communication…the principal relationship is not person to person but person to architecture or space."

and recession vis-à-vis color in relation to flattened modernist canvases (see Fig. 37).[234] For Hoffmann, as for Rothko, a painting was something with which to interact, as opposed to something at which to look. The Seagram's door/window forms push toward the viewer, while the flattened color pulls away from us. In 1953, Rothko told Alfred Jensen, that "either their surfaces [of his own canvases] are expansive and push outward in all directions, or their surfaces contract and rush inward in all directions."[235] As John Gage has shown, such comments indicate Rothko's awareness of Hoffmann's method. Such a recession/advancement bears an interesting parallel with Robert Motherwell's *Open* Series. Beginning in 1967 (see *Open No. 122 in Scarlet and Blue* (1969, Tate Collection, Fig. 38) Motherwell used colorfields and window shapes abstracted from images of paintings stacked in his studio. In other words, he distilled the basic elements of drawing and color to investigate issues of space. In this way, Rothko's first series, like Motherwell's, is indebted to Matisse's frequent incorporation of doors and windows into his compositions, along with his depictions of paintings, empty frames, and other works of art in the colorfields he fashioned to investigate space, artifice, and nature. By playing with the balance between flatness and illusion vis-à-vis the door/window form, it is quite possible that Rothko might have even had Leon Battista Alberti metaphoric window (from his *De picture*, 1435) in mind during the project. In either case, the experience of

[234] John Gage, in Weiss, 252. While Rothko never studied with Hoffman directly, he was well aware of Hoffman's theories, which were ubiquitous within the New York avant-garde of the postwar period. Rothko had read, in the 1930s, the book *Expressionism in Art* by Sheldon Cheney, whose ideas were heavily influenced by Hoffman's. See Breslin, 106, and Sheldon Cheney, *Expressionism in Art* (New York, 1934).

[235] Breslin, 301.

at once encouraging and denying spectatorial access can be read aggressively, thwarting our efforts at fully accessing his canvases.

In addition to the Pompeian Villa, Michelangelo's Library (see Figs. 39-40) profoundly influenced Rothko during both his 1950 and 1959 Italian visits. Rothko seems to have had a special kinship with Michelangelo, perhaps believing that Michelangelo's project for San Lorenzo augured his own work for the Seagram building, in the sense that both epitomize the standards of their respective cities and eras. The San Lorenzo complex reflects a uniquely Florentine blend of Humanism and Catholicism not unlike how the Seagram building suggests the economic superiority and capitalist enterprise of the corporation. The Humanist standard of knowledge and learning was replaced by the capitalist standard of economic prosperity. This might help to explain why the Seagram building has been compared to Italian Renaissance architecture, from its Park Avenue "piazza," to what Mies's biographer Franz Schulze called the "neo-Florentine palazzo" across the street, implying a dialogue between the two buildings.[236]

The Library is situated within the San Lorenzo complex in Florence and was commissioned in 1524 by Pope Clement VII, Giulio de' Medici, to house the Medician collection of manuscripts. The historiography on the Library is lengthy and often

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[236] Schulze, 275, referring to the Racquet and Tennis Club, built in 1918 by McKim, Mead, and White. Such a conversation Mies instigated between the Seagram and Italian architecture is perhaps unsurprising, given his view that the Palazzo Pitti in Florence was "one of the strongest buildings," marveling how a building can be made with such "few means," or that ancient Roman aqueducts were "all of them…of the same character," a simplicity he sought throughout his career, and one that doubtlessly inspired his admiration for Andrea Palladio. Mies, quoted in Peter Carter, *Mies van der Rohe at Work* (New York: Praeger, 1974): 174. For Mies's admiration of Palladio, see Schulze, 30.

contradictory.[237] While a good deal of it postdates Rothko's encounter with the Library, the artist seems to have instinctively understood a pivotal idea about the building: namely that its combination of form and space reads aggressively.

According to John Fisher, Rothko articulated his desire to control the mood of the spectator in reference to Michelangelo:

> After I had been at work for some time, I realized that I was much influenced subconsciously by Michelangelo's walls in the staircase room of the Medicean Library [Laurentian Library] in Florence [see Figs. 164-165]– he achieved just the kind of feeling I'm after – he makes the viewers feel that they are trapped in a room where all the doors and windows are bricked up, so that all they can do is butt their heads forever against the wall.[238]

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[237] In 1934, Rudolf Wittkower brought the space into modern art historical scholarship with his essay "Michelangelo Biblioteca Laurenziana," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 16 (1934): 218. This was quickly followed by Charles de Tolnay, "La Bibliothèque Laurentienne de Michel-ange: Nouvelles Recherches," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 14 (1935): 95-96, revised in Charles de Tolnay, *Michel-ange* (Paris, 1951): 169 ; and in Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo: Sculptor, Painter, Architect* (Princeton : Princeton Univ. Press, 1975): 131-132. Nikolaus Pevsner, in his massive 1943 study of European architecture, considered the building as a definitive representation of Mannerism. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 6th Jubilee Edition, 1960, first published 1943). Most notable pioneering subsequent accounts focused primarily on the Library include James Ackerman, *The Architecture of Michelangelo, Vol. II*, (New York: Viking, 1961): 33-44; *Michelangelo: Six Lectures by Johannes Wilde*, Michael Hirst and John Shearman, eds. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978): 134-137; Staale Singing Larsen, "The Laurenziana Vestibule as a Functional Solution," *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia, VIII* (1978): 213-222; Howard Saalman, "The New Sacristy of San Lorenzo before Michelangelo," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 67 (1985): 199-228; Ralph Lieberman, "Michelangelo's Design for the Biblioteca Laurenziana," *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth Vol. 2, Art and Architecture*, Andrew Morrogh, ed. (Florence: Giunti Barbèra, 1985): 571-595; Frank Salmon, "The Site of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 49, No. 4 (Dec. 1990): 407-429; Andrew Morrogh, "The Magnificent Tomb: A Key Project in Michelangelo's Architectural Career," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 74, No. 4 (Dec., 1992): 567-598; Carlo Giulio Argan and Bruno Contardi, *Michelangelo Architect* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993): 186-197; David Hemsoll, "The Laurentian Library and Michelangelo's Architectural Method," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 66 (2003): 29-62; and Cammy Brothers, *Michelangelo, Drawing, and the Invention of Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2008).

[238] Rothko, in Fisher, 16.

Rothko made similar comments to his assistant Dan Rice as he worked on the Seagram series that reveal his aggressive endeavors.[239] For Rice, such comments indicated Rothko's preference for the Seagram paintings over his signature works. The Seagram paintings, in his view, more straightforwardly influenced the mood of the spectator for the reason that employ references to Michelangelo's blind windows.[240]

Like the blind windows, the odd space of the Library likely affected Rothko. The space consists of a small Ricetto, or vestibule, which is nearly filled by Michelangelo's dramatic staircase that leads up to a long, narrow, rectangular reading room. Windows face the cloister of San Lorenzo on one side and flood each room with ample light. On the opposite wall, a series of blind-windows, which mirror the design of the cloister windows, continue the pattern around the antechamber and within the Library proper.[241] As with each individual Seagram painting, each blind window is essentially ineffectual on its own and is meant only to be part of a unified composition. The interplay between the blind-windows and the actual windows that face the cloister is part of what creates the tension within the space.[242] Rudolf Wittkower understood this as an "irreconcilable

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[239] Glimcher, 66.

[240] Ibid, 66.

[241] For more on the function of the blind windows, see Ralph Lieberman, "Michelangelo's Design for the Biblioteca Laurenziana," *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth Vol. 2, Art and Architecture*, Andrew Morrogh, ed. (Florence: Giunti Barbèra, 1985): 571-595.

[242] Michelangelo employed such a tension throughout his career. In terms of the marriage between painting and architecture—a crucial component of the Seagram project—Michelangelo's massive Last Judgment fresco (1537-41, Sistine Chapel, Vatican) offers perhaps the best example of such a tension. The fresco becomes an unmistakable part of the architecture of the Chapel, pushing and pulling with it in a tension not unlike what Rothko anticipated for how his cycle would behave in its anticipated space in the Grill Room. A similar tension is to be found elsewhere in the

conflict," one that reflects a "a situation of doubt and uncertainty."[243] Robert S. Jackson deciphered the tension poetically and psychologically, that "the Ricetto will have played its part in bringing about a movement in which body and psyche join to produce not only an 'artistic' resolution but also a personal one."[244] Roy Daniells similarly accounted for the "overwhelming oppression" of the Library in phenomenological terms, concluding that "to enter the Laurentian Library is to confront an architectural statement of extreme, perhaps unique, intensity."[245] Moreover, Guglielmo De Angelis d'Ossat described the vestibule of the Library as a "hostile architectural pit."[246] For all these reasons, this odd space appealed to Rothko. This is precisely because he sought spaces that elicited the sense of entrapment, claustrophobia, and antagonism. While it is unclear whether Michelangelo desired this result, Rothko apparently believed that he had fallen into an experiential trap Michelangelo had set more than four hundred thirty years previously.

The bizarre dimensions of the Ricetto, measuring 31 x 34 x 33 feet, contribute to the aggressive character of the space. Andrew Morrogh called it an "unusually contained space," coupled with the massive staircase that consumes the room.[247] The dramatic staircase keeps the room from being a destination on its own, forever relegating it, in a servile way, to its adjacent room. Rothko was likely thinking about the relationship

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Sistine, most notably in the placement of the prophets/sibyls on the ceiling, who engage with and seem to try to break free from the architecture grounding them.

[243] Rudolf Wittkower, "Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana" in *Idea and Image*, (London, 1978): 35-42.

[244] Robert S. Jackson, "Michelangelo's Ricetto of the Laurentian Library," *Art Journal* (Fall, 1968):

[245] Roy Daniells, *Milton, Mannerism, and Baroque* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1963): 16-17.

[246] Guglielmo de Angelis d'Ossat, "Architecture," *The Complete Works of Michelangelo*, Mario Salmi, ed. (London: MacDonald, 1966).

[247] Andrew Morrogh, "The Magnificent Tomb: A Key Project in Michelangelo's Architectural Career," 568.

between both rooms while he was in the complex and thereafter. For Michelangelo, the room-to-room progression resulted from the many restrictions of the Library space. As Staale Sinding Larsen found, such restrictions were in fact the driving force behind the design of the Library.[248] There was also the challenge of locating the Library within a preexisting scheme of buildings at San Lorenzo. To overcome this, Michelangelo employed what Morrogh observed to be a "highly original choreography of columns" in the Library, "blocking and reblocking them" specifically to work out a dialectical relationship with "the wall and…the viewer."[249] He was just as concerned with the relationships between room to room as he was with the relationships between viewer and space as well as viewer and form. Rothko would have encountered a similar problem with the Seagram project: of finding a way to merge his canvases to the pre-established confines of the Grill Room in particular and the restaurant overall.

Rothko was especially sensitive to the relationship between the Grill Room to the rest of the restaurant not unlike Michelangelo's concern with linking the Ricetto both to neighboring spaces and to the San Lorenzo complex overall. Knowing that the correlation between his murals and the architecture of the restaurant would be essential, Rothko, even before beginning to paint, rented a new studio for the project, a former YMCA located at 222 The Bowery, one that had enough space to accommodate a full-scale mock-up of the restaurant space. At twenty-three feet high, the studio's walls provided him with ample flexibility to conceive and manage the large works he knew he would need to fashion to make his painted environment more architectural. In the studio,

[248] Staale Singing Larsen, "The Laurenziana Vestibule as a Functional Solution," *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia, VIII* (1978): 213-222.
[249] Andrew Morrogh, "The Magnificent Tomb: A Key Project in Michelangelo's Architectural Career," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 74, No. 4 (Dec., 1992): 567.

he approximated the restaurant's space, covering three of the interior walls with a scaffolding covered in plasterboard and making a movable fourth wall. He constructed all of this to the exact specifications of the Grill Room, fifty-six by twenty-seven feet. Rothko went to such lengths to create a template for the space in an attempt to deal with the many complications of the room in which the murals were meant to be installed. He had to take into consideration that the paintings needed to be hung at least three feet above the floor to be seen over the heads of the patrons; that they would have been installed on walls that were covered either in beige-colored carpet or mahogany panels; that he would have had to avoid partitions projecting into the room; and that there were only three window-less walls of the room where art could be placed, all in addition to other quirks of the space. A sequence of grid patterns on the ceiling and walls, not unlike the blind-windows in the Laurentian structure, reinforce the geometric rigidity of the room and make it not easy to place art. In addition to recreating the footprint of the room in his studio, Rothko then blocked off six of the studio's eight windows to simulate what he imagined to be the lighting in the Grill Room: low and diffused, with windows that look out north onto 53rd Street, framed by dark, heavy drapes, and nearly concealed by additional virtually opaque coverings. The interior décor (see Fig. 12), which has been more or less remained unchanged since the restaurant's opening, in 1959, provides a clear sense of the lighting. As Philip Johnson saw it, "Mies liked that dark, noble feeling."[250] Even at the beginning of the project, Rothko imagined that the low-lighting of the restaurant and the windows limited to one end of the space would have made the cycle

[250] Philip Johnson, 140.

seem more mysterious, more brooding, not unlike that of the Library, the Pompeian Villa, and the Etruscan tomb.

While Rothko's fondness for Italy explains why he selected the Italian sources he did as inspiration for the scale, color, and shapes of the murals, what has not been addressed are the potential reasons why he wanted to weave pictorial and architectural concerns to manufacture a potentially tense space for his viewers. To start with, Rothko is generally understood to have suffered from depression, which links him to Michelangelo. As David Anfam recently observed, this is one of the multiple points of intersection between the two artists, specifically that both exhibited the melancholic temperament.[251] Pairing a photo from 1964 of a gloomy-appearing Rothko seated in an Adirondack chair in his East Hampton studio with a reproduction of Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melancholia I* (1514), Anfam argued that "melancholia was the reservoir from which Rothko's high creativity evidently sprung."[252] Anfam even speculated on whether Rothko's loss of a parent at an early age contributed to this tendency, citing clinical studies reported by John Bowlby in 1980.[253] In this sense, Michelangelo's saturnine temperament probably contributed to the aggressiveness of the Library's design, which, in turn, seems to have triggered Rothko's uneasy experience of the space.

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[251] Anfam, "To See, or Not to See," *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding*, *The Rothko Chapel Series*. Anfam borrows from the pioneering research of Rudolf and Margot Wittkower's investigations of the melancholic temperament, in *Born Under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists, A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1969).

[252] Anfam, "To See, or Not to See," *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding*, *The Rothko Chapel Series*, 69.

[253] John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss Vol. 3: Loss, Sadness and Depression* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). See also Anfam, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas*, note 31.

Furthermore, by the time Rothko accepted the commission in 1958, the Abstract Expressionist style he had helped to create had been replaced by a new and different vanguard sensibility in New York, part of a second generation of artists that included Rauschenberg and Johns. As Irving Sandler described in the last chapter of *The Triumph of American Painting* (1970), there was a dissolution of the Abstract Expressionist community by the mid-1950s. The lessened magnetism of both the Club and the Cedar Street Tavern contributed to this, symbolically solidified by Jackson Pollock's death in 1956.[254] It also might have made Rothko especially sensitive to his pivotal role as an even larger figurehead of Abstract Expressionism. As James Breslin observed, Rothko's

[254] When revisionist scholarship of Abstract Expressionism emerged with the publication of Serge Guilbaut's groundbreaking book *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983) it became clear, moreover, that the small, allegedly tightly-knit community of avant-garde artists working in and around New York was in fact far more nuanced than earlier accounts suggested. Currently, the transatlantic link is still debated, and the relationship between Abstract Expressionism and the Cold War, an extension of the broad discussion of where American nationalism fits in, is still "hotly contested," as Adrian R. Duran pointed out in "Abstract Expressionism's Italian Reception: Questions of Influence," in Marter, 138. Continuing the conversation about the European influence on the Abstract Expressionists, Dore Ashton provided an explanation for the thorny issue of "American-ness." Citing references to David Craven's book *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique*, which has at its core the contention that the Abstract Expressionists were anathema to nationalism (and thus wouldn't have promoted themselves as decidedly "American" painters), Ashton points out a seemingly irreconcilable conflict: that these artists "both wanted and didn't want to be American artists." See Dore Ashton, "Implications of Nationalism for Abstract Expressionism," in Marter, 26. See also David Craven, *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999). Although his abstract colorfields suggested a "place," one that seemed to supersede boarders and boundaries, nationalistic or otherwise, it became clear by the late 1950s that Rothko's paintings nonetheless began to be exploited as cultural weapons of Cold War-era politics. See Jonathan Harris, "Mark Rothko and the Development of American Modernism," *Oxford Art Journal* Vol. 11, No. 1 (1988): 42. For more on the relationship between the C.I.A. and Abstract Expressionism in Cold War politics see David and Cecile Shapiro "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," first published in Jack Salzman, ed., *Prospects* Vol. 3 (1977).

acceptance of the Seagram project "advanced Rothko's position as perhaps the major living artist of his generation."[255]

Another explanation for Rothko's aggression by the late 1950s concerns the onslaught of harsh criticism he received from artists that he believed respected him and his work. Rothko's acceptance of the Seagram commission confirmed for many that he had become as corrupted as those who paid exorbitant prices for his pieces. Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still noted that they "considered themselves purist independents … [and felt that] Rothko had become a philistine who courted mainstream acceptance and success."[256] Newman wrote to Sidney Janis, in 1955: "It is true that Rothko talks the fighter. He fights, however, to submit to the philistine world. My struggle against bourgeois society has involved the total rejection of it."[257] Espousing a similar tone, Robert Motherwell made the spiteful remark that Rothko "liked one to treat him as a genius."[258] For the ever-sensitive Rothko, such condemnation would have had a major impact, namely that such harsh criticism seems to have inspired Rothko to acknowledge overtly the negative implications of his commercial success by working to create an environment that he believed would antagonize the establishment. Such an intensely personal/internal debate plagued him during his Italian trip.

In the spring of 1960, after Rothko and his wife Mell dined at the Four Seasons, he notoriously quipped: "anyone who will eat that kind of food for those kinds of prices

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[255] Breslin, 383.

[256] Diane Waldman, *Mark Rothko in New York* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1994): 23.

[257] Barnett Newman, in a letter to Sidney Janis (dated April 9, 1955), in John P. O'Neill, *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992): 201.

[258] Robert Motherwell, "On Rothko," (1970). Rothko Motherwell Archive, Greenwich, CT.

will never look at a picture of mine" and immediately abandoned the project.[259] He returned the cash advance he had received from the Seagram Corporation and withdrew from the commission altogether. As Michael Compton argued, "accounts of his motivations and intentions, the dates of events, the progress of the scheme, its final form, and the reasons for its abandonment are contradictory or inadequate."[260] Diane Waldman found that Rothko abandoned the project because he "probably felt guilty because he was himself rich and had accepted a commission for a commercial establishment that served the wealthy."[261] Waldman, in her 1994 book *Mark Rothko in New York*, observed that the "intensively meditative paintings…were totally incompatible with the setting for which they were intended. As attracted as he must have been by the idea of his first commission, Rothko would allow nothing to interfere with his concern for moral and ethical issues in art."[262] James Breslin observed, Rothko "felt ambivalent about the [Seagram] project from the start…[because he was] ambivalent about *any* exhibition of his work. "[263] Robert Motherwell also thought that Rothko "had a deep-rooted ambivalence, a persistent doubt…that went far beyond an artist's usual doubts at work."[264] This is mostly likely why, shortly after he agreed to the terms of the commission, Rothko met with Willem de Kooning, who recalled that Rothko "was happy

[259] From an interview with Dan Rice by Arnold Glimcher, *Mark Rothko: The 1958-1959* ex cat., Pace Gallery, New York, Oct. 28 – Nov 25, 1978.

[260] Michael Compton, Introduction to Michael Compton, *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project*, ex. cat. (The Tate Gallery, Liverpool) (London: Tate, 1988): 10.

[261] See *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: A Retrospective*, Diane Waldman, ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., in collaboration with The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1978): 65.

[262] Diane Waldman, *Mark Rothko in New York* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1994): 28.

[263] Breslin, 373.

[264] Robert Motherwell, "On Rothko," (1970). Rothko Motherwell Archive, Greenwich, CT.

[because]…he made a contract…so he could get out of it."[265] Rothko himself alluded to this:

> My first instinct was the general distrust of all dealing promises of this sort. Therefore the first item of the contract was a provision that in the event of a desire on the part of my patrons to dispose of the pictures that they must be resold to me.[266]

Mell Rothko, Rothko's assistant Dan Rice, Dore Ashton, Werner Haftmann, and Thomas Hess all had no reason to doubt Rothko's claim that he had stopped working on the project earnestly. In other words, they all believed Rothko, who reiterated the narrative that he had stopped working only when Philip Johnson and his team, without consultation, changed the restaurant's initial design. With the change, only patrons and thus not employees, would be able to see the murals.[267] As Haftmann recalled, Rothko believed the project was "completely destroyed when he learned that this room was to be used as a restaurant for the most exclusive parties. He had no intention of handing over his pictures."[268] Mell Rothko went as far as claiming that "as far as she could remember, her husband did not know what the room would be used for when he undertook the commission and certainly was unaware that it would be turned into a restaurant."[269] Hess

[265] Joseph Liss, "Willem de Kooning Remembers Mark Rothko," *Art News* Vol. 78 (Jan. 1979): 43.
[266] Mark Rothko, in *Rothko*, Oliver Wick (Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2007): 169-170.
[267] Ashton, *About Rothko*, 156.
[268] See Walter Haftmann, Mark Rothko (Zurich: Kunsthaus, 1971): 7-11.
[269] Mary Alice Rothko, letter to Ronald Alley. See Ronald Alley, *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art* (London: Tate Gallery, 1981): 657-663.

pointed out that Rothko "thought it would be a ceremonial space in this grand building and did not realize it would be a regular restaurant open every day."[270]

On the other hand, Phillip Johnson, who designed the Four Seasons space, gave a completely different testimony. So did Phyllis Bronfman Lambert. Johnson claimed that Rothko "knew perfectly well [it] would be an expensive restaurant," thus accusing Rothko of fabricating a spurious reason to abandon the project.[271] Lambert corroborated Johnson's assessment of what Rothko knew about the space when he accepted the commission.[272] To Johnson and Lambert, it was inconceivable that Rothko was unaware of how opulent the restaurant would be. Rothko was certainly aware of the opening of the building as a major event in May 1958, before he painted his first mural. He might have even had access to some of the published reviews of the building. One such review, from the July 1958 edition of *Architectural Forum*, touted the "luxurious ground floor restaurant."[273] Rothko's son Christopher's comments seem to also raise the question of whether Rothko's explanations for abandoning the project were genuine. "I think he deceived himself about what that restaurant was going to be about," he observed, "[because] he desperately wanted to do a major public work ... but once he saw the reality that had always been whispering to him, he couldn't ignore it anymore."[274]

Rothko's aggressive denouncement of his élite audience was in part a rejection of himself, or, specifically his dealings with that community. As James Breslin observed,

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[270] Thomas Hess, quoted in Ronald Alley. See Alley, *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art* (London: Tate Gallery, 1981): 657-663.
[271] Phillip Johnson, quoted in Breslin, 375.
[272] Phyllis Lambert, paper in Seagram archive (August 18, 1987).
[273] "Seagram's Bronze Tower," *Architectural Forum* Vol. 109 (July 1958): 66-77.
[274] Christopher Rothko, in Clare Dwyer Hogg, "Rothko Revealed: Christopher Rothko Shares Troubled Memories of his Father Mark," *The Independent* (Sept .21, 2008).

Rothko's "different aims, values, and social position, and his economic dependence on them…[meant that he] had always approached collectors warily."[275] The lucrative Seagram commission together with the publicity it garnered led to a drastic increase in his income, from $21,000 in 1958 to $61,000 in 1959. By 1961, he was getting anywhere from $10,000 to $15,000 per painting. With his starving artist early years now far behind him, Rothko, as Breslin surmised, "looked at his career…and wondered if he were corrupt."[276] In August 1958, just weeks after he started the Seagram project, Rothko's canvas *No. 14* (1957, Collection of Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, VA) won the United States National Selection Award in the Guggenheim Museum's international awards competition, to which Sidney Janis submitted the painting without Rothko's knowledge. Furious, Rothko rejected both the award and its $1,000 prize, perhaps attempting to deny the reality that his works were coveted currencies.[277]

At some point during the project, perhaps at the time of his visit to the restaurant in 1960, Rothko realized that his paintings would not operate in the way that he envisioned, that his targeted viewers probably would not experience them in the way he hoped they would. The embrace of his art by many collectors and the exorbitant prices they were willing to pay for it short-circuited his subversion. What is unclear and perhaps unknowable is whether he, upon recognizing the failure of his aggressive endeavor, hoped that his rejection of the commission earned him the credibility that some

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[275] Breslin, 417.

[276] James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, 374.

[277] See David Craven, "Abstract Expressionism & Left-Wing Discourse," *Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 51-78.

of his contemporaries believed he had lost.[278] Although his Seagram environment never manifested as he intended, Rothko, by looking to Italian sources, moved closer to uniting painting and architecture.

[278] In this way, the defunct project recall Diego Rivera's problematic pictorial-architectural commission for Rockefeller Center, a project which similarly did not manifest as an attack on the establishment as Rivera had originally intended. Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads* (1932-34, formerly at Rockefeller Center, New York, Fig. 182) similarly pitted commercial interests against rebellious artistic sensibilities. Rivera, who lived in the United States from 1930 to 1934, negotiated a similar problem Rothko had, namely of accepting major commissions from the American business élite (for Rivera, from the Rockefellers, and for Rothko, from the Bronfmans, at the helm of Seagram's), while at the same time staunchly opposing the sensibilities of that system. Rothko's distaste for the rich patrons who bought his paintings in this sense mirrors Rivera's support of socialist and Communist ideologies. Each of their positions, their respective denouncements of the élite, also encouraged the subjects and themes of their respective mural projects. For Rivera, who opposed the Stalinist regime, and was, as a result, expelled from the Mexican Communist Party, in 1930, his inclusion of a portrait of Vladimir Lenin allowed him to reassert his socialist leanings in the New York mural. And for Rothko, his inclusion of the architectural and spatial references to the Library similarly allowed him to reassert his anti-élite status, borrowing from what he understood to be an aggressive, tense, conflicting environment of Michelangelo's space. For a thorough account of the project, see Irene Herner de Larrea, *Diego Rivera's Murals at Rockefeller Center* (Mexico City, 1990). Not all of Rivera's mural projects are, however, as antagonistic. In fact, he considered his *Detroit Industry Murals* for the Ford Motor Company (1932-33) to be among his most successful works.

CHAPTER 4:
EARLY WORKS

This chapter examines selections from Rothko's figurative period from 1924 to ca. 1940 with the aim of providing evidence that Rothko's aggressive architectural use of art during the Seagram project has its roots in his prior work.[279] The discussion will focus primarily on *Mother and Child* (ca. 1940, Collection of Christopher Rothko, Fig. 41), the last painting Rothko made before his Surrealist phase, a work that intriguingly foretells what Rothko seems to have intended for his Seagram environment. Additional paintings will also factor into the discussion, in order to present a stylistic context for Rothko's high level of interest in architectural settings, and why he seems to have meant for those settings to involve tension and contention. This will include paintings that showcase Rothko's longstanding interest in tall buildings, one that seems to have culminated in his decision to fashion murals for arguably the most important skyscraper of the 1950s. The subject of how Rothko used architectural compositions in his figurative period to convey something uneasy, disagreeable, an even aggressive has been completely neglected, as has the relationship of aspects of these early works to the Seagram paintings. It is as if Hilton's Kramer's assessment that "nobody takes [Rothko's figurative work] very seriously as art" has still not been completely debunked.[280]

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[279] By "figurative," I am referring to the one hundred seventy-seven works on canvas Rothko painted before *Antigone* (ca. 1939-1940, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 42), which launched his Surrealist (and ultimately post-figurative) period. While Rothko used variations of figures after Antigone, the pre-Surrealist works are more clearly categorized as traditional figurative paintings.

[280] Hilton Kramer, "Art Chronicle," *The Hudson Review* Vol. 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 1962): 415. Kramer raised the question of "how much of his late style was born of a radical deficiency of sensibility and ineptness in the elementary practices of his

Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s Rothko was "tormented" and "completely absorbed" by his work, according to his wife Edith Sachar, whom he married in November of 1932.[281] This was in part due to their unhappy marriage ca. 1940. Morris Calden, who lived with the Rothkos during that time, mentioned that Rothko and Edith had "violent arguments" almost daily.[282] They first separated in the summer of 1937, separated again in either 1940 or 1941, and ultimately divorced on February 1, 1944. By 1940, Rothko seems to have prioritized his art over his relationship, even perhaps using his art as an escape from Edith and from their complex marriage. He found her to be cold and materialistic, and she disapproved both of his abstract paintings as well as the work of his friends. The distance between them is epitomized by Edith's comment that "I wouldn't hang one [a painting by Milton Avery] in my bathroom."[283] Considering Rothko's admiration for Avery, it is not difficult to see why he was so outraged with Edith as a result of her remark.

Rothko's writings from that time also evidence his anger, including a short passage from November 1938 written on behalf of the artistic group The Ten.[284] In the statement for the exhibition *The Ten: Whitney Dissenters* he co-wrote with Bernard

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craft…[even when] Rothko was in his thirties…[his figurative work] has the look of some juvenilia executed by a not very gifted art student." Kramer, 416.

[281] Breslin, 127.

[282] Breslin, 144.

[283] Ibid., 145.

[284] The group debuted in 1935, with the exhibition of the work of Rothko and eight other artists (held at the Montross Gallery, at 785 Fifth Avenue in New York) under the heading "The Ten: An Independent Group." The exhibition was held from Dec. 16, 1935 – Jan. 4, 1936. The group would exhibit together eight times, from 1935-1939. Other members includes Ben-Zion [Weinman], Ilya Bolotowsky, Adolph Gottlieb, Louis Harris, Jack Kufeld, Louis Schanker, Joseph Solman, and Nahum Tschacbasov. For more on their relationship, see Breslin, 102. The group met regularly at each of their studios to discuss art, among other matters. They commented on the reproductions of European art in such magazines as *Cahiers d'Art*.

Braddon and Sidney Schectman, who co-owned the Mercury Galleries on West 8th Street, Rothko takes an outsider stance. He calls attention to what he saw as the arrogance of the Whitney Museum of American Art, or what he called, the "silo."[285] Both the exhibition and Rothko's comments were designed to protest the Whitney, which had not, by 1938, collected any work by a member of The Ten, interestingly foretelling the 1950 letter Rothko co-wrote with twenty-seven of the core Abstract Expressionists denouncing Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition practices. While it is not clear whether anti-Semitism played a role in this exclusion, even though all nine members of the group were Jewish, what it clear is that the oversight was especially upsetting to Rothko and the other painters in the group, especially considering that the museum's founder Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney had, by that point, already collected nearly six hundred American paintings. Provocatively, the group selected an exhibition venue, the Mercury Galleries, which was a stone's throw from the Whitney building. While "attacking the Whitney [in this manner]," as Breslin pointed out, "was a way to grab some of what little public attention was then paid to art, and it worked," it also revealed just how disturbing such a rejection must have been for Rothko, one that anticipated his own rescinding in 1959 of the Seagram project and all it signified for him.[286]

Rothko, at this time, also suffered from financial insecurity. In June 1936, the Treasury Relief Art Project invited Rothko, along with nearly five hundred artists, to apply for one of its coveted positions, which he received in August of 1936, initially

[285] Rothko, *Writings on Art,* 16.
[286] Breslin, 104.

making $95.44 per month to work for fifteen hours per week.[287] He submitted only one known painting, on February 13, 1937.[288] After losing that position, as most easel-painters did, he worked for the Easel Division of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, from May 1937, to August 1939.[289] It was during that time that he came into close contact with many of the more than two thousand New York-based artists

[287] For more on Rothko's role in the WPA, see Breslin, 119-149. The Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project was created from the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, funded, in 1934, by Congress on the order of President Roosevelt. It created nearly eight million jobs for artists and artisans, many of whom went on to become Abstract Expressionists. New bridges, parks, schools, swimming pools, sewers dams, runways, among other projects, were built. Art historians are still uncovering, literally in some cases, the full story of the WPA murals. Gorky's murals (1935-37) for the Newark Airport Administration Building, for example, were only recently uncovered and exhibited. See Jody Patterson, "Flight From Reality: A Reconsideration of Gorky's Politics and Approach to Public Muralism in the 1930s," in *Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective*, Michael Taylor, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2009). For a thorough account of the WPA murals, see Francis V. O'Connor, *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, ed. (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973).

[288] Ibid, 585, note 8. His *Untitled (Study for a Social Security Building Mural)* (1940) is the only extant work Rothko made for a mural competition. It depicts a scene from the life of Benjamin Franklin (in the lower section).

[289] Breslin, 118-149. The WPA-FAP was created from the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, funded, in 1934, by Congress on the order of President Roosevelt. It created nearly eight million jobs for artists and artisans, many of whom went on to become Abstract Expressionists. New bridges, parks, schools, swimming pools, sewers dams, runways, among other projects, were built. Of the many artists who worked under the FAP branch of the program, which ran from August 1935 to June 1943, William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, Norman Lewis, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Tobey, among others, specifically engaged in an architectural themes and concepts. Art historians are still uncovering, literally in some cases, the full story of the WPA murals. Gorky's murals (1935-37) for the Newark Airport Administration Building, for example, were only recently uncovered and exhibited. See Jody Patterson, "Flight From Reality: A Reconsideration of Gorky's Politics and Approach to Public Muralism in the 1930s," in Michael Taylor, *Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective*, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2009). For a thorough account of the WPA murals, see Francis V. O'Connor, *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, ed. (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973).

working for the WPA. But, it was also during that time that his financial security as an artist was especially uncertain.

At that time Rothko painted to, "recover a sensual, emotional aspect of the self that had been repressed, lost, or damaged in childhood…[that] left him feeling depressed and walled-in (like the people in his paintings)," as Breslin put it.[290] Rothko came to America when he was only ten year old, arriving at Ellis Island on August 17, 1913, with his mother Anna and his sister Sonia, after a twelve-day journey at sea. His first exposure to his new country had such a profound impact on him that he expressed grief about it well into his adulthood. He once told Robert Motherwell that "you don't know what it's like to be a Jewish kid dressed in a suit that is a Dvinsk not an American suit traveling across America and not able to speak English."[291] His father, Jacob Rothkowitz, whom Rothko adored, once describing him as a "man of great character, great intelligence," died on March 27, 1914, soon after Rothko's arrival.[292] Both events, his arrival in America and his father's death, exacerbated Rothko's sense of outsiderness and alienation that arose from his early life in his hometown of Dvinsk, now in Latvia, an extremely cold place located not far from the Arctic Circle. Dvinsk was a hotbed of violence, stemming from Russification and anti-Semitism, all of which forced Rothko inward.[293] Moreover, 1940 was a transitional year for Rothko. He stopped painting around that year to concentrate on delving deeper into philosophical and literary works. As mentioned, it was also at that time (1940-41) that he wrote most of the manuscript for what would become the posthumously published, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of*

[290] Ibid., 127.
[291] Robert Motherwell, quoted in Breslin, 21.
[292] Ibid., 15.
[293] Ibid., 10-11.

Art.[294] He was likely in a state of depression at that time, which may help to explain why *Mother and Child* and related works involve aggressive architectural settings.

Mother and Child is referred to in only two publications, the first in Edward Alden Jewell's short review in the *New York Times* of the *Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors Second Annual* exhibition, held at the Wildenstein Gallery in mid-1942. In a one-line reading of the painting, Jewell observed that it "seems a pretty-mannered and self-conscious [painting]…its color scheme yellow, beige, orange, and red."[295] In the catalogue raisonné, David Anfam refers to the painting only once, noting that its figures "push beyond the borders that confine them, as do those of the next decade."[296] What makes *Mother and Child* worth our attention, however, is that it shows Rothko's exploration of key pictorial and architecturally-grounded ideas that later culminated in his Seagram project. The first is the compacted, claustrophobic sense of space Anfam mentioned, though not in relation to the Seagram paintings. We are presented with two figures occupying an architectural setting, with decorative architectural details framing the walls and ceiling. The odd scale between figures and environment has forced the mother to bend her head toward our right, wedging herself into the claustrophobic, windowless room. She seems to advance into the spectator's zone, especially with her right foot, as if testing these spatial waters. As with many of his figurative works, Rothko depicts architectural spaces that seem to aggressively trap the figures within. Another ingredient of the Seagram paintings prefigured in the 1940 work is the merging

[294] Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, Christopher Rothko, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004).
[295] Edward Alden Jewell, "Exhibition is Held by Art Federation," *The New York Times* (May 22, 1942): 24.
[296] Anfam, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas*, 102, note 123.

of painting and architecture, vis-à-vis the red colorfields and the relationship to the walls that surround the two figures. In addition, the rectangular forms on all three walls foretell his preferred arrangements of his mature abstractions as a desire to control how viewers experience the works. Moreover, the colorfields of *Mother and Child* also anticipate, in color, scale, and emotive character, the Seagram paintings. Ten years before he first visited Pompeii, in 1950, Rothko has positioned his figures within the confines of a low-ceilinged, small red room that bears similarities, in color and scale, to the spaces within the Villa of the Mysteries (Fig. 19). The way in which he has "installed" the rectangular forms on all three walls in the 1940 painting is also intriguing in the context of the Seagram's work. It is as if the figural pair experiences what he hoped his Seagram's viewers would, namely an unpleasant sense of entrapment within a pictorial-architectural environment. Rothko's references to Pompeii in his posthumously published manuscript, *The Artist's Reality*, which he wrote ca. 1940, make the possibility of a Pompeian connection even more enticing.[297] In one chapter, he refers to Pompeian painting as being from a "naturalistic pagan style."[298] In another passage, he describes how "our best notion of Hellenistic paintings comes from the paintings of Pompeii."[299] It is unclear, however, whether the red walls depicted in the 1940 painting might have been inspired by reproductions of Pompeian wall paintings with which he was certainly familiar at that point.

[297] The manuscript is believed to have been written in 1940 and 1941. A registrar of the Rothko estate discovered the 226-page sloppily-constructed manuscript in a warehouse in 1988. Rothko's son Christopher Rothko, a psychotherapist by training, spearheaded its publication.
[298] Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, 74.
[299] Ibid., 89.

When we stand amidst a grouping of the Seagram paintings, we are faced with various spectatorial choices, phenomenologically perceiving the canvases through multiple relationships. In his pioneering work on spectatorship, David Carrier has defined four such associations: "the spectator stands before a work; the spectator sees the work and the work looks back; the spectator is as if absorbed in the work; [or] the work elides the spectator's presence."[300] In the first case, we hold agency, peering into the defenseless canvas. In the second, power is shared reciprocally between the painting and spectator. In the fourth, the artist has eliminated a place for us, as in Diego Velazquez's *Las Meninas* (1656, Museo del Prado, Madrid).[301] But, it is Carrier's third relationship that more closely approaches what Rothko intended viewers to experience in the Seagram paintings.[302] In this type, we are drawn into the painting but quickly realize that what is happening in the painting, in a narrative sense, seems to exist without our voyeuristic gaze.[303] In *Mother and Child*, we are invited in via the perspectival space, but are faced

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[300] David Carrier, "Art and Its Spectators," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 45, No. 1 (Autumn 1986): 6.

[301] With its painted-painter, mirror, and other suggestive paradoxes, the painting crystallizes the difficulty imbedded in spectatorship. The viewer looks at the work, and is faced with a mirror (located on the back wall) reflecting other figures (the Spanish monarchs King Philip IV and Queen Mariana), a reflection that leaves no space for the viewer's own imagined reflection. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans., anonymous (New York, 1970): 3-16.

[302] Here Carrier borrows both from Michael Fried's reading of Gustave Courbet's *The Painter's Studio; A Real Allegory* (1855, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and from Michael Ann Holly's analysis of Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin's *The Young Schoolmistress* (1740, The National Gallery, London), both of which (in his view) typify his third spectatorial type. See Michael Fried, "Representing Representation: On The Central Group in Courbet's 'Studio,'" *Art in America*, Vol. 69, No. 7 (1981): 127-33, 168-73; Michael Ann Holly, "Past Looking," *Critical Inquiry* 16-2 (1990): 371-96; and Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of an Image*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996).

[303] As Michael Fried observed, the figure of Gustave Courbet in *The Painter's Studio; A Real Allegory* (1855, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) is too preoccupied with the act of painting

with two figures that seem to interact only with each other. They turn to face one another, but do not engage the viewer. As mentioned earlier, the door/window forms of the Seagram paintings similarly enlist this type of attraction/repulsion. Decades before Rothko told the audience at his Pratt lecture during the Seagram project that it was "with the utmost resistance that I found the figure could not serve my purposes," he experimented with the figural-architectural relationships that would evolve into the viewer-painting-architectural relationships of the Seagram works.[304] Through a careful consideration of the large scale of the painted walls in the 1940 work in relation to the figures, of the intersections between painting and architecture in that depicted space, of the soft lighting, and even of the articulation of the frames on the wall of *Mother and Child*, Rothko appears to have trapped his figures within a claustrophobic environment, experimenting with ingredients, often used antagonistically, that he later assembled for the Seagram project.

The figure at the right provides a clue for the claustrophobic and thus aggressive nature of the painting. Quite possibly because he seems to have been emotionally stunted by the tragic loss of a parent at such a young age, Rothko was especially empathetic toward children, as may be gleaned from his teaching.[305] Years before his own children

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and with the other figures to notice the spectator. The painted-Courbet's absorption into his work mirrors the viewer's own absorption (into the experience of viewing the painting). As Michael Ann Holly found, a similar effect is present in Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin's *The Young Schoolmistress* (1740, The National Gallery, London), in which two young figures are so engaged in their lesson that they seem to exist independently of their audience.

[304] First published in Dore Ashton, "Art: Lecture by Mark Rothko," *The New York Times* (Oct. 31, 1958): 26.

[305] Rothko taught art to children twice a week from 1929 to 1946, at the Center Academy, attached to the Brooklyn Jewish Center on Eastern Parkway. Breslin, 86, 111-112, 114.

were born, Kate in 1950 and Christopher in 1963, Rothko loved teaching youngsters. Moreover, three of Rothko's earliest known essays reflect his interest and empathy in children and their art.[306] This sensitivity helps explain why he might have employed entrapping architectural settings to frame the spaces of most of his images of children. I propose that he did so in order to create a vehicle for sympathy, empathy, or perhaps both. Rothko sympathized with the trapped figures, and encouraged us to do the same.

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[306] His first extant essay on art, "New Training for Future Artists and Art Lovers" (1934), reflects his observations of young children making art. See Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art,* 1-3. The essay shows that Rothko sought a more instinctive approach to making art than his young students possessed innately. Rather than trying to sway the youngsters, he defined his task as a facilitator of art. In his Sketchbook essay (also ca. 1934) he describes how the public had come to understand children's art better, and had begun to respond to it more favorably. Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 14-15. A third written piece from 1934 (the unpublished and incomplete "Scribble Book") provides further context. Rothko intended this essay to be the nucleus of a manual for teaching art to children. In it, he explores the relationship between the art of children and that of the modern artist, who he finds self-consciously employs a "primitivist" approach to seek out a pure and uncorrupted state. [re-work this sentence to make it clearer] Naturally, here Rothko participates in the recurring tendency within modernist art to appropriate so-called primitive arts and mental states, referring to modern-primitive art as "the exploitation of the picturesque in the charming guise of naiveté" and expressionism, "the greatest resemblance to the children's art…[which] is in fact a nostalgia for the innocence of childhood." Rothko finds that the mad child, the childish madman, and Picasso all "employ the basic elements of speech," noting how children present pictorial representations of space in a decidedly non-mimetic manner, presumably unbeknownst to them. Rothko also places a larger, societal emphasis on the artistic expression of young children, referencing ideas related to what he considered to be "social action" and "community spirit." Methodologically, he examines child art in the context of the western art historical canon. He alludes to general historical periods of western art (i.e., Classical, early Christian, Byzantine, and the Italian Renaissance); sweeping categories of art like expressionism, abstraction, and representational art; and specific artists including Piero della Francesca, Titian, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, and Marc Chagall. All of this is meant to explain the immediacy of children's art by contextualizing it within the broader discourses of art and art history. See Ibid., 4-13.

Arshile Gorky may have influenced Rothko's use of architectural motifs in this manner.[307] Twenty years before the two painters exhibited together, Rothko studied under Gorky, beginning in early 1925, in the latter's old masters course at the New School of Design.[308] Although Rothko claimed that he "learned painting from his contemporaries in their studios," he in fact honed his craft, if only for short durations, in proper classes.[309] As a teacher, Gorky was commanding and unrestrained.[310] At the height of six foot four inches, he towered over his students. In this situation, Rothko did not exhibit the bravura of, say, Constantin Brâncuşi, who famously summed up the student-teacher relationship with his comment, in reference to Auguste Rodin, that "nothing grows under the shade of big trees".[311] Instead, he seems to have turned inward as a result of Gorky's often-bullish behavior. As Matthew Spender has shown, Gorky, as

[307] For more on the Rothko-Gorky relationship, see Breslin, 56, 121, 142, 267, 335-36. With a shared history of traumatic early childhoods, Rothko viewed Gorky as a kindred spirit who felt similarly out of place, in New York, in America, and arguably in their own respective identities. For Rothko, see Breslin, 9-46. For Gorky, see Matthew Spender, *From a High Place: The Life of Arshile Gorky* (New York: Knopf, 1999): 3-50, and Hayden Herrera, *Arshile Gorky: His Life and Work* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003): 9-106. Rothko would have doubtlessly shared Gorky's pessimism, which might have even inspired Rothko to make art that designed to transcend bleakness. Both Gorky and Rothko, however, would ultimately succumb to the darkest parts of their psyches, with their suicides in 1948 and 1970, respectively.

[308] Rothko exhibited with Gorky (along with Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hoffman, and Jackson Pollock) at the "A Problem for Critics" exhibition, held at the 67 Gallery in New York, in 1945. See Edward Alden Jewell, "Towards Abstract or Away," *The New York Times* (July 1, 1945); and Rothko's reply to Jewell's article in his letter to the editor (July 8, 1945), reprinted in Rothko, *Writings on Art*, 46.

[309] Rothko, quoted in Oscar Collier, "Mark Rothko," *The New Iconograph* Vol. 4 (Fall 1947): 41.

[310] For more on Gorky's teaching and this stage of his life, see Spender, 65-81, and Herrera, 144-150.

[311] Constantin Brâncuşi, quoted in Carola Giedion-Welker, Constantin Brâncuşi, trans. *Maria Jolas and Anne Leroy* (New York: George Braziller, 1959): 222.

a teacher, was “peremptory.”[312] Meyer Schapiro believed such aspects of Gorky’s pedagogy revealed his longing for stable parenting.[313] This may explain why Rothko referred to Gorky as being “overcharged with supervision.” According to Rothko’s friend Raoul Hague, Gorky “pushed Rothko around,” and even made him take out his garbage.”[314] We can thus place Rothko in Gorky’s studio at the moment the latter began work on his two versions of *The Artist and His Mother* (at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, ca. 1926 - ca. 1942, Fig. 43; and at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1926-36, Fig. 44).[315] In both paintings, Gorky created a private interior to set the emotional tenor. The figures of a young Gorky and his mother gaze hauntingly toward the viewer in one of the most profound pictorial expressions of loneliness from that time. Through this gaze they possess the same “frank and direct look which we are accustomed to see only in children,” to borrow a phrase from an English cleric who described the

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[312] Spender, 67.

[313] In his teaching and in his work before ca. 1940, Gorky emphasized copying from old master works as a source of artistic inspiration. Meyer Schapiro later told Gorky’s nephew Karlen Moradian that Gorky held the position of a figure of authority at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where he led his students around the galleries, regaling them with his charm and bravado. In Schapiro’s view, “many people are imitators for weakness. To him, the power of imitation of the great masters was a strength, where a Renaissance painter would want to be as good as a Greek master or a Roman master.” Schapiro suggested that Gorky’s veneration of the masters resulted from his search for father figures. Meyer Schapiro, recorded by Karlen Moradian, Tape 95, Side A No. 1, Collection of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.

[314] Ibid., 67.

[315] The two pieces were based on a now legendary photograph of Gorky and his mother Shushan, taken in Van City, Armenia, in 1912. The photograph was sent to Gorky’s father, who had immigrated to America, with the intention of showing him how dire the circumstances were back in Armenia. Fifteen years later, Gorky discovered the photo, tossed in a drawer in his father’s house in Cranston, Rhode Island, rather than occupying a position of agency as he had expected it to. His father had thus completely moved on from his Armenian roots, an abandonment that haunted Gorky throughout his life. For more on Gorky’s early life, see Spender, 3-64, and Herrera, 9-96. By 1926, six years after he had moved to America, painting, for Gorky, had evolved into a therapeutic vehicle for him to negotiate the traumatic events of his early life.

people of Gorky's childhood community near Lake Van, a look that carries with it a quickness to "detect and resist evil."[316] Such vacant, distant glances become the physical markers of two individuals forced inward by the horrors of the outside world. However much the figures plead, through their gazes, for audience interaction, Gorky seems to prevent this. To help create this mood, Gorky set his figures in front of an architectural backdrop, and has used that structure to reinforce his feelings of grief, loss, and terror.

As Kim Servart Theriault found, Gorky "took liberties with space and began to work out compositions that reflected a new interpretation of the past through alterations of form."[317] In a preparatory drawing, he "drew the mantle in the background straight across, as it is in the photograph, but he made it uneven in the paintings, effectively breaking up the setting."[318] In both versions, the mantle at right, located just behind Gorky's mother Shushan, is thus interrupted by her form, shifting from one horizontal plane to the left of her face to a slightly lower one to the right.[319] Gorky's architecture shouldn't have fluidity or malleability but does. In this way it seems to convey, for Gorky, a disruption that metaphorically refers to Shushan, who died in his arms of starvation in 1919 during an Armenian genocide, just six years before Rothko studied with him. In addition to the architecture, Gorky has also dematerialized other parts of the scene, rendering the figures less realistically than their counterparts in the 1912

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[316] Spender, 8.

[317] Kim Servart Theriault, in *Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective*, Michael Taylor, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2009): 27.

[318] Ibid., 28.

[319] Gorky would continue to use such architectural devices both compositionally and metaphorically throughout his career. In *Organization* (1933-36), Gorky merged the biomorphic forms he inherited from Joan Miró with a geometric infrastructure that holds the composition together and at the same time draws attention to the flatness of the spaces created by the structure of black grid lines.

photograph from which the painting is based. Gorky has immobilized his figures, and has silenced them by making them seemingly incommunicative. Having labored over the pair of paintings for at least sixteen years, Gorky was quite deliberate about what he included, and about how each pictorial device held a specific function. As Harry Rand found, "each detail would take on special significance," and Gorky carefully controlled his precise environments, in this case laboriously working on the portraits to "recapture the lost time when the mother and son posed together in that frozen moment."[320] Like Rothko, especially at that time, Gorky painted in this manner to come to terms with his psychic anguish and his sense of isolation, and placed his figures within architectural backdrops that facilitated the expression of grief.

In addition to Gorky, Giorgio de Chirico may have played a role in shaping what David Anfam has called the "bulbous heads or foreheads" of the figures in *Mother and Child*, those that "parallel those of de Chirico's mannequins."[321] Rothko might have also responded to another of de Chirico's characteristic pictorial devices, an expressive use of architectural settings and spaces. Writing in 1920, de Chirico noted that "among the many senses that modern painters have lost, we must number the sense of architecture," describing the role of the "arch of a portico" and the "square or rectangle of a window" in particular as fundamental to his practice, because such devices, in his estimation, suggest that "architecture completes nature."[322] Of the nine de Chirico's on view in the *Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936-37, which

[320] Harry Rand, *Arshile Gorky: The Implications of Symbols* (Montclair, NJ: Allanheld & Schram, 1981): 23.
[321] Anfam, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas*, 64, note 28.
[322] Giorgio de Chirico, "Metaphysical Art," (1920), reprinted in Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, 440.

Rothko would have seen when he visited the show, the columnar figure at left in the foreground of *The Disquieting Muses* (1918, Private Collection, Fig. 45) is especially bulbous.[323] There is no record of Rothko's reaction to this painting, though it is likely he would have responded to de Chirico's emphasis on the overall strange arrangement of figures, architecture, and space. Such "odd conjunctions" in this and other de Chirico works were, as Robert Rosenblum observed, what allowed the paintings to "impact on a broad range of American art and architecture."[324] As Peter Selz noted in 1961, Rothko "always admired…de Chirico."[325] With the Rothko-de Chirico connection in mind, the foreshortened floor/ground of *Mother and Child* might even suggest that Rothko looked to a similarly tipped ground of de Chirico's painting for inspiration.[326] In both paintings, the severe orthogonals that tilt the setting unnaturally toward our space furthers a sense of disorientation.

Rothko had experimented with using architectural settings in this manner since the beginning of his career. In his fifth known painting on canvas, *Composition I [Verso]* (ca. 1926, Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko, Fig. 46), Rothko has

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[323] See *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936).

324 Robert Rosenblum, "De Chirico's Long American Shadow," *Art in America* Vol. 84, No. 7 (July 1996): 46-55, reprinted in Rosenblum, *On Modern American Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999): 42-56, 43.

[325] Peter Selz, *Mark Rothko*, 1961, 10.

[326] The slant of the floor might even recall how Edvard Munch and Vincent van Gogh used architectural setups to convey something emotive, perhaps most memorably in the latter's *The Night Café* (1888, Yale University Art Gallery) and works on view at the Alfred Barr-curated major exhibition of van Gogh's work at the Museum of Modern Art in 1935-36. See *Vincent van Gogh*, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1935). The exhibition, which ran from Nov. 4, 1935 to Jan. 5, 1936, had 140,000 visitors at the New York venue, and another 750,000 and its other locations. Its media coverage, even in *Time* magazine, makes it quite likely that Rothko would have seen the exhibition.

painted a young or adolescent boy within an indecipherable setting. He is virtually nude, wearing only basic undergarments or perhaps even a swimsuit. Rothko has turned the figure's head away from the viewer, but has positioned his body mostly fully frontal. In this way, his exposed body and inward gaze reinforces a spectatorial gaze, one that exacerbates a sense that he is vulnerable. An indistinguishable architectural structure traps the figure within the confines of an unknowable setting, making it unclear whether the architecturally seeming green rectangular area at right is a door or simply part of the structure of the site. With no verifiable way for the figure to enter or leave the space, the painting is the first in a long line of depictions of figural-architectural relationships in which the architecture Rothko has suggested conveys confinement, a theme that ultimately manifested in *Mother and Child*.

On the recto side of the 1926 painting is *Composition I [Recto]* (1929/1931, Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko, Fig. 47), which depicts a young woman perhaps in her mid-twenties, Rothko's age at the time, seated at a table inside an urban café/restaurant. Rothko leaves the identity of this café-dweller uncertain, having given her a face, but one that is left deliberately generic and incomplete. At that point, Rothko had painted only three figures with discernible faces, identified as "Sophie," "Leah Farber," and "Rothko's Mother" (see Figs. 48-50).[327] The café painting is different from the three portraits in other ways. Each portrait sitter is relatively close to the picture plane, and, in two cases, stares directly out at the viewer. The café-dweller instead encourages our gaze, in an act of voyeurism that Rebecca Zurier has shown to be

[327] Of the thirteen extant paintings on canvas he painted before this café scene, only three have discernible physiognomic features. See, for example, the faceless figure of a standing man in the background at left, discernible only by an outline, merging with the wall.

a crucial facet of social interaction in New York in the early to mid twentieth century.[328] In the three earlier works, Rothko has rendered his sitters much more convincingly, with careful chiaroscuro, corporeality, and with the greatest psychological depth of his work from the 1920s. Moreover, there are no architectural settings in any of the portraits, perhaps suggesting that Rothko only uses something architectural to frame his figures when they are least familiar to him.[329] The interior architecture thus reinforces a sense of the unfamiliar.

The café figure sits next to a window, through which part of a sign is legible, with the letters "CH" and "SU" presumably advertising the establishment. As David Anfam has observed, Rothko has clearly borrowed this arrangement from Edward Hopper's *Chop Suey* (1929, Collection of Barney A. Ebsworth, Fig. 52), a work he might have seen in or after January 1929 when it was first exhibited at the Frank K. M. Rehn Gallery in New York, or as a reproduction in a monograph on Hopper published in 1931.[330] Rothko once praised Hopper, observing that "[Andrew] Wyeth is about the pursuit of strangeness. But he is not whole as Hopper is whole."[331] Both Rothko and Hopper have harnessed architectural environments and urban-based narratives to convey something

[328] Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2006).

[329] He would repeat this pattern and continue to make portraits with the sitter identified in the title without architectural settings *Portrait of a Young Boy {Untitled}* (ca. 1932, Collection of Christopher Rothko, Fig. 51).

[330] Anfam, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas*, 27, and note 19.

[331] Mark Rothko, quoted in Brian O'Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and The Myth* (New York: Random House, 1973): 231, and Ibid. 77. These qualities are also reflected in Lloyd Goodrich's assessment of Hopper's "direct language of form, and tone, and color." See Lloyd Goodrich, John Clancy, Helen Hayes, Raphael Soyer, Brian O'Doherty, James Thomas Flexner, "Six Who Knew Hopper," *Art Journal* Vol. 41, No. 2, *Edward Hopper Symposium at the Whitney Museum of American Art* (Summer 1981): 125.

emotive.[332] Both have also used expressionistic brushwork to do the same.[333] Rothko's figure wears the same hat as the figure in the Hopper, is close in dress, and sits at the same location at a similar table. The setting is equally analogous, including the lamp positioned just next to the window, a yellow curtain, and a red exterior sign. Even the shadows entering the room within each scene fall precisely along the same diagonal. However, the differences are significant. Hopper's figure is much more serene than Rothko's, lit as if by the crisp and clear early-morning light of so many of Hopper's paintings. She holds her body upright, more in tune with appropriate public comportment, whereas Rothko's figure slumps onto the table in a pose that suggests exhaustion. Hopper suggests that she listens politely to her companion, whereas Rothko's is in solitude. Where Hopper's table is precisely flat and sharp, Rothko's is slightly convex and distorted. As a result, the lamp at the right of Rothko's table leans dangerously toward the viewer, while the other elements on the table (wine bottle and cup/saucer, among others) all have a similarly shaky footing. Thus, while both employ the theme of the large window to signify the presence of the urban environment even when indoors, Hopper's scene is perhaps slightly less glum than Rothko's.

Discourse (1933/1934, Collection of Christopher Rothko, Fig. 53) offers another example of how Rothko used architectural motifs at that time to enclose figures. The

[332] Hopper, in the 1933 catalogue for a solo exhibition of his work at the Museum of Modern Art, describes, his disinterest in painting that does not record the emotions of the artist who made it. See *Edward Hopper* ex. cat., Museum of Modern Art, New York, (1933): 17-18.

[333] For Hopper, such brushwork is directly related to Robert Henri. Hopper observed that Henri's "resources as a teacher everyone knows…[and] of his enthusiasm and his power to energize his students I had firsthand knowledge. Few teachers of art have gotten so much out of their pupils, or given them so great an initial impetus as Henri." See Edward Hopper, quoted in Henry Geldzahler, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Nov. 1962): 113.

arch in the background of the painting frames an ambiguous setting beyond it, a netherworld confounding entry. We are encouraged to penetrate Rothko's image perspectivally, but are shown nothing beyond the arch but a hybrid space. Like the back and forth banter of the discourse presented in the foreground, the architectural grounding of the scene beyond this arch continually shifts between what might be considered an interior or an exterior, or both at once. Rothko has envisioned a type of fictive architectural place that thwarts any attempt at decoding the setting, in that we are given no tools to decipher what is depicted beyond the arch. Like the Seagram door/window forms, we can look through the arch of *Discourse*, but are presented with an indefinable place. *Mother and Child* and *Discourse*, among other paintings from Rothko's figurative period, evoke what Oliver Wick recently observed as "a strangely condensed, almost claustrophobic space…[within which] facades and architectural elements parallel to the picture plane close off the pictorial space and emphasize presence in the plane."[334] Moreover, the huddling together of the grouping of figures in *Discourse* excludes us and perhaps Rothko himself from the closely-knit circle. Such an exclusion reflects how the artist felt about himself at the time he painted it, in the position of an outsider looking in, to American culture and to New York's art world. The prickly rejection foretells key comments from his 1947 essay "The Romantics Were Prompted." "The unfriendliness of society to his activity," he wrote, "is difficult for the artist to accept. Yet this very hostility can act as a lever for the true liberation."[335] With these statements in mind, the incommunicative figures in *Discourse* express something somewhat darker. Although

[334] Oliver Wick, *Rothko*, 12.

[335] Mark Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," *Possibilities*, Vol. 1 (Winter 1947-48): 84, reprinted in Ellen G. Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005): 140.

Rothko has titled the scene to refer to a conversation, even though the mouth of the figure who may be talking, is obscured. Has Rothko silenced him by not showing us his face, deliberately excluding us, and himself, from the discourse?

Interior (ca, 1936, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 54) also evidences Rothko's blending of silent figures and the architecture that surrounds them in order to evoke a dark mood. Positioned at the bottom center of the canvas on the first register of an unidentifiable type of two-storied architectural structure, a small group of figures stands in a doorway. Rothko has again positioned his figures in front of a space suggestive of a precipice, although here it is defined by the unclear architecture. But he appears to have subverted a comprehensible architectural function. Stripped of precise utility, this doorway shows how Rothko continued to experiment with locating his figures at transitional junctures.[336] The ambiguous space beyond the doorway is underscored by the space within a portrait, located in the center of the second level, in which a figure stands at the edge of a void, a space bereft of light, into which he or she figure gazes. Rothko repeatedly used such doorways to nowhere throughout the 1930s, as seen for

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[336] Scholars have often cited this painting as a forerunner to the Seagram series, due to the resemblance between the compartmentalized architectural structure and the later door/window forms. David Anfam has also discussed the painting in relation to Michelangelo's *The Tomb of Lorenzo de'Medici* (1521-34, Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo, Florence, Fig. 55), observing that Rothko divided his painting into six sections not unlike the tomb's design (similarly subdivided by pilasters). See Anfam, "To See, or Not to See," *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding*, *The Rothko Chapel Series*. The antique or Renaissance character of the two sculptures depicted in Rothko's painting (as evidenced by what might be contrapposto poses, potential nudity, and gray tones that could signify marble) makes the connection more intriguing. Anfam has also compared the frontally situated window in Rothko's *Thru the Window* (1938/1939, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 56) to both Fra Filippo Lippi's *Portrait of a Man and a Woman at a Casement* (ca. 1440, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fig. 57) and Sandro Botticelli's *Giuliano de Medici* (ca. 1478, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 58). See Anfam, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas*, 36-37.

example in *Untitled [Two Nudes Standing in Front of a Doorway]* (1939, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York, Fig. 59). Like Pablo Picasso had done in his *Two Nudes* (1906, Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 60), in which figures stand in front of the faintest suggestion of what appears to be a wall or a curtain rendered in shades similar to that of the nudes, Rothko flattens space with the bluish-white-gray tones of the figures, the floor and wall, dissolving his subjects into the architecture of the setting. Rothko encourages our perspectival penetration of the scene via doors and doorways, but provides no clues as to how to read the contents of the space beyond them. His use of this motif extends even into his Surrealist phase, as in the doorway in *Untitled* (1940/1941, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 61). As Chave has observed, "the threshold metaphor is a suggestive one insofar as thresholds are a recognized trope for crucial turning points in life, for the popular as well as the Duchampian 'passage of the virgin to the bride,' for example."[337] While Chave did not refer to the two Rothko paintings just mentioned, it may be significant that Rothko created the doorways of the late 1930s and early 1940s during a crucial transitional phase for him. As Julia Davis has argued, the "symbolic discourse of the motif of the doorway" in Rothko's work "inevitably ends up at the word 'transcendence.'"[338] In this way, the theme of the doorway functioned to allow Rothko a vehicle to metaphorically transcend space.

In both *Untitled [Children Around a Table]* (1937, Collection of Christopher Rothko, Fig. 62) and a very similar *The Party {Untitled}*, (1938, National Gallery of Art,

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[337] Chave, 74.

[338] Again, Rothko's use of transcendent themes will be addressed later in this dissertation. Julia Davis, *Mark Rothko: The Art of Transcendence* (Kent, U.K.: Crescent Moon, 1995): 69, 82.

Fig. 63), Rothko depicts a group of six figures gathered around a table in an interior in front of a doorway. In addition to being a framing device, it also conveys meaning in the sense that we are prevented from accessing it. In the 1937 painting, two figures occupy nearly the entire doorway, except for a small portion at the top right. The murky brown-gray tones of the standing figure's hair dissolve into the space beyond the door, making the space beyond the frame even more indistinguishable. In the 1938 painting, with similarly positioned figures in the doorway, the right jamb seems to dissolve at its base into a cloudy gray-blue area to the right of the kneeling figure at right, calling into question how this door operates as a passageway. In both paintings, Rothko has paid considerable attention to the architecture that surrounds the figures, interweaving diagonal, horizontal, and vertical elements.

Perhaps the most incommunicative of Rothko's early figures are those in his thirteen subway-themed paintings, all of which transmit a sense of alienation in the city related to the paradoxes of urban living, including the sharing of personal space with complete strangers but having no intimate contact with them.[339] As Georg Simmel concluded in his classic essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1902-03), "the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces."[340] In

[339] See Anfam cat. nos. 71, 104, 108, 111, 135, 139, 140, 141, 145, 165, 166, 167, and 174.

[340] Contemporary critics criticized his contention that individuality, impersonality, and a sense of anxiety are all bred in metropolises. Simmel nevertheless saw such a struggle as part of a continually recurring presence throughout history. One's relationship to the state and to religion, for example, preoccupied eighteenth-century individuals. Similarly, in the nineteenth century, the specializations of an individual in relation to his/her work declared the incomparability of one person to another. This gave him the evidence he needed to argue that struggles with individuality are timeless, that

Subway (1935, Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel, Fig. 64), the first work in the set, five figures populate a claustrophobic, windowless, dark space. They gaze directly forward incommunicatively, eerily motionless as they wait for trains not present in the scene. Rendering them all in similar poses, Rothko has made them even less natural/realistic, abstracting what could be veristic figures into typologies. They are not individuals but signifiers of an overpopulated world. Adam Gopnik, writing in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1998 about the Rothko retrospective of that year at the National Gallery of Art in Washington explored the negativity that shrouds these paintings, relating such animus to "the experience of an immigrant boy who spent his life on this island," wondering whether "the light that fills a [signature] Rothko" was the same light as that found "at the end of the Lexington Avenue tunnel."[341] Gopnik's observation followed Jeffrey Weiss' view that Rothko "experienced the subway as a measured yet eccentric place," one populated in his paintings by "remote ciphers" that "posses a haunted air."[342] Both assessments reinforced James Breslin's view that public architecture, for example, symbolically conveyed for Rothko "a social order in which he, as a Russian immigrant and a modernist painter, felt himself to be an alien."[343] Jonathan Harris investigated the issue further, arguing that the prevailing zeal of xenophobia inherent in American culture in the 1930s and 1940s ultimately caused Rothko's feelings of inadequacy.[344] Such an

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the so-called primitive man fought for his existence not unlike how modern individuals do. While Rothko would have likely been attracted to the overall thrust of Simmel's essay, there is no evidence that Rothko was aware of it.

[341] Adam Gopnik, "City Boy," *The New Yorker* (June 01, 1998): 54.

[342] Jeffrey Weiss, "Rothko's Unknown Space," *Mark Rothko*, Jeffrey Weiss, ed., 309.

[343] Breslin, 30.

[344] Jonathan Harris, "Mark Rothko and the Development of American Modernism," *Oxford Art Journal* Vol. 11, No. 1 (1988): 40-50.

articulation of dismal experiences, for Harris, became a crucial springboard for Rothko's later work, which, in Harris' view, similarly conveys something grim.

The architecture of the station facilitates the communication of such themes. Anticipating the colorfields of Rothko's signature paintings, rectangular blocks of color, mostly in shades of green, black, red, and yellow, provide the compositional skeleton of the structure, one reinforced by six vertical columns that presumably support a sequence of steel joists. The dissolution of figures and architecture continued throughout the series, culminating in *Underground Fantasy {Subway [Subterranean Fantasy]}*, ca. 1940, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 65). Figures have been abstracted to the point that they dissolve into the architecture and merge with columns, piers, posts, and other structural elements, suggesting maze-like, disorienting places. The 1940 figures become weightless, relatively thinly painted rectangular blocks of color, shapes that mimic the architecture that surrounds them and anticipate the standard composition of his mature paintings.

Rothko's incommunicative urban figures and the architectural context in which he placed them were likely influenced by Gottlieb's figurative work. Long before Gottlieb's architecturally structured pictographs or his aggressive bursts, his depictions of architecture must have appealed to Rothko, with whom Gottlieb began frequent contact by 1930. In Gottlieb's *South Ferry Waiting Room* (ca. 1929, Private Collection, Fig. 66), none of the dozen or so figures communicate. As with the figures in his *Brooklyn Bridge* (ca. 1930, Private Collection, Fig. 67), none have faces. Many of the figures are in a shadowed space, including the pair on the bench at left, the three exiting the space through the doorway at left, and the group at right under what appears to be a large

window just beneath the artist's signature. In contrast, most of the architecture in the waiting room is brightly lit, such as the two large columns in the background, the two windows between the columns, a diamond-patterned section of the floor at center, and the newspaper kiosk in the center. Lighting the space in this way reinforces the cold, inorganic character of the dark figures, almost all painted in shades of black.

Gottlieb's subject of a ferry waiting room raises the issues of another important source for Rothko's use of aggressive architecture to convey urban themes disparagingly. For all of 1923 and part of 1924, Gottlieb took painting classes with the Ashcan painter John Sloan at the Art Students' League in New York.[345] Gottlieb later declared that Sloan "had the most valuable influence on me."[346] Sloan's paintings are among the exemplars of how urban architectural motifs can be used to convey negative aspects of urbanism. This is especially true of *Wake of the Ferry, II* (1907, Phillips Collection, Fig. 68), in which Sloan communicates a sense of urban melancholy by removing the communicative abilities of the sole figure, his face in shadow and merging that figure with the darkly-toned structure of the ferry. Gottlieb also was familiar with the work of the source of many of Sloan's ideas: Sloan's teacher, Robert Henri. Understanding Gottlieb's connection to the Ashcan ideas Sloan and Henri espoused points toward Rothko's awareness of these ideas. In the winter and spring of 1921, Gottlieb attended lectures Robert Henri delivered at the Art Students League, where Gottlieb had taken art

[345] Rothko was well aware of the work of American painters before the Second World War. In *The Artist's Reality, The Philosophies of Art*, he made several remarks on the subjects of both contemporary and past developments in America art. His analyses refer to John Singleton Copley, Gilbert Stuart, Benjamin West, Thomas Eakins, Winslow Homer, Albert Pinkham Ryder, William Merritt Chase, in addition to his contemporaries, including Thomas Hart Benton.

[346] Adolph Gottlieb, from an interview with Dorothy Seckler on October 25, 1967, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 6.

classes in high school.[347] Mary David MacNaughton, who co-organized a retrospective of Gottlieb's works for the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation in New York (in 1981), explained the importance of Henri for Gottlieb:

> Henri's non-academic approach to painting, which he espoused in these lively talks, left its imprint on Gottlieb. He was especially affected by Henri's advice to paint directly on the canvas, instead of from a preliminary sketch. That Gottlieb absorbed Henri's method is seen in his preference throughout his career for working without sketches to ensure a freshness of execution.[348]

Henri, and later Gottlieb and in turn Rothko, wholeheartedly embraced a sketchy, expressionist technique as a critique of academic painting through blemished painted surfaces. "Someone has defined," Henri wrote in *The Art Spirit* (1923), that "a work of art as a 'thing beautifully done.' I like to think it better if we cut away the adverb and preserve the word 'done,' and let it stand alone in the fullest meaning. Things are not done beautifully. The beauty is an integral part of their being done."[349] This is precisely when Henri directed his students to "Paint what you feel. Paint what you see. Paint what is real to you."[350] Henri's *Snow in New York* (1902, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 69) is just one example of how he merged this technique with images of

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[347] Registrar's Records, The Art Students' League, Parsons School of Design, and Cooper Union, New York.

[348] Mary Davis MacNaughton, "Adolph Gottlieb: His Life and Art," *Adolph Gottlieb: A Retrospective* (New York: Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, 1981): 9.

[349] Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (New York: Basic Books, 2007): 53. Like so many of the Charcoal Club members who followed him from Philadelphia to New York (including George Luks, John Sloan, Everett Shinn, and William Glackens) Henri studied under Thomas Anshutz at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. It was there that he had direct exposure to Anshutz's scenes of the gritty urban world. Randall C. Griffin, *Homer, Eakins, and Anshutz: The Search for American Identity in the Gilded Age* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2004). Henri's brushwork also owes its due to the sketchy quality of Impressionist paintings, which he had seen in Paris after his arrival in 1888. Henri also gleaned his pronounced and fluid brushwork from the work of El Greco, Frans Hals, Francisco Goya, Eugène Delacroix, Édouard Manet in Paris.

[350] Ibid., 285.

urban architecture to convey the gritty reality of industrialized modernity. The combination of the profound impact of Henri and Sloan on Gottlieb's early work and the "very very close" connection between Rothko and Gottlieb, after they met in 1929, makes the transmission of Ashcan ideas to Rothko, from Henri and Sloan, through Gottlieb, plausible.[351] Thus, Rothko's aggressive attempts to silence his urban figures by using the architectural environment of his scenes as a structuring element are quite possibly related to the incommunicative figures of Henri, Sloan, and Gottlieb.

A likely transmission of ideas from Henri to Rothko raises the question of whether Henri's depictions of tall urban buildings influenced Rothko's. As with Rothko's interiors, his depictions of the exterior facades of urban buildings and of the city itself convey a sense of aggression. Throughout the nearly twenty-year span of his figurative period, Rothko repeatedly paired incommunicative figures with tall buildings. It is this combination of two elements that particularly suggests an urban pessimism. For Rothko, these included a sense of isolation, loneliness, and what might have been an overall depressive malaise. His imagined architecture structures his sad figures in order to convey his own seemingly ever-present sense of disillusionment.

Rothko's first known painting on canvas, *The Peddler* (1924/1925, Collection of Blanche Goreff, Fig. 70) depicts a crowded city street framed by tall buildings. Loosely-painted figures gather around a horse-drawn carriage, on a ground that is perspectivally tipped forward. Figures hover over the ground they are meant to occupy, furthering the expressive distortion of the scene. In this urban mélange, the facelessness of the figures contributes to an overall sense of uncertainty. Such an incompletion of the figures

[351] Breslin, 161.

suggests that they might be immigrant typologies with which Rothko most identified: recently arrived Eastern European working class people that populated the lower east side and other mostly-immigrant neighborhoods of New York. This facelessness perhaps also signifies unfinished identities, or, figures that stand for individuals still in the process of formation. Rothko and other immigrants were subjected to a "social spatiality," to borrow Edward Soja's term, in the sense that he and they occupied a tangential place within the social hierarchy of America.[352] Even in this first painting, Rothko moves closer to how he wanted the architectural environments he imagined to function: namely, to underscore the urban setting, to order the emotive qualities of the scene, and to structure our empathy with the incomplete figures.

Rothko was barely more than twenty years old when he painted this scene. In 1924, he returned temporarily to Portland, Oregon, where he studied acting at Josephine Dillon Theatre Company. In early 1925, he came back to New York to begin his career as an artist. He was an outsider to New York and to the art world there, but eager to break into both. It is thus not difficult to imagine why the fragile Rothko, so new to the metropolis in 1924, might have been sensitive to the city, and specifically to the threat of losing his individuality within it. Rothko's apparent silencing of his figures, achieved by painting them without faces, and thus without the ability to communicate, might also reflect his uncertain feelings about the city. Rothko's earliest exposure to city-life carried promoted distrust. Rothko was raised to be wary of the public spaces of the city, in

[352] Kim Servart Theriault raised this issue in relation to Arshile Gorky, in "Exile, Trauma, and Arshile Gorky's The Artist and His Mother," in *Arshile Gorky*, Michael Taylor, ed. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2010). See also Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

Dvinsk, fearing the potentially dire consequences of his Jewish and Latvian identity. The tall buildings of Rothko's first painting function to frame this urban context, to forcefully wall-in his faceless/expressionless figures. His tall buildings metaphorically seem to convey Rothko's wariness about the city. Rothko uses these buildings to order the emotive qualities of the scene, structuring our empathy with the incomplete figures.

The same is true of Rothko's second extant canvas *Untitled [Two Jews]* (1924/1925, Collection of Marjorie G. Neuwirth, Fig. 71). As with his first canvas, the setting of this painting seems to be an urban, industrial street with figures standing directly on that undisclosed street. The overall mood is a darker one. There is an eerie sense of quiet in this scene, with movement restricted to a train passing over a bridge in the background. Rothko's reference to the Jewish identities of the figures in the title suggests why he has enshrouded his figures in such a melancholic gloom. As Philip Guston noted, from a lunch conversation with Rothko in 1965, Rothko's Jewish identity had made him feel lonesome. Guston summarized the conversation and Rothko's feelings on the subject:

> Being brought up as the youngest child when his father was an orthodox Jew, Mark during the first nine years of his life was an hebrew infant prodigy. All the rules and rigor of religion were never sufficiently observed by his mother, not sufficiently to Mark's rigid father. And then a complete break came into his life—oblivion of the Hebrew language and a complete break with temple rigor—after having gone 100 times to the temple during the holidays[,] one day at the age of 9 he came home and announced to his mother he would never set foot in the temple again.[353]

Additionally, Rothko had only just left Yale University in the fall of 1923, the year before he painted his second work, a decision strongly influenced by the overt anti-

[353] Philip Guston, in Breslin, 19.

Semitism he experienced there. As Michael Compton has shown, "the tiny number of Jews [at Yale] were not well received by the dominant 'wasps,' and as an immigrant radical he must have been particularly suspect in the period immediately following the Russian Revolution."[354] Adding to his sense of shame, Rothko, for part of his time at the university, lived with the Weinstein family, and was considered, as Breslin observed, "the poor relation."[355] That his tuition scholarship was converted into loans at the end of his first semester, further contributed to the overall disheartening experience there. In his second painting, Rothko alluded to an aspect of his identity with which he was not altogether comfortable. The two men in the painting thus symbolized for Rothko a mirror of his own conflicted religiousness, reflected in the ostracization he experienced in Dvinsk, Portland, and now New Haven.[356] Rothko thus chose such a muddied palette and sketchily-painted brushwork for a scene that was likely a difficult image for him to create. At the moment when he would have almost certainly been thinking about the many stages of the development of his Jewish identity, from devoutly adhering to it to being agnostic about it, Rothko used gloomy and vague architecture to convey one of the most sensitive aspects of his character.

The isolation Rothko experienced because he was Jewish likely made him receptive to the painter Max Weber, with whom Rothko studied at the Art Students

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[354] Michael Compton, "Mark Rothko: the Subjects of the Artist," *Mark Rothko: 1903-1970* (London: Tate Gallery, 1996): 39.

[355] Breslin, 50.

[356] Rothko would later use the theme of Jewish identity in his works for Rabbi Lewis Browne's *The Graphic Bible: From Genesis to Revelation in Animated Maps & Charts* (New York, 1928). For more on the intersections between modernist artists and Judaism, see a series of books by Matthew Baigell on the subject, including *Jewish Art in America: An Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); *American Artists: Jewish Images* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2006); and *Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2002).

League after October 1925. Like Rothko, Weber immigrated to America as a child, settling in Brooklyn in 1891 when he was ten years old. In various depictions of New York, Weber presents a city full of tall buildings caught up in kaleidoscopic Cubist settings, and often inferred that the mélange of urban architecture was objectionable. Recollecting his experiences standing on the Brooklyn Bridge, in 1912, Weber crystallizes his aggression against urban architecture:

> I stood and gazed at the millions of cubes upon billions of cubes…higher and higher, still piled and still higher with countless window eyes…all this framed and hurled together in mighty mass against rolling clouds…I gazed and thought of this pile throbbing, boiling, seething, as a pile after destruction.[357]

For Weber, the "pile of destruction" was something to escape. More evidence that Weber coded his skyscrapers in negative terms stems from the fact that by the mid-1920s, Weber had grown so disgusted with the urban architecture he painted that he had moved on to painting simple structures in bucolic settings as a critique of urbanism and its architecture.[358] By 1925, Weber used architectural subjects to express lighter moods. "I saw a child playing," he once noted, "all by itself with stones. It made two lintels and an arch. Right there primarily it made more architecture than these blusterers. An arch, an aperture, the heavens over the arch, what more can you want?"[359] Rothko had direct

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[357] Max Weber, "On the Brooklyn Bridge," Manuscript, 1912, Weber Papers, Archives of American Art (NY 59-6): 136.

[358] See, for example, his *High Noon* (1925, The Phillips Collection). The painting typifies Weber's return to illusionistic painting just after the First World War. Its colorful setting reflects the bucolic life of Long Island, where Weber and his wife had purchased a home in 1921. Three small barns in the background and a small gray house at the bottom right are nestled within a landscape made of high-key colors. Overall, the mood is significantly much warmer than the mood his images of tall buildings of New York convey.

[359] Max Weber, in Breslin, 59.

access to Weber's pictorial style in relation to coding urban architecture as something problematic.

In *New York* (1913, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Fig. 72), tall buildings point upward from all various footings out of view. Weber repeats the pattern of slim, tall, white structures with tiny windows but does little else to structure the scene into one that allows the viewer access. The painting contains no access point for the viewer, resulting in a flattened sequence of shapes that keep the fragmented composition further impenetrable. This is true of his other depictions of skyscrapers from the same time, including *New York (The Liberty Tower from the Singer Building) [The Woolworth Building]* (1912, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Fig. 73). In this way, Weber certainly borrows from the Cubo-Futurist techniques he picked up while in Paris from 1905-1909.[360] In this and similar paintings, Weber applies the Cubist grid to dislocate the stability of architecture. We are presented with a disorienting view of the city, a view in which the conglomerations of stylized buildings convey a sense of urban angst. The swirling sense of motion in *New York* and in similar paintings by Weber also naturally reflects Futurism, and thus the aggressive character of Filippo Marinetti's manifesto "Le Futurisme," first published February 20, 1909. As Alfred Werner found, Weber "brought design into the chaos…[making] a panorama of the public scene. All the city's discord,

[360] Weber's connection to the early phase of Cubism in Paris has been well documented. He met Picasso at the salon of Gertrude and Leo Stein and could have even *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) when he visited Picasso's studio in October 1908. Memoirs, Correspondence, and Scrapbook of Max Weber, Oral History Collection, Columbia University; see also S. E. Leonard, Henri Rousseau and Max Weber, *New York*, 1970: 33-34. Weber returned to America with a small still life by Picasso, which was the first picture by Picasso Alfred Stieglitz had ever seen.

all its cacophony, was illuminated" in such pictures.[361] By underscoring the aggressive potential of tall buildings in this way, Weber participates in a critique of urbanism vis-à-vis its buildings. As Henry James observed, in *The American Scene* (1907), as such "multitudinous skyscrapers" were "giants of the mere market…consecrated by no uses save the commercial at any cost."[362] Such structures were "thrown up as if by the blind," to borrow Alan Trachtenberg's view, and "had become the emblem of urban confusion, of defiance of traditional meanings and controls."[363] By using architectural themes and subjects to convey unpleasant aspects of city-life, Weber denounced an architectural form that was quite popular at that time. William Aiken Starrett proclaimed, in 1928, skyscrapers to be "the most distinctively American thing in the world."[364] Moreover, Marcel Duchamp famously exclaimed: "Look at the sky-scrapers! Has Europe anything to show more beautiful than these?"[365] While the tall building might in fact be "the landmark of our age" as Ada Louise Huxtable claimed, Weber's depictions of the building type belie the positive potential the skyscraper offered at the moment he painted images of them.[366]

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[361] Alfred Werner, *Max Weber* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975): 49-50.
362 Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1907): 70ff.
[363] Alan Trachtenberg, "The Photographer's New York," reprinted in Marianne Doezema and Elizabeth Milroy, ed., *Reading American Art* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1998): 304.
[364] William Aiken Starrett, *Skyscrapers and the Men Who Build Them* (New York: Scribner, 1928): 1.
[365] Marcel Duchamp, quoted in "The Iconoclastic Opinions of M. Marcel Duchamp [*sic*] concerning Art and America," *Current Opinion* Vol. 59 (Nov. 1915): 346.
[366] Ada Louise Huxtable, from *The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered: The Search for a Skyscraper Style* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), selections reprinted in Ada Louise Huxtable, *On Architecture: Collected Reflections on a Century of Change* (New York: Walker & Co., 2008): 132. For the definitive account of the skyscraper at the moment Rothko painted the type, see Louis I. Horowitz and Boyden Sparkes, *The*

Milton Avery might have also inspired or reinforced Rothko's interest in pictorial architectural. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Avery painted many images of New York. These range from scenes without architecture to those in which architectural structures tower over nearby figures.[367] In *The Steeplechase, Coney Island* (1925, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fig. 74), Avery expresses the massive scale of a steeplechase roller coaster. This particular roller coaster had side-by-side cars in a dueling racing effect, thus making it much scarier than previous roller coasters, reinforcing the sense of danger and fear the amusement park ride conveyed. Avery painted the work not long after he moved to New York in 1925 from the small town of Altmar in northern New York, which may explain his awe with such structures. As a constant presence in Avery's studio at that point, Rothko might have either seen this work or other works by Avery in which architecture factors prominently. Rothko had seen some of Avery's early work in an exhibition at the Opportunity Gallery, held in late 1928, where both artists, along with Gottlieb, had exhibited paintings.[368] They officially met in either 1929 or 1930 through Louis Kaufman, a mutual friend and musician from Rothko's hometown of Portland, Oregon. As E. A. Carmean, Jr. observed, Rothko and

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Towers of New York: The Memoirs of a Master Builder (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1937).

[367] For a non-architectural work, see *Rider in Central Park* (early 1930s, Brooklyn Museum of Art).

[368] The two extant works on canvas Rothko exhibited are landscapes (see Anfam cat. nos. 11 and 12). Two reviews of that exhibition praised "the landscapes of M. Rothkowitz" and what was touted as Rothko's "painter's vision." See Murdock Pemberton, *Creative Act* (December 1928): n.p.; and *New York Sun* (Nov. 12, 1928).

Gottlieb were "a part of the Averys's daily life; indeed, when their daughter was born in 1932, Rothko helped the Averys bring her home from the hospital."[369]

Key early works by Avery show similar faceless figures. Among the earliest is *Sitters by the Sea* (1933, Private Collection). In the work, four seated adult figures and one standing child are on a beach surveying the ocean. Only three years into his mature career at that point, Avery's signature colorfields, those that significantly influenced Rothko's own, are already present. While there is no record that Rothko had in fact seen this painting, if he had he would have responded to the obvious incommunicability of the figures in Avery's 1933 painting. Avery's comment that "I always take something out of my pictures…the facts do not interest me so much as the essence [does]" might equate the facelessness and their inability to communicate verbally to Avery's sense of reducing forms to what he believed were the barest essentials.[370] However, it is possible that Rothko nonetheless might have read Avery's erasure of the figures ability to speak as an aggressive act against them.

Multiple paintings from Rothko's figurative period suggest how he employed the architecture of the city in his work. Despite his "interest in people" touted in the accompanying literature for Rothko's first solo exhibition in 1933 at the Contemporary Arts Gallery in New York, where *The Road* (1932/33, Collection of Christopher Rothko, Fig. 75) was first exhibited, along with fourteen other works by Rothko, three barely-discernable sets of figures in are compositionally swallowed up by the architecture

[369] E. A. Carmean, Jr., "Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko: Provincetown Summers," *Coming to Light: Avery, Gottlieb, Rothko, Provincetown Summers 1957-1961* (New York: Knoedler & Co., 2002): 10.

[370] Milton Avery, quoted in Harvey S. Shipley Miller, "Some Aspects of the Work of Milton Avery," *Milton Avery Drawings and Paintings* (Austin, TX: The Univ. of Texas at Austin Art Museum, 1977): 28.

depicted. And while he paid particular attention to the finely-painted wrought-iron balustrade, located at right, in stark contrast to the way he painted the extremely-abstracted figures, in quick dashes of pigment, Rothko has overwhelmingly emphasized the architectural setting, or, his Brooklyn neighborhood, at the crossing of Atlantic Avenue at Norstrand Avenue. The following year, in *City Phantasy [Recto]* (ca. 1934, Collection of Christopher Rothko, Fig. 76), Rothko resolved the issue, giving equal compositional weight to both the figures and the depicted architecture. He has made the figures not only more architectural, with columnar bodies, but has given them more compositional agency by wedging them between two rows of tightly-packed tall buildings, at left and right of both canvases, functioning to direct the figural traffic towards the viewer.

Large-scaled buildings also appear in *Landscape [?] {Untitled}* (or, *Untitled (two women before a cityscape)* (1936/1937, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 77), two figures stand on a balcony in what appears to intimate conversation with the backdrop of a sequence of tall buildings in the background.[371] It is nighttime and the city is dark, at a standstill, void of pedestrian traffic, and unwelcoming. Emphasizing this, the figures are separate from the desolation below them. That same year, in *Street Scene* (1936/1937, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Fig. 79), Rothko has merged his figures with the tall buildings surrounding them, compressing them by the architecture of the city. The bottom half of the central figure who gazes out at the viewer in an intimate

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[371] Here, the work recalls two works in which Rothko combined a stark cityscape, tall buildings, and a high vantage point, both his fourth known work *Sketch Done in Full Sunlight* (1925, Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko, Fig. 82)—which depicts a view from the area of West 136th Street in Manhattan's Morningside Heights neighborhood, looking southward toward Columbia University—and *Untitled [Cityscape]* (ca. 1936, Collection of Christopher Rothko, Fig. 78).

gesture of connectivity with us/Rothko dissolves into the structures. Rothko subsequently continued his pictorial investigation of the interplay between the monumental scale of tall buildings and their relationship to the figures positioned alongside them, depicting oversized columns,[372] the massive footing of an enormous structure,[373] and vast plazas enveloped by large-scaled buildings.[374]

Long before he accepted the Seagram commission to make murals for a skyscraper, Rothko consistently worked toward hinging unpleasant moods onto the architectural settings he imagined, both the interiors and exteriors of urban architecture. His repeated use of architectural motifs during the period justifies why is it necessary to add painting/architecture to a series of polarities David Anfam identified populating Rothko's earliest work, including precision/blurredness, city/nature, and a static/roving sense of movement.[375]

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[372] See *Metropolitan Scene* (ca. 1937, Collection of Christopher Rothko).

[373] See *Street Scene* (ca. 1937, National Gallery of Art, Washington).

[374] See *Untitled [Four Figures in a Plaza]* (ca. 1937, National Gallery of Art, Washington) and *Untitled [Four Figures in a Plaza]* (ca. 1937, National Gallery of Art, Washington).

[375] Anfam, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas*, 27.

CHAPTER 5:
ROTHKO, MIES, & TRANSCENDENCE

Michael Compton's view that Rothko "might also have been impressed by the architect, Mies van der Rohe, with his reputation for implacable architectural integrity and precision of design" inspired the goal of this chapter, which is to examine a neglected connection between Rothko and Mies's respective Seagram projects, namely a shared interest in the theme of transcendence.[376] Achim Borchardt-Hume's assessment that the murals "destabalise the architecture they inhabit by dematerialising the solidity of the walls on which they are hung…[creating a] drama between physical reality and its transcendence" provided more of an impetus to examine this line of inquiry.[377] As Michael Leja contended, many Abstract Expressionists employed themes of transcendence as an escapist retreat from modernity. "To the increasing materialism, selfishness, and scientism characteristic to modern life," Leja wrote, "were counterposed the spirituality, transcendence, and organic community allegedly exemplified by primitive societies."[378] Like film noir, which he found "thematize[s] the sensations of loss of control," the work of Rothko and his contemporaries were preoccupied with what

[376] Michael Compton, *Mark Rothko: Kaaba in New York*, 12. I am using the term "transcendence" as defined by Gérard Genette in the two-part study *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence*. See Ganette, *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987). As Eyal Segal found, in an examination of Genette's distinction between immanence and transcendence, "immanence" is "the manner in which a work consists in a physical or an ideal object or event," while transcendence is "the set of all the ways in which a work exceeds this object of immanence." See Eyal Segal, "The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence by Gérard Ganette, and The Aesthetic Relation by Gérard Ganette (review)," *Poetics Today* Vol. 23, No. 2 (Summer 2002): 357-58.

[377] Achim Borchardt-Hume, 17.

[378] Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1993): 64.

Leja described as a "shrill insistence on the continuing, pivotal importance and transcendence of the subject."[379] Rothko's own statements regarding transcendence, along with his interest in music and his bent toward quasi-spiritual experiences with paintings, all suggest his interest in transcendent themes. Understanding this will show that he and Mies had a fundamental similarity in how they each approached their respective Seagram projects. A link between the painter and the architect has been completely neglected, despite Rothko's longstanding interest in architecture. While the prior chapters have focused primarily on Rothko's paintings, this chapter will instead focus on a central idea, perhaps the central idea, of the conceptual platform of his abstractions.

For Mies, "the transcendent quality he achieved in his architecture," readers to the *MoMA Highlights* catalogue will see, "is epitomized by…reductive purity and structural clarity."[380] For Rothko, the idea of transcendent art preoccupied him years before he made his first mural.[381] By the late 1950s, he used objects to get viewers to transcend

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[379] Ibid, 268.

[380] *The Museum of Modern Art, MoMA Highlights* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999): 217.

[381] Rothko's connection to Mies in relation to the theme of transcendence follows a similar connection between Mies and Piet Mondrian. Mondrian argued, in "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality" (1919), for the breakdown of distinctions between mediums, in order to emphasize something metaphysical. For him, the immaterial and the transcendent, what he called the "cosmic" and the "universal," were rooted in "internal things," quasi-emotional states of being on the other side of the duality with the outwardly focused "cultivated externality." See Piet Mondrian, "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality," originally published as "de nieuwe beelding in de schilderkunst" in *De Stijl* I, 1919, reprinted in Piet Mondrian, *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality: An Essay in Trialogue Form* (New York: George Braziller, 1995). Theo van Doesburg, in as essay from the same year, promoted similar views, offering his own binary of "spiritual (inward) and material (outward)," advocating that artists should resist "the domination of individuality." See Theo van Doesburg, Introduction to *De Stijl* II 1919, reprinted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: Univ.

them, as vehicles to elicit experiences that are essentially metaphysical. In this way, his abstractions resist the problematical categorization as merely objects in the Greenbergian sense, even though they exhibit the modernist characteristics of flatness and evident brushwork, among other factors.[382] This is why Rothko claimed that his works were "no color paintings."[383] While there is no evidence that he knew about Mies's views about transcendence, he was, of course, had to have been familiar with the building in which his murals were to be located. Its opening in May 1958, before he began working on the murals, was, as mentioned, a major event. Rothko's interest in the sublime affect of the large scale as Burke defined it would have also made his interest in a project for a

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of California Press, 1968): 324. Both artists' attempts to interrogate the boundaries between painting and architecture in the De Stijl movement has been thoroughly investigated elsewhere, along with the idea that Mondrian, van Doesburg, and J.J. Oud led a movement that sought to demystify the notion of medium specificity. While this seems to have influenced Mies's own use of transcendent themes, Mies considered van Doesburg's influence on his own work to be "absolute nonsense," remarking, in a 1960 interview, that "it was not as though he knew very much about architecture." See Mies van der Rohe, in Moisés Puente, *Conversations with Mies van der Rohe*, ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008): 43.

[382] Rothko understood this, and rallied against such interpretations of his work, those that limited his paintings to Greenberg's definition of modernist painting. To clarify the issue of "objecthood" and how the term functions in relation to modernist art and discourse, see Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 4*, John O'Brian, ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993): 85-93. Greenberg argued that painters must become self-critical in order to come to terms with the most basic/fundamental elements of their respective medium, or, in other words, he promoted a central dictum of modernist painting. Painting, Greenberg advocated, is essentially flat, and should be approached as such. Michael Fried followed the Greenbergian critical model, which had—by the mid-1960s—come under attack by the onslaught of the Pop, conceptual, and Minimalist movements. See Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* Vol. 5 (June 1967): 12-23.

[383] Rothko, quoted by Dan Rice during the Seagram project. For a thorough review of Rice's comments on the project, see Breslin, 371-409.

massive tower intriguing. As Burke noted, on the issue of scale, "greatness of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime," especially what he calls a "perpendicular" form.[384]

There are many intriguing links between the Seagram paintings and the building, encouraging an exploration of shared themes that both Mies and Rothko employed in their work for the corporation. To start with, Mies and Rothko's separate commissions for the Seagram project afforded them both ideal opportunities to experiment further with their respective signature styles, those that were at that time lucrative and highly critically acclaimed. Both projects occurred relatively later in each of their careers. Mies' later phase, generally understood to be dated to after ca. 1949, was more focused on large scale tall, commercial buildings in urban settings, as opposed to the horizontal format of his most famous building to date, the German Pavilion at the Barcelona Exposition (1928-29).[385] For Rothko, as mentioned in prior chapters, the project inspired his ongoing experimentation both with architectural motifs and the dissolution of boundaries between his canvases and the architecture they inhabit/create.

Additionally, many of the upright vertical rectangular shapes of the door/window forms of the canvases have similar proportions as the building. In *Mural, Section 4 {Red on Maroon} [Seagram Mural]* (1959, Tate Gallery, Fig. 7), for example, the central lighter-toned rectangular (framed by the larger, open, darker one) is nearly exactly the same shape as the building's Park Avenue façade (Fig. 10). Rothko originally intended for this painting to hold a central position within the overall installation in the Grill

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[384] Burke, 114.

[385] The completion of the Seagram building, in 1958, occurred more than fifty years after Mies's first architectural project, the 1907 Riehl House (Berlin-Neubabelsberg). For more on Mies's work ca. 1949-58 (as a pivotal new phase of his career), see Schulze, 239-283.

Room, according to Dan Rice, underscoring this connection.[386] When rotated clockwise, the landscape-formatted canvases also mimic the proportions of Mies's building.

Another important link between the Seagram paintings and building is that they both championed abstraction. While Rothko abstracted the door/window forms from Michelangelo's Library, they are still nonetheless flattened, abstract shapes. Similarly, as Mies's biographer Franz Schulze observed, Mies was part of a zeitgeist that was "almost ideally suited" to him as "an abstractionist by nature…a perfect Prometheus of the new modernism."[387] Mies abstracted architecture to what he believed were its purest ingredients: the simplest geometric shapes and materials, steel, glass, and stone. Any visual irregularity in its meticulous facade would draw attention to the building as a massive, tangible structure glued to its Park Avenue footprint, rather than an elegant, weightless-seeming architectural presence. The simple and sleek aesthetic thus allows the building to seem to transcend its massive weight, gravity, and scale. To achieve this, Mies kept the composition of the exterior facades as simplified as possible, rejecting outright the standard stepped ziggurat form of a typical New York skyscraper, a convention that resulted from the progressive setbacks mandated by the city's zoning laws. He once compared the sleek design of the building in contrast to the Rockefeller Center tower. In his view, Raymond Hood's earlier Art Deco tower was a "mess…[that] has nothing to do with style," a structure in which "thousands of windows" become like an "army of soldiers."[388] As Robert Venturi observed, "Mies allows nothing to get in the

[386] *The 1958-1959 Murals*, ex. cat., Dan Rice interviewed by Arnold Glimcher (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1978): n.p.
[387] Schulze, 227.
[388] Mies van der Rohe, in Puente, 84.

way of the consistency of his order, of the point, line, and plane of his always complete pavilions."[389]

An added connection between the building and the paintings is that the abstract colorfields of the canvases function not unlike that of the reflective glass windows of the building, in the sense that the visual impenetrability of both ultimately denies our access perspectivally. Mies's windows reflect only the surrounding architecture. Similarly, the door/window forms of the Seagram paintings frame a colorfield that is illusionistically impenetrable. There is nothing depicted within the frames but washes of color. Their impenetrability vis-à-vis the flatness of the canvas in this way aligns them with a similar feature of Rothko's previous abstractions (1949-1958), works that are, as James Breslin argued, "dangerously close to nothing." [390] For Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty, all of Rothko's abstractions are in fact "very close to nothing."[391] For Robert Rosenblum, they are "near to nothingness."[392] Natalie Kosoi went as far as to argue that Rothko's abstractions "represent" nothingness in the Sartrean sense.[393] This sense of nothingness stems from Rothko's stated goal to transcend objecthood, to evoke a mood over the object. Rothko aimed at achieving what Michael Compton has called "universality."[394] This is precisely why John Elderfield observed that Rothko's abstractions are "designed to deliver transcendence, to provide access to hidden but immanent truths of the

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[389] Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2002, first published 1966): 50.

[390] Breslin, 7.

[391] Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko's Dark Paintings: Tragedy and Void," *Mark Rothko*, Jeffrey Weiss, ed., 281.

[392] Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*, 10.

[393] Natalie Kosoi, "Nothingness Made Visible: The Case of Rothko's Paintings," Art Journal, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Summer 2005): 20-31.

[394] Michael Compton, 65.

universe—not merely to struggle with that transcendence, those truths (that would be a doubter's way) but actually to convey them."[395] All of the assessments reflect Rothko's statements on the subject of transcendence, views that suggest an affinity with Mies' views about transcendence.

By emphasizing the interrelationships of each individual canvas in the series to the other works in the set when installed jointly, Rothko also employed a seminal ingredient of architecture: namely the relationship of a building to the architecture that surrounds it.[396] As mentioned, one painting within the Seagram series was less important than an installation of his multiple canvases mounted jointly. Each singular canvas of the cycle thus dematerializes into a greater frieze of his other works and of the architectural

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[395] John Elderfield, "Transformations," in Glenn Phillips and Thomas Crow, eds., *Seeing Rothko* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Inst., 2005): 101. Using colorfields to evoke transcendent themes of course prefigures the "voids" of Yves Klein. In a lecture Kline delivered at the Sorbonne while Rothko worked on the Seagram project, he argued for the intangibility of tangible art, specifically describing his immaterial aesthetic experience with the color blue. Borrowing from Gaston Bachelard, who noted "First there is nothing, next there is a depth of nothingness, then a profundity of blue," Klein described how blue "has no dimensions…is beyond dimensions" unlike the other colors, and is instead a state of being that is "pure and insubstantial." See Yves Klein, from "The Evolution of Art towards the Immaterial," extracted from the transcript of a lecture delivered on June 3, 1959 at the Sorbonne in Paris, originally published in 1973 in an exhibition catalogue for Klein's work at the Gimpel Fils Gallery, London, in Harrison & Wood, eds., 819. [I'm not sure that Rothko would be pleased to be compared with Klein]

[396] Mies and Rothko's focus on the relationships between the individual and the collective in an attempt to dissolve the boundaries between the two paradigms raises an intriguing parallel with Noam Chomsky, who had, at that point, recently published his theory of transformational-generative grammar. In *Syntactic Structures*, Chomsky articulated the concept that language is not conditioned, but is instead innately grounded, observing that language as such permeates boundaries, transcending them, in the sense that we are all hard-wired to receive it. By emphasizing cognition over empiricism, his findings not only paved the way for the development of cognitive psychology overall, but also, more pertinent to the current investigation, suggested that people were more closely connected in terms of the mechanics of how we receive and process information than what previous linguists believed. See Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957).

setting. The color, scale, and architecturally referencing shapes of the Seagram paintings all function to underscore the serial nature of the set. We are meant to read each painting as part of a larger frieze-like program.

Similarly, Mies was quite sensitive to the building-to-building relationship throughout his career, and very much so with the Seagram. As Franz Schulze observed, Mies "had a reputation for designing architectural objects as self-referential bodies independent of...the context in which they found themselves...it is decidedly not true of the Seagram Building."[397] In other words, Mies considered the location of the building and its relationship to adjacent structures to be so essential to the project. In this way, it becomes part of an architectural tapestry, dissolving itself into its surroundings. Along with the then-newly opened Skidmore, Owings & Merrill-designed Lever House, completed in 1952 and located at 390 Park Avenue, Mies's building promoted the International Style in America.[398] Johnson felt similarly, as evidenced by what is generally considered to be his response to the Seagram building, the AT&T/Sony building in midtown Manhattan, finished in 1984.[399] At least as early as 1924, Mies believed that the collective usurped the individual, that the "questions of a general

[397] Schulze, 272-73.

[398] The style was coined in 1931 by Alfred Barr after a debate with Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, thus replacing Hitchcock's term "New Pioneers" from his 1930 book *Modern Architecture*. See Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Missionary for the Modern* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989): 85. It was popularized by the Johnson/Hitchcock-organized exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art* at the Museum of Modern Art.

[399] Johnson invokes a conversation between the two buildings vis-à-vis close proximity (the AT&T/Sony building is located at 550 Madison Avenue between 55th and 56th Streets, only a few blocks from the Seagram), and also through similar scales (thirty-seven stories in Johnson's building and thirty-eight in Mies's). Johnson used idiosyncratic design motifs (derived from appropriations of Chippendale furniture, Brunelleschi's Pazzi Chapel, and so on) as a direct reference to the Seagram, as a critique of the less-is-more sensibilities of Mies's earlier building.

nature," he noted, are more important than what he understood to be the lost significance of the individual.[400] Translating this view to architectural matters, Mies sought to achieve a unity of building and its site, dematerializing the structure into its surroundings, thereby debasing, as Gevork Hartoonian put it, "the metaphoric relation of column and wall promulgated by L. Battista Alberti…[rejecting] all aesthetic, all doctrine, all formalism."[401] The International Style emerged in part as a plastic expression of such a dematerialization, a transcendence of a building into its environment.[402]

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[400] Mies van der Rohe, "Baukunst und Zeitwille," *Der Querschnitt* Vol. 4 (1924): 31-32. Mies's prioritization of the collective over the individual in this manner might have been inspired by a central tenet of Oswald Spengler's book *The Decline of the West* (first published in 1918 and 1922): namely, that individuals are powerless, caught up in the magnetic pull of cultural life-cycles (what he called winters and summers). In Spengler's view, civilization is locked into an irreversible system of life-cycles, dialectically polarized into "summers" (or, great periods of civilization, during which Galileo, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, and Mozart, among others, have emerged), and "winters" (as identified by periods of materialism, greed, and burgeoning metropolises). The popularity of Spengler's books (selling 100,000 copies by 1926) provides evidence for Mies's familiarity with these ideas. Published just after the First World War, Spengler's notion of a cyclical sociological system provided hope for Germans that the low ebb (after the War) would be only temporary. The orderliness and simplicity of Spengler's binary would have almost certainly appealed to Mies. Arthur Drexler first suggested Spengler's influence on Mies, in a lecture he delivered at the Arts Club of Chicago on September 20, 1982 (in conjunction with the exhibition *Mies van der Rohe: Interior Spaces*). For more on the impact of philosophy on Mies's notions of transcendence, see Peter Serenyi, "Spinoza Hegel and Mies: The Meaning of the New National Gallery in Berlin," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 30 (Oct. 1971). Mies denied having read the book, though this seems unlikely, especially because he was an avid reader. See Schulze pp 90-94.

[401] Gevork Hartoonian, "Mies van der Rohe: The Genealogy of Column and Wall," *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-), Vol. 42, No. 2 (Winter, 1989): 43-44.

[402] The new style (of Mies, Le Corbusier, J. J. P. Oud, and Walter Gropius, among others) showcased the use of form to suggest something formless/immaterial. Mies and the others employed sleek visual language (in part derived from the geometric wing of modernist painting) to make buildings that are meant to assimilate into any geo-political context worldwide. Vernacular architectural styles (of "French" or "American" buildings) were outmoded, replaced by a new utopian-leaning architecture, one that permeated boundaries (of nationalism and culture, among others). Le Corbusier, in his chapter on airplanes in *Toward an Architecture* (1923), the very chapter in which his

In his classic essay "The Romantics Were Prompted" (1947), Rothko mentions transcendence no less than six times, beginning with the idea that the "transcendental must involve the strange and unfamiliar," even though "not everything strange and unfamiliar is transcendental." "Transcendental experiences become possible," he wrote, "when an artist abandons the false sense of security and community [of a]…plastic bankbook."[403] Even before he made his first signature picture, Rothko distinguished between object, a commodity purchasable with a "bankbook," and the metaphysical experience an object suggests or provokes. He rehashes the discussion of such an emphasis on the metaphysical experiences one can have with objects/plastic art throughout his career. In his posthumously published manuscript, for example, he argues that the Italian Renaissance artists "whether through knowledge or instinct…understood that in demonstrating a physical law alone…had failed in the ultimate end of art, which is to reduce this law to the terms of profound human sensuality."[404] Describing "fragments of the universe" and "man's subjectivity," Rothko reinforced his promotion of metaphysicality over objecthood.

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famous phrase "the house is a machine for living in" was articulated, suggested such a transcendence (of terrestrial space, of architectural types). See Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris: G. Crés, 1924); and *Toward an Architecture*, trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2007): 87. As Vincent Scully described, Mies's transcendence of vernacular architectural languages made his style "simplified, pure, clean, generalized, reasonable, abstract." Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1988): 184. In this way, Mies's appropriation of the International Style (in the Seagram) strongly juxtaposes the style of New York buildings that Louis Sullivan once denounced as being "of the same crassness of type; a singularly sordid, vulgar vernacular in architectural speech." Louis Sullivan, *The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Dover, 1956): 202.

[403] Mark Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," in *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, 140.

[404] Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, 30.

Rothko's preoccupation with the theme of transcendence is also evidenced by his passionate interest in music, an aural, non-tangible experience.[405] In his manuscript, he argued that the essential components of the plastic arts—"shapes, space, color, rhythms," and so on—"constitute," in his estimation, "the language of painting, just as sounds, timbres, and measures constitute that of the musician."[406] He also describes how music should only be understood as "movement in time," referencing "timespace" and "the fourth dimension," revealing his deep interest in music in terms of metaphysics.[407] Elsewhere in the manuscript he describes how "the abstraction of music…[can make us] feel gay, sad, heavy, or light, not by any human association but through the relationship of rhythms and the textural quality of the sound."[408] As Thomas M. Messer found, in 1978, Rothko "shares with composers of music an absence of explicit imagery…an

[405] The recent exhibition *Vertical Thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts* (held at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin from March 31 – June 27, 2010) explores the connection, rooted in a mutual admiration between Rothko and his friend Feldman. Commemorating his friendship with Rothko, based in part on a shared Russian-Jewish kinship, Feldman, in 1971, wrote the twenty-minute composition Rothko Chapel, the solemn, haunting sounds of which are an ideal musical mirror of the chapel paintings and environment. For Rothko, music was, like pictorial art, a bridge to something transcendent and intangible. Rothko's comment that he wanted to elevate painting to the "level of poignancy of music," since only music was more apt to convey the basic human emotions he sought to express pictorially, is especially crucial to this investigation. Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko's Dark Paintings: Tragedy and Void," *Mark Rothko*, Jeffrey Weiss, ed., 266. Rothko's love for music and its metaphysical affects naturally places him in a pantheon of modernist artists with similar tastes, including most notably James Abbot McNeill Whistler, Wassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee.[ok; since you've established the influence of Matisse, he should be mentioned here] Whistler, for example, used the terms "symphony," "harmony," and "nocturne" in the titles of his works, in order to suggest not only a fluid, synaesthetic union of sound and image, as in "music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight." James Abbott McNeill Whistler, "The Red Rag," (May, 1878), reprinted in Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, eds., *Artists on Art from the XIV to the XX Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972): 347.

[406] Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, 98.

[407] Ibid., 48.

[408] Ibid., 53-54.

ability to engage…the eye…in a process that is akin to listening because it involves attention to consecutive passages; an interest in rhythmic structures…and the use of color to achieve modulations that can be subtly chromatic or dramatically contrasted."[409] Dore Ashton contended, "the other great passion in Rothko's life was music. Rothko was a man who could not be without music, a man whose inner life was accompanied constantly by the harmonies of great works and, most particularly, the works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart."[410] Ashton also described how Rothko once gave a musical reading to viewing Matisse's *The Red Studio* (1911, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fig. 23). "When you looked at that painting, you became color, you became totally saturated with it, as if it were music."[411] Vincent J. Bruno similarly found that:

> Rothko wanted to overwhelm the senses with the emotional shock of certain colors in a way that raised pure sensation to the level of transcendental experience. Perhaps his aim was to equal the effects of music, which he loved, to release the power of color with the impact of a crescendo in a Beethoven symphony, lifting the mind to a realm beyond the reach of logic.[412]

Christopher Rothko similarly argued for Rothko's connection to music; "he really loved music as much – if not more – than he loved art."[413]

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[409] Thomas M. Messer, *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: A Retrospective*, Diane Waldman, 12.

[410] Ashton, "Rothko's Frame of Mind," *Seeing Rothko*, 19.

[411] Breslin, 283. See also Dore Ashton, *About Rothko*, 112-113.

[412] Vincent J. Bruno, "Mark Rothko and the Second Style: The Art of the Color Field in Roman Murals," in R. T. Scott and A. R. Scott, eds., *Eius Virtutis Studiosi: Classical and Postclassical Studies in memory of Frank Edward Brown*, Studies in the History of Art, Symposium Papers 23, National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC, 1993): 239.

[413] Christopher Rothko, quoted in Clare Dwyer Hogg, "Rothko Revealed: Christopher Rothko Shares Troubled Memories of his Father Mark," *The Independent* (Sept. 21, 2008).

Rothko's spiritual-leaning sensibilities, which are also well documented in the Rothko literature, also points toward his interest in transcendent themes. His friend, the poet Stanley Kunitz, referred to him as "the last Rabbi in Western art."[414] Louise Bourgeois stated that Rothko "had dignity that comes from a very serious, long, religious background" and that he "always sounded like a religious official."[415] Lawrence Alloway suggested, "Rothko's art was always putting people in the mind of chapels."[416] Anna Chave devoted the prime position, most of the first page of her book *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, to the subject of "religiosity" and the "spiritual" in Rothko's work.[417] Hilton Kramer weighed-in, noting that the "religious dimension to Rothko's art" is found in its "aestheticism – in the religion the artist made of art."[418] All of these sentiments, and many others like them, mirror one of Rothko's most often-repeated phrases: "the people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them."[419] Wilhelm Worringer's "Transcendence and Immanence in Art," published five years before Rothko began the Seagram paintings, offers a definition of transcendence as it relates to spirituality that would have suited Rothko's spiritualist-leaning sensibilities:

> We are all the less familiar with the connections that exist between a state of soul which thus inclines toward transcendentalism, and the form of its expression in art. For the spirit's fear of the unknown and the unknowable not only created the first gods, it also created the first

[414] Stanley Kunitz, interview with Avis Berman, Part I, Archives of American Art, in Breslin, 320, and note 59.

[415] Louise Bourgeois, interview with Breslin (Jan. 7, 1986), in Breslin, 323, and note 68.

[416] Lawrence Alloway, "Art," *Nation* (Mar. 15, 1971): 349.

[417] Anna C. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, 1.

[418] Hilton Kramer, "Rothko: Art as Religious Faith," *The New York Times* (Nov. 12, 1978).

[419] Mark Rothko, in Breslin, 325.

> art. In other words, to the transcendentalism of religion there always corresponds a transcendentalism of art, for which we lack the organ of understanding only because we obstinately insist upon appraising the vast mass of factual material in the whole field of art from the narrow angle of vision of our European-Classical conception. We perceive transcendental feeling in the content, to be sure; but we overlook it in the real core of the process of artistic creation.[420]

Rothko's interest in spiritualist definitions of transcendence culminated in his acceptance of the Rothko Chapel project in Houston (see Fig. 80).[421] The Chapel was the

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[420] Wilhelm Worringer, "Transcendence and Immanence in Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 12, No. 2 (Dec. 1953): 210.

[421] The transcendent themes of Rothko's Chapel project, and the architectural paintings he fashioned to convey them, were largely influenced by a project Matisse completed in 1951, the small Dominican Chapelle de Saint-Marie du Rosarie in the French town of Vence (see Figs. 81-82), located on the French Riviera near Nice. Matisse worked on the project from 1947-51 as a partial favor to Sister Jacques-Marie, known to Matisse as Monique Bourgeois, who nursed him after his surgery in 1941, and whose "tenderness…goes beyond words." See Henri Matisse, letter to R. Rouverye (May 9, 1947), quoted in Gabrielle Langdon, "'A Spiritual Space': Matisse's Chapel of the Dominicans at Vence," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* Vol. 51 (1988): 544. Matisse's attempts to intersect pictorial and architectural concerns in the Chapel resulted from his career-long architecturally-themed/related works, including the large-scale murals *Dance* and *Music* (1910, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg) for the Russian collector Sergei Shchukin, and *Dance II* (1932, The Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania). "In a very restricted space, the breadth is five meters," Matisse recalled of the Chapel, "I wanted to inscribe…a spiritual place." Henri Matisse to Maria Luz, 1952, quoted in Jack D. Flam, *Matisse on Art*, ed. (New York: Phaidon, 1973): 136. Matisse designed the various accoutrements within the space, including the altar and candlesticks, in order to create a total environment, one designed for the viewer's complete immersion and transcendent experiences. "I consider it, in spite of all its imperfections," Matisse wrote, "to be my masterpiece." Henri Matisse, in a letter to Bishop Rémond, quoted in Frederick A. Sweet, "Henri Matisse," *The Art Institute of Chicago Quarterly* Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 1, 1952): 33. Links between Matisse's chapel and the Rothko Chapel in Houston were immediately made, just after the dedication of the latter, in 1971. [people linked the two; did Rothko have any thoughts on this] Dominique de Menil, who described Rothko's chapel as his masterpiece, equating it with the Vence chapel, observed that the Chapel "will probably be known the world over, as the Rothko Chapel, just as the conventual Chapel of the Dominican sisters of Vence, the chapel of the Rosary, is known the world over as the Matisse chapel." See Dominique de Menil, "The Rothko Chapel," *Art Journal* Vol. 30, No. 3 (Spring, 1971): 249. For the most recent account of de Menil's relationship with the chapel, see Dominique de Menil,

brainchild of Dominique de Menil, who visited Rothko in New York, on April 17, 1964, where she viewed some of the Seagram paintings, and declared: “O miracle,” she declared, “peace invaded me.”[422] As a result of that experience, she commissioned a series of paintings for what would ultimately become a non-denominational chapel in Houston. Shaped in an octagonal form derived from Torcello (and baptistery fonts and baptisteries , (Meyer Schapiro once informed Rothko the octagon was of the model for Eastern Orthodox churches), the chapel, designed by Philip Johnson and completed by Howard Barnstone and Eugene Aubry, fulfilled Rothko’s desire to “make East and West merge in an octagonal chapel.”[423] For most of 1964 through April of 1967, when Rothko sent the requested fourteen paintings, along with four additional ones, to Houston, the project consumed him. The paintings were stored there until 1971, after Rothko’s death, at which point the chapel was completed with the installed paintings.

The Chapel paintings are among Rothko’s most architectural and are “in discourse with the architecture,” as Stephen Polcari argued, in the sense that they are “architectonic in scale, the fulfilment of the artist’s lifelong search to wed the human inner life to a culturally symbolic, enveloping symbolic, enveloping ‘environment,’ thereby suggesting the shaping of the individual by tragic and powerful forces.”[424] As

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The Rothko Chapel: Writings on Art and the Threshold of the Divine (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2010).

[422] Dominique de Menil, quoted in Nodelman, The *Rothko Chapel Paintings: Origins, Structure, and Meaning*, 33-34. She recalled: “He had placed a chair for me about twenty feet in front of it [the painting]…I just looked. O miracle, peace invaded me. I felt held up, embraced, and free. There was a beyond. Nothing was stopping my gaze… As a consequence, she attempted to acquire "a group of these paintings for the future chapel in Houston."

423 Rothko, quoted in Dore Ashton, 169.

424 Stephen Polcari, “Mark Rothko. Houston,” *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 139, No. 1132 (July 1997), 506.

Sheldon Nodelman found, the chapel "inscribes itself within what was probably the century's most serious attempt at the reintegration of art and religion, hopelessly estranged since the Enlightenment."[425] Rothko's "urgency for transcendent experiences," he argued, explained why he would have been drawn to the chapel project.[426] Many scholars have proposed similar analyses. Julia Davis observed that it was "practically inevitable" that Rothko would have made paintings for the chapel, and that the "symbolic discourse of the motif of the doorway inevitably ends up at the word 'transcendence.'"[427] David Anfam concluded that the chapel works not only "supplant" the walls, but that their reduced palette triggers a transcendent spiritual experience, one he found was not unlike the unmarked stones used by the ancient Greeks to represent a deity in its absence.[428] Christopher Rothko went so far as to describe the chapel as "the very culmination…the opportunity he had long searched for to make a powerful and sweeping

[425] Nodelman, 34.

[426] Ibid., 306.

[427] Julia Davis, *Mark Rothko: The Art of Transcendence* (Kent, U.K.: Crescent Moon, 1995): 69, 82.

[428] Anfam, "To See, or Not to See," *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding, The Rothko Chapel Art Series*, 65. In this way, Anfam observed, the Chapel works are thus not dissimilar to key Buddhist reliefs from the 2nd century C.E. and the Kabba at Mecca. Rothko made the palette from variations of maroon (a combination of alizarin crimson and black, with traces of umber, sienna, and blue). Anfam also linked the ideas of "blackness" and "absence" to contemporary popular culture (to the black slab that augments a room in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and to references to blackness in the conceptually dark rock-and-roll song *Paint It Black* by the Rolling Stones (which topped the Billboard's *Hot 100* chart in 1966, while Rothko worked on the chapel project). See David Anfam, "To See, or Not to See," 65, 66. More recently, Anfam linked the darkness of the Chapel works not only to Rothko's predilection for Romantic art, melancholia, and mortality, but to contemporaneous dark-themed or dark-toned works (including works by Tony Smith, Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra, Carl Andre, and, among others, Ad Reinhardt's Abstract Painting, Black series (see, for example, Fig. 218). See David Anfam, "The World in a Frame," *Rothko* ex. cat. (London: Tate, 2008): 45-56.

statement of all the ideas that had percolated within him for decades."[429] He went on to describe how his father had "pushed the challenges of his earlier work past their logical conclusion," with the result that the Chapel paintings are "more explicit than Rothko's other paintings."[430] Wessel Stoker observed that the chapel paintings code an "expression of the universal religious in distinction from the institutional religions," one that visualizes pictorially "[confrontations] with our mortality."[431]

As Robert Rosenblum observed, in his classic essay "The Abstract Sublime," (1961) and later his groundbreaking book *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (1975), Rothko, Newman, Still, and Pollock, among others, revived not only the sublime tradition in painting, but also the Romantic spiritual/metaphysical associations it invites.[432] Rosenblum's essay begins with one

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[429] Christopher Rothko, "Introduction: Search for Understanding," *Image of the Not-Seen: Search for Understanding, The Rothko Chapel Art Series* (Houston, TX: The Rothko Chapel, 2007): 13.

[430] Ibid., 13.

[431] Wessel Stoker, "The Rothko Chapel Paintings and the 'urgency of transcendent experience,'" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 64, No. 2 (Feb. 2008): 98, 94. In this way, the Chapel also probably responds to Le Corbusier's *Notre Dame du Haut* (1955, Ronchamp, France), for the reason that Le Corbusier united pictorial and architectural forms and concerns so that the chapel would function as an intimate space, noting that "the requirements of religion have little effect on the design of Ronchamp...the form was an answer to the physiology of the feelings." Le Corbusier, quoted in *Oeuvre Complète* Vol. 5 (Zurich: Les Editions d'Architecture, 1976): 52. Blending stained-glass with sweeping modernist forms, he emphasized sensuousness, so that visitors to the chapel would experience a bodily-based, physical reaction, not unlike the one Rothko wanted the visitors to the Chapel space to experience.

[432] Rosenblum's research was inspired in part by Casper David Friedrich's statements and paintings that reference his preoccupation with quasi-spiritual/transcendent themes. "Close your bodily eye," Friedrich directed, "so that you may see your picture first with the eye of the spirit. Then bring to the light of day that which you have seen in the darkness so that it may react upon others from the outside inwards." Casper David Friedrich, quoted in William Vaughan, *German Romantic Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1980): 68. In his *The Abbey in the Oakwood* (1809-10, Schloss Charlotteenburg, Berlin), to take just one example, Friedrich used an

spectator's reaction to two Still paintings: "It's like a religious experience!"[433] Barnett Newman's similar interest in the sublime affect and other quasi-spiritual themes related to transcendence would have reinforced Rothko's attempt to achieve transcendent works.[434] Newman's pictorial-architectural work often specifically explored Jewish-spiritual themes.[435] As Karen Kurczynski recently observed, Newman's "individual

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architectural subject, a ruined cathedral/church, to covey something dark and emotive, expressing the turbulent context of the Napoleonic conflicts. Rothko was quite familiar with Friedrich's work.

[433] Robert Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," *ARTnews* Vol. 59, No. 10 (Feb. 1961): 38. See also Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975). As Michael Auping has shown, Rothko had a Romantic-inspired preoccupation with large scale to achieve a sublime affect that continued to inspire artists after Abstract Expressionism, including Dan Flavin, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson, among others. Michael Auping, "Beyond the Sublime," in Michael Auping, *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments*, ed., 146-166. [Auping includes other Ab-X artists in this, as well]

[434] In his catalogue essay "The Ideographic Picture" (1947) for a show at Betty Parsons Gallery, Newman defined his art in relation to that of Rothko, Reinhardt, and Hofmann also in the exhibition, prioritizing the metaphysical affects of his work over the objects themselves. By opening the essay with an epigraph of three definitions of the "ideograph," a symbol that suggests something without actually expressing it outright (verbally, rhetorically, or otherwise), Newman proclaimed that his work was unconcerned with "ideas," and instead focused on a viewer's intangible reaction to it. See Barnett Newman, "The Ideographic Picture" (1947), reprinted in Ellen G. Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, 135-136. In his 1948 essay "The Sublime is Now," he equated the "pure idea" with the sublime as Burke understood it, and advocated a pure art that was only pure when it was sublime and thus communicated what he believed to be the primitive nature of human experience. See Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now," in "The Ides of Art: Six Opinions on What is Sublime in Art," *The Tiger's Eye* Vol. 1, No. 6 (Dec. 1948): 51-53, reprinted in Harrison & Wood, 580-582. In the essay, Newman proposed that art must shed its desire for beauty in order to become sublime, and that beauty was ingrained in art as far back at the Greco-Roman tradition, with only sporadic periods including the Baroque when artists attempted to destroy the perfect/beautiful form. In his view, the colossally-scaled *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950-51, Museum of Modern Art, New York), which measures 95 3/8 by 213 ¼ inches, increased our sensitivity to the sublime, at once filling our frontal and peripheral visual fields.

[435] In a 1965 letter to the Jewish Museum in New York, written after he had attended the symposium "What about Jewish Art," Newman argued that "what the Jewish Museum has done is to compromise me as an artist because I am Jewish," vowing never

painterly expression led directly to transcendence."[436] In this way, he was perhaps Rothko's closest analogue in terms of his use of the abstract pictorial language to achieve a metaphysical affect.[437] Newman's paintings from the series *The Stations of the Cross*

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to "cooperate ever with any of your shows." See Barnett Newman, in a letter to Hans van Weeren-Griek, dated Jan. 18, 1965, in Mark Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2007): 53. Much of his work, however, dealt specifically with Jewish themes. In *Abraham* (1949, Museum of Modern Art, New York), for example, Newman references the Biblical patriarch through the title in order to pay his respects to his father (who died in 1947). In *Onement I* (1948, Museum of Modern Art, New York), to offer a second example, Newman referred to the role of atonement in Judaism (and in particular to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement) in order to suggest the theme of rebirth. As Thomas Hess, in his monograph on Newman, and later, Robert Rosenblum, have shown, the Kaballah in particular inspired the "zip" motif he first used in this work. See Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971); Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*, 209. Matthew Baigell summarized exactly how kabalistic texts influenced the zip, noting how it represents "the first ray of light and the first man," in accordance with concepts proposed by the sixteenth-century mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria from Safad (in modern-day Israel), as summarized in Gershon Scholem's then-recently published book Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. Matthew Baigell, "Barnett Newman's Stripe Paintings and Kaballah: A Jewish Take," *American Art* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Spring 1994): 34. See also Gershon G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1946). For more on the intersections between modernist artists and Judaism, see a series of books by Matthew Baigell on the subject, including *Jewish Art in America: An Introduction* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); *American Artists: Jewish Images* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2006); and *Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2002).

[436] Karen Kurczynski, "Ironic Gestures: Asger Jorn, Informel, and Abstract Expressionism," in Joan Marter, *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, ed., 112.

[437] Among many other works contemporary to Rothko's Seagram paintings, this is also true of Ad Reinhardt's *Abstract Painting, Black* series, which uses abstract pictorial language to connote quasi-spiritualist themes related to transcendence. For Reinhardt, the works were "pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless, disinterested painting," with objects that are "self-conscious (no unconsciousness), ideal, transcendent, aware of no thing but art." [spirituality is a bit trickier in relation to Reinhardt] See Ad Reinhardt, in Barbara Rose, *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991): 83. Rothko, however, distinguished himself from Reinhardt, whom he called "the mystic," remarking that his own paintings "are here" whereas Reinhardt's prioritize the

(1958-66, see Figs. 83-84), begun just after Newman's first heart attack, in November 1957, are, as Ann Temkin described, a "cross-referencing between paintings, and spiritual ambitions."[438] With fourteen paintings, the cycle, as Lawrence Alloway observed, alludes to the theme of the Passion of Christ.[439] As Mark Godfrey has shown, Newman's reference to Christianity in this manner also reflects his signature use of Jewish themes, in this case, referencing the holocaust.[440] Investigating the Judeo-Christian connection, Ziva Amishai-Maisels linked Newman's appropriation of Christian concepts to a larger phase in modernist art, one in which his "Christological Symbolism" signifies the holocaust.[441] The large scale of the works in the series, with each painting measuring about 78 by 60 inches, is also meant to evoke the spiritual affect Newman desired, one that he referred to as "a human scale for the human cry."[442] With nearly four hundred sixty-six square feet of wall space taken up by the stations cycle, it is indebted to Rothko's Seagram cycle, and is similarly meant to interrogate the boundaries between painting and architecture.[443]

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metaphysical. Mark Rothko, quoted in David Anfam, "The World in a Frame," in *Rothko* ex. cat., 49.

[438] Ann Temkin, *Barnett Newman*, ed. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002): 229.

[439] Lawrence Alloway, "Residual Sign Systems in Abstract Expressionism," *Artforum* (Nov. 1973): 36-43, reprinted in Ellen G. Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2005): 319.

[440] Mark Godfrey, "Barnett Newman's Stations and the Memory of the Holocaust," *October* Vol. 108 (Spring 2004): 35-50. See also Mark Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust*.

[441] Ziva Amishai-Maisals, "Christological Symbolism of the Holocaust," in Yehuda Bauer, *Remembering for the Future, Volume II: The Impact of the Holocaust on the Contemporary World*, ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989): 1657-71.

[442] Barnett Newman, "The 14 Stations of the Cross, 1958-1966," *ARTnews* Vol. 65, No. 3 (May 1966): 57.

[443] Newman's combined pictorial-architectural forms related to Judaism might also correspond to Marc Chagall's many architectural works, especially his twelve stained

Kazimir Malevich, also involved in architecture, was perhaps the first to understand this conceptual platform, as evidenced by his iconic painting *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying* (1915, MOMA New York, Fig. 85), a work that suggests an abstracted world without borders, as viewed from a bird's-eye view above such arbitrary distinctions which separate people. "The rectangular picture-plane," in his conception, is just the "starting point of suprematism…the suprematism of pure feeling," with the intangible essence of the work essentially superseding the canvas.[444] Both Malevich and Rothko, as Anna Chave has observed, sought unity in their art. "I have created a new type of unity," Rothko told William Seitz in a 1953 interview, "a new method of achieving unity."[445] Both also variously depicted black squares, Malevich because he felt it was "the embryo of all potentials,"[446] and Rothko because it, as the collectors Robert and Jane Meyerhoff felt, made the [late] works "dark, and frighteningly

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glass windows for the Abbell Synagogue at the Hadassah University Medical Center in Jerusalem. The remarkable success of the exhibition of the windows at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 1961-62, makes it likely that Newman and Rothko must have seen them. 176,000 attended the show, despite its relatively short run of November 19, 1961 to January 3, 1962. Alfred Werner wrote that "there has been no New York show in years that has received such a flood of publicity." See Alfred Werner, "Chagall's Jerusalem Windows," *Art Journal* Vol. 21, No. 4 (Summer 1962): 224.

[444] Kasimir Malevich, "Suprematism: The Non-Objective World," Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, eds., *Artists on Art from the XIV to the XX Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972): 452. Although Mies mentioned that he was "very strongly opposed…to Malevich," his rationale for this claim—that he was "never interested in formalistic ideas"—suggests that he curiously read the painter's work in a very one-dimensional way, with little recognition for Malevich's emphasis on the transcendent metaphysical. See Mies van der Rohe, in Puente, 44.

[445] Rothko, interviewed by William Seitz, 1953, quoted in Anna Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1989): 191.

[446] Malevich, cited in Chave, 191. See also Jean-Claude Marcadé, "K.S. Malevich," in Stephanie Barron and Maurice Tuchman, eds., *The Avant Garde in Russia, 1910-1930: New Perspectives* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980): 21-22.

mysterious."[447] Moreover, as Brian O'Doherty found, images of squares in particular, linked them, in line with Rothko's comment that his "squares were not squares, but all my feelings about life, about humanity."[448] Rothko made this comment in the context of Malevich's belief that he had conveyed pictorially with his squares a feeling, albeit what he considered to be a pure one that transcended form.

As with Malevich, Mies believed his forms had the potential to be transcendent. For his Barcelona Pavilion (Fig. 86), the centerpiece of Germany's contribution to the International Exposition in Barcelona, 1929-30, Mies set out to erase the boundary between interior and exterior spaces.[449] He accomplished this through its characteristic horizontality, a quality of the structure emphasized by the juxtaposition of the low building and the neighboring Royal Palace of the reigning Spanish monarch at the time, Alfonso XIII. "[It appears] perfectly obvious," Walter Genzmer wrote, "that the main orientation of the pavilion should be perpendicular to the palace wall, that in contrast to the considerable height of that wall the pavilion be quite low, and that in contrast to the calm unbroken surface of the wall it be kept open and airy."[450] Several additional attributes of the Pavilion's design suggested a dissolution of interior and exterior spaces. These include a series of chrome-plated columns lining the passageway to the interior of the building, a colonnade that mirrored the metallic accents of the interior, including the

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[447] See Jane Meyerhoff, "The Collector's Perspective," in Nina Sundell, *The Robert and Jane Meyerhoff Collection, 1958-1979* (Baltimore: Jane B. Meyerhoff and Nina C. Sundell, 1980).

[448] Rothko, quoted in Brian O'Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth* (New York: Random House, 1973): 164.

[449] See in Franz Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985): 152-160.

[450] Walter Genzmer, "Der deutsche Reichspavillion auf der internationalen Ausstellung Barcelona," *Die Baugilde* Vol. 11 (Oct. 25, 1929): 1654-57, quoted in Schulze, 154.

metal bars of Mies's Barcelona chairs inside, and led the progression from interior to exterior, dissolving the boundary between the two. A massive ten by eighteen foot slab of onyx dorée, a rare marble literally linked interior and exterior spaces. Large curtain walls further enhanced the union of the two spaces.

As Director of the Bauhaus, a position he accepted in 1930 soon after the Pavilion was dismantled after the Exposition, he disseminated his ideas concerning the integration of interior and exterior architectural spaces as part of a larger conceptual program/curriculum at the school to think, somewhat utopically, about transcending borders. Mies wrote: "we should strive to bring Nature, houses, and people together into a higher unity," a unity which transcends the particulars of each category.[451] Mies's buildings suggested a way to structure what he called "the desperate confusion of our times" with a "quiet timeless order, the reassurance of stability."[452] What mattered to him was how "architecture expresses the real essence of its times…a question of truth."[453] He expressed his prioritization of the ideological/metaphysical over the material repeatedly in interviews, and in 1959 noted, "it took me a long time to understand the relationship between ideas and between objective facts. But after I clearly understood this relationship, I didn't fool around with other wild ideas."[454] This is why Mies was, as Peter Blundell-Jones argued, more interested in "the general or typical approach to architectural questions" rather than the more specific, minute

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[451] Ibid.
[452] Mies van der Rohe, cited in Peter Blake, *The Master Builders: Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wrigh*t (New York: Norton, 1996, first published 1960): 74.
[453] Mies van der Rohe, in Puente, 46.
[454] Ibid., 21.

problems within an overall structure.[455] The "transcendent: eternal architecture" Mies sought was, Blundell-Jones argued, one in which "the form was as independent of content as possible."[456]

Mies's special interest in philosophy played an important role in the development of his thinking about transcendent themes. It is quite possible that his first client, the neo-Kantian philosopher Alois Riehl, encouraged Mies's philosophical bent.[457] As Franz Schulze has shown, Riehl wanted to "advance the career of some gifted neophyte" rather than contract an established architect.[458] Riehl's awareness of contemporaneous developments in physics and metaphysics made him quite familiar with ideas concerning the transcendental. This led him to acknowledge, as Michael Heidelberger has observed,

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[455] Peter Blundell-Jones, *Hugo Häring: The Organic Versus the Geometric* (Stuttgart: Ed. Axel Menges, 1999): 156.

[456] Ibid., 156.

[457] One of Riehl's most important contributions to the discourse of philosophy was the first monograph on Friedrich Nietzsche. See Alois Riehl, *Friedrich Nietzsche. Der Künstler und der Denker* (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1897). Riehl is, however, best known for his most important work, the two-volume *Philosophy of Criticism and Its Significance for Positive Science*, published variously from 1876 to 1887. See Riehl, *Der philosophische Kriticismus und seine Bedeutung für die positive Wissenschaft*, 2 vols. (vol. 2 in 2 parts) (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1876, 1879, and 1887). In addition to his postulation on epistemology, ideas of time and space, and so on, one of the central contributions of the text to the philosophical discourse was his mapping of the roots of Immanuel Kant's philosophical roots to John Locke and David Hume. In the second part of the second installment of the second volume, Riehl explores what he calls "metaphysical problems," examining determinism and free will.

[458] Schulze, 23. For more on the Riehl House, see Shulze, 23-29. With Mies and Rothko, the role of the metaphysical is key to understanding Riehl's philosophy. While Riehl's influence on Mies has been acknowledged (by Schulze and others), it is worth positing that Rothko might have been aware of his ideas, too. Riehl had become more widely known in America after he received an honorary doctorate, from Princeton University, in 1913, raising the intriguing question as to whether Rothko's strong interest in philosophy at that same time could have introduced him to Riehl's concepts. See Alois Riehl, "The Vocation of Philosophy at the Present Day," in Emile Boutroux, Alois Riehl, A. D. Godsley, and Arthur Shipley, *Lectures Delivered in Connection with the Graduate College of Princeton University in October, 1913* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1914): 45-66.

the existence of "something outside of consciousness that is not wholly constituted by cognitive categories alone."[459] In addition to Riehl, Georg Simmel's ideas on cultural philosophy, as W. Gordon Brown has demonstrated, also had a major impact on Mies and the formation of his ideas concerning transcendence.[460] Brown notes that Mies was well aware of Simmel's essay "The Ruin," from his 1911 book *Philosophiche Kultur*, in which he asserted that a building is built by "human will" and becomes a ruin by the "crumbling power of nature."[461] As Murray S. Davis has shown, this dialectic suggests "the balance between the striving of the spirit and the necessities of nature."[462] An intangible, transcendent "spirit" is thus always present in the reality of building-making. Back and forth, human will to construct architecture and nature's power to deconstruct it are in flux, in what Brian Dillon called "a fragile equilibrium between persistence and decay."[463] Subscribing to Simmel's view, Mies understood architecture proper to be the springboard into an intangible essence: a transcendence.

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[459] Michael Heidelberger, "Kantianism and Realism: Alois Riehl (and Moritz Schlick)," in Michael Friedman and Alfred Nordmann, *The Kantian Legacy in Nineteenth-Century Science,* eds. (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2006): 235.

[460] W. Gordon Brown, "Form as the Object of Experience: Georg Simmel's Influence on Mies van der Rohe," *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-), Vol. 43, No. 2 (Winter, 1990), pp. 42-46.

[461] Georg Simmel, "The Ruin," in Kurt Wolff, *Georg Simmel, 1858-1918*, ed. (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1959). See also Simmel, *Philosophiche Kultur* (Leipzig: W. Klinhardt, 1911).

[462] Murray S. Davis, "Georg Simmel and the Aesthetics of Social Reality," *Social Forces*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Mar. 1973): 325.

[463] Brian Dillon, "Fragments from a History of Ruin," *Cabinet* Vol. 20 (Winter, 2005/06).

CHAPTER 6:
ARCHITECTURAL THEMES IN NEW YORK'S VANGUARD ART
CA. 1955-65

Rothko's aggressive quips that "those young artists are out to murder us" and that he "would kill" any member of the younger generation of New York's avant garde if that artist attempted to usurp his position as a patriarch underscores an uneasy relationship he had with his younger contemporaries in the 1950s.[464] His withdrawal from the Sidney Janis Gallery, in 1962, as a protest against *The New Realists* exhibit that opened in October of that year firmly declared that he was no longer cutting-edge. By 1965, he knew he had been replaced, telling the painter John-Franklin Koenig that "he felt as if he were dead…[that] only museums and large corporations could acquire him," echoing John Graham's comment from 1960 that "modern painting is worthless."[465] What has been completely ignored, however, is the extent to which Rothko's experiments with architectural ideas and the culmination of those ideas in the Seagram project and two subsequent mural commissions actually aligned him with a handful of the most important artists who made major breakthroughs in advanced art in New York in the late 1950s and early 1960s, at which point Rothko worked on his three mural commissions.

Numerous major works from the period could have been brought into the discussion, including Louise Bourgeois's totemic forms and environments, Claes Oldenburg's architecturally shaped/themed pieces, and, among many others, George

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[464] Rothko, according to Herbert Ferber in a Jan. 27, 1987 interview with James E. B. Breslin; and Rothko, in Fisher.

[465] Rothko, in Breslin, 430, note 73. John Graham, interviewed by Angus Deming, September 1960 [Archives of American Art, Microfilm Roll 96], in Hayden Herrera, "Le Feu Ardent: John Graham's Journal," *Archives of American Art Journal* Vol. 14, No. 2 (1974): 4.

Segal's walk-in environments, which he identified as having been strongly influenced by Edward Hopper's architectural paintings. Artists who made significant contributions at that time who later turned their attention to architecture, including Vito Acconci, could also fit comfortably into a discussion of this kind. However, to streamline the current chapter, a small cross-section of artists who emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s will be discussed, including Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Louise Nevelson, Ellsworth Kelly, and Frank Stella. Rothko would have been familiar with all of these artists, having attended solo exhibitions of some of their work, and likely having seen the Dorothy Miller-curated *Sixteen Americans* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959, where pieces by all five artists were exhibited.[466] A small set of Rauschenberg's combines, Johns's targets, Nevelson's assemblages, Kelly's non-objective paintings, and Stella's black paintings, will be discussed as exemplars of vanguard art made in New York all in the late 1950s. The use of doors, windows, images of architecture, architectural ornaments, and references to architecture in these works will be considered. Additionally, a succinct rundown of how the Minimalist artists Donald Judd, Tony Smith, Sol LeWitt, and Carl André treated architectural themes will also be bought into the discussion.

Of the seven works by Rauschenberg exhibited at the 1959 show, among the largest at approximately seven by twelve feet was the *Wager* (1957-59, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Fig. 87), a composite of four canvases. While Rauschenberg has concentrated a mass of paint drips mixed with various bits of newspapers, fabrics, and other found materials, the right and left panels are sparer,

[466] *Sixteen Americans*, Dorothy C. Miller, ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959).

focusing attention on two important details. At the right, an unmistakable tracing of a life-sized male figure evokes the human scale of most of the combines, and at the left pair of references to architecture are clearly separated from the rest of the composition. At the bottom left is a small image of the Capitol Dome in Washington, D.C. (Fig. 88), and at the top left is a pair of what are likely fragments of wallpaper, cropped and outlined in pencil (Fig. 89). By 1959, when he completed the work, Rauschenberg had included dozens of architectural references and objects. In his *Untitled* (1954, Private Collection, Fig. 90), a stained-glass window dominates the top portion of the work. In the freestanding combine *Minutiae* (1954, Private Collection), a yellow architectural fragment supports one of the panels, not unlike how white architectural fragments act as columns in the subsequent *Untitled* (ca. 1954, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), *Odalisk* (1955/1958, Museum Ludwig, Cologne), and *The Tower* (1957, Private Collection), all completed before *Wager*. In *Interview* (1955, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Fig. 91), a life-sized door jutting out toward the viewer suggests that we are looking into the work rather than at it, a idea he repeated in several subsequent works, including vis-à-vis the window in *Trophy V (For Jasper Johns)* (1962, Honolulu Academy of Arts, Fig. 92).

Even outside the realm of his combines, in which the architectural fragments might appear to be as random as the other items included, Rauschenberg continued to suggest architectural themes in works in other mediums, including his transfer drawings, prints, and silkscreened paintings. Silkscreened depictions of the architecture of Manhattan, images of buildings in various stages of construction, populate multiple works of the early 1960s, including *Tideline* (1963, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art,

Humlebaek, Denmark), *Scanning* (1963, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), *Barge* (1962-63, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), and, among others, *Express* (1963, Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid). In *Estate* (1963, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Fig. 93), for example, Rauschenberg has paired silkscreened images of urban buildings with a view of the interior of the Sistine Chapel. Given that, as Paul Schimmel has argued, Rauschenberg's selection of objects and imagery was not completely random, that it relates to his autobiography and "evoke[s] the imprint of his body and the residue of a life lived," it is difficult to imagine that his inclusion of an image of the Sistine was a haphazard one.[467] That the Chapel offers one of the most iconic examples in western art of pictorial imagery that is dominated by architecture and architectural forms makes it intriguing to imagine if, with *Estate*, Rauschenberg was perhaps attempting to convey this aspect of the Chapel frescoes. While the scope of the current study does not allow for a broader analysis of Rauschenberg's oeuvre, however, it is worth noting that he continually alluded to architecture throughout the many stages of his long career, in an attempt to bridge the art object and the world outside the gallery. In the 1959 catalogue for the MoMA show, his signature statement that "painting relates to both art and life…(I try to act in that gap between the two)" declared that his artistic enterprise was inexorably linked to the real world and to the objects, some architectural, from that world.[468] As Brian O'Doherty observed, even the way we engage with a

[467] Paul Schimmel, "Autobiography and Self-Portraiture in Rauschenberg's Combines," *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, Paul Schimmel, ed. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005): 211.

[468] Robert Rauschenberg, Statement, in *Sixteen Americans*, Dorothy C. Miller, ed., 58.

Rauschenberg combine, in the sense that we "scan" it rather than "stare" at it, mirrors the world outside the gallery and how we quickly scan our surroundings.[469]

Before he included architectural fragments and images of buildings into his combines and silkscreened paintings, Rauschenberg was, like Rothko, highly sensitive to architectural concerns, including the space his paintings created. This is evident in his earliest works, including *The Man with Two Souls* (1950, Private Collection, Fig. 94), a simple construction of a glass rod and two wine bottles in a plaster he made as a response to one of Barnett Newman's earliest architecturally-related sculptures, *Here I* (1950, The Menil Collection, Houston), an over life-sized totemic work made up of two vertical wooden zip-shaped pieces standing inside a milk crate, painted and plastered. As Charles Stuckey has shown, the exhibition of the Rauschenberg piece at his first solo exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery in May 1951 came not long after the exhibition of the Newman sculpture a month previously. *Here I*, installed at the 1951, engages architecture through its column-like upright stance, among other factors, setting the tone for Newman's *Broken Obelisk* series and related architecturally-inspired sculptures.

In addition to borrowing from Newman's architectural works, Rauschenberg engaged architectural/spatial issues with his monochromes from the early 1950s, including his *White Painting (Three Panel)* (1951, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 95). As Sheldon Nodelman asserted, Rothko "almost certainly knew" Rauschenberg's monochromatic polyptychs from the early 1950s.[470] Moreover,

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[469] Brian O'Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth* (New York: Ridge Press, Random House, 1973): 197-98.

[470] Nodelman, 96. Nodelman discusses the Rothko Chapel paintings in relation to Rauschenberg's early black monochromes, namely in terms of color, construction, and scale.

Rauschenberg's presence in the New York School community throughout the 1950s would have been unavoidable.[471] Borrowing the large scale championed by the Abstract Expressionists, the work, at 72 by 108 inches, the work encourages viewer participation on a phenomenological level. Although all-white paintings had been done previously by Kazimir Malevich, as in his *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Fig. 96), Rauschenberg's seemingly blank canvases offered a critique of the artist-centric more self-absorbed paintings of his Abstract Expressionist contemporaries. Rather than being witnesses to the abstract expressions of Rothko's emotions, for example, we instead actively participate in the white paintings by conceptually completing them by imagining what we want to see on the surface of the canvases. Ridiculing, at least in part, what Rothko, Newman, and others thought were profound paintings prompted Newman's reaction, after he had first seen the white paintings: "What's the matter with him? Does he think it's easy?"[472] While *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 97) raised the question again of whether Rauschenberg's work signaled an end to Abstract Expressionism, an "erasure" of it, his highly spectatorial combines and later his performative pieces similarly activated the architecture/space in which we participate with such pieces. In this way, Rauschenberg, along with John Cage and Allan Kaprow, among others, provided a new dimension to the type of actions and dramas both artist and

[471] For more on Rauschenberg's relationship with the Abstract Expressionists in the early 1950s, see Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: A Portrait of Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Picador, 2005): 75-88.
[472] Barnett Newman, quoted in Tomkins, 77.

viewer can have by "getting inside the canvas," as Harold Rosenberg famously declared in his essay "The American Action Painters" (1952).[473]

As with Rauschenberg's foray into architectural and spatial issues, Rothko was, during the Seagram project, well aware of Johns's early work. Five months before Rothko signed the contract to make the Seagram murals, he attended Johns's first one-man show at Leo Castelli's Gallery, in January 1958.[474] It was at the gallery that Rothko remarked that "we worked for years to get rid of all of that."[475] The show was a resounding success, with Johns's *Target with Four Faces* (1955, The Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 99) having graced the cover of *Art News* before the show opened officially declared. Perhaps the most important early critical inquiry into the work was Leo

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[473] See Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *ARTnews* Vol. 51, No. 8 (Dec. 1952): 22-23, 48-49. For more on the Rauschenberg-Cage connection, see Ibid., 59-68. For Kaprow, who had attended one of the performances of John Cage's piece at Carnegie Hall, in 1952, the engagement of the space occupied by the spectator related to Jackson Pollock's performative style, a space Kaprow designed his Happenings to activate. Kaprow's pairing, in his book *Assemblage, Environment, and Happenings*, of a reproduction of one of Hans Namuth's famous photos from 1950, of Pollock in the act of painting, with a photograph from his own Happening *Yard* (1961, temporarily installed at the exhibition *Environments, Situations, Spaces* at the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, Fig. 98) both cemented Pollock's performative/spatial legacy, and positioned Kaprow as the inheritor of that tradition. See Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings* (New York: Abrams, 1966). William Kaizen, who has studied the importance of Kaprow's role as a proselytizer of the dissolution of painting into the space of architecture, has observed that Kaprow, "instead of engaging with untrammeled ego and pure expression, engaged with the problem of painting and space, and with objects in a society turning away from production and toward consumption." William Kaizen, "Framed Space: Allan Kaprow and the Spread of Painting," *Grey Room* No. 13 (Autumn 2003): 82. On Kaprow and performance, see Amelia Jones, *Body Art, Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1998); Paul Schimmel, "Leap Into the Void: Performance and the Object," in Paul Schimmel, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

[474] Rothko and Johns had multiple encounters. As Bernard Malamud recalled, both Rothko and Johns participated in the festivities in Washington for Lyndon Johnson's inaugural celebration in 1965, even riding a bus marked "Cultural Leaders" together. See Diane Waldman, *Mark Rothko, 1903-1970: A Retrospective*, 13.

[475] Ibid., 427.

Steinberg's from 1962, in which saw such paintings as having a "single image-meaning," suggesting that the painting and the subject the same, at once a depiction of a target and a target itself.[476] Along with the target, what garners most attention in the boxlike construction attached to the top edge of the canvas, within which four plasters casts of a face are set in four separate compartments. What cannot be overestimated is the importance of the small door that is hinged to the top of the wooden section. Although it is generally open when installed, so we can see the casts, its hinges allow it to function as a proper door, to alter how we view and interpret the work. "This aspect [of a functioning door] has been lost," Johns has explained, "now that the pictures have been become more museumized, but it was important at the time" he made it.[477] When the door is open, the niches and their contents are exposed, raising issues of public versus private, exposure, voyeurism, and spectacle, in addition to the concerns of representation and illusion central to Johns's work from that time. The magnitude of the impact of the door is even greater with *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955, Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 100), the first of several dozen target works. In this case, the nine small doors when opened underscore the paired themes of eroticism and display, disclosing the male genitalia and various other body parts. This was made abundantly clear in 1957 when Johns refused to allow the work to be exhibited at the Jewish Museum with the doors closed, something that the show's organizers felt downplayed the erotic component.[478] In

[476] Leo Steinberg, "Jasper Johns: The First Seven Years of His Art," *Metro* 4/5 (1962), reprinted in Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972): 51.
[477] Jasper Johns quoted in Roberta Bernstein, "An Interview with Jasper Johns," 1980, reprinted in Kirk Varnedoe, *Jasper Johns: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996): 202.
[478] Varnedoe, 273.

one of Johns's many visual puns, the meaning of the piece, including to question the role of the nude figure in postwar art, to play with the paradigms of illusion versus abstraction, to test the waters between something that is at once subjective and objective, all literally hinge on the small doors.

In addition to the multiple intersections between the early work of Rauschenberg and Johns and Duchamp, including found objects, puns, and the role of chance, architecture must also be considered. With his *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Fig. 33), Duchamp employs the architectural form of a window, and through its transparency, draws attention to the floors and walls surrounding it. As it is installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, its placement directly in front of a window that overlooks the museum's east terrace draws more attention to the dissolution of the architectural-sculptural divide. In *Étant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas)* (1944-66, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Fig. 101), to offer just one more example, entices viewers into an architectural space intentionally estranged from the adjacent gallery by an eerie dark lighting scheme, one that sets the mood for the piece. To create and conceal the piece, Duchamp transformed the architecture of his studio, anticipating the augmentation of the Philadelphia gallery to accommodate the work. Moreover, viewers participate with the work by gazing into two small holes in a readymade, exterior wooden door, onto a mixed-media combination of bricks, nails, stucco, and other architectural ingredients.

Architectural references/ingredients are also essential to other important works of vanguard art from New York in the late 1950s built with Duchamp's readymades in

mind. Nevelson's room-sized environment *Dawn's Wedding Feast* (1959, Fig. 102), made for the *Sixteen Americans* exhibition, combined issues of space and viewer participation with architectural forms. No longer extant in its original form, with its various parts currently housed in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Art Institute of Chicago, among other places, the piece was a massive assemblage of small fragments unified by a single color, white, in forms that Robert Rosenblum equated to "the architectural fantasies of Gaudi."[479] In relation to her use of white, Nevelson has referred to herself as the Architect of Light, describing how she "give[s] it [each work] architecture as solid as anything can be."[480] As with her all-black pieces, a series she began in the mid-1950s, the 1959 work is made in part from balusters, doorknobs, and other architectural ornaments, often dating to the turn-of-the-century, she found on the streets of New York. As Robert Hobbs argued, Nevelson did not see these fragments as broken, fragmented parts of something else, but instead as "alive and virginal…unified in a new composition."[481] In *Case with Five Balusters from Dawn's Wedding Feast* (1959, Walker Art Center, Fig. 166), originally part of the larger piece assembled at the 1959 exhibition, Nevelson devoted at least half of the composition to balusters and reinforced the heavy architectural emphasis by the title. The white-washing not only united the various forms, but also suggested a more traditional link between purity and nuptials. Like Rothko's ill-fated environment for the Four Seasons, another architectural aspect of Nevelson's piece was that it structured/created a space. As Virginia Tillyard found, in

[479] Robert Rosenblum, *Sixteen Americans*, Dorothy Miller, ed., 52.

[480] Louise Nevelson, *Dawns + Dusks: Taped Conversations with Diana MacKown* (New York: Scribner's, 1976): 128.

[481] Robert C. Hobbs, "Louise Nevelson: A Place That Is an Essence," Wo*man's Art Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1980): 42.

her review of a Nevelson exhibition at the Guggenheim, in 1986, her work "at once sets up organic relationships with the human figure and with its architectural environment."[482] That she hoped one collector would purchase the entire environment rather than breaking it up into disparate parts underscores just how important the architectural/spatial setting was for the piece. After the exhibition, Nevelson, in subsequent decades, experimented further with her architectural pieces, fashioning large-scale works including *Mrs. N's Palace* (1964-77, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fig. 104) that mimicked the proportions and scale of architectural spaces. As with *Sky Cathedral* (1954-55, Museum of Modern Art), one of her earliest forays into merging sculpture and architecture, creating what Hilton Kramer has referred to as "sculptural architecture," Nevelson provided clues in the title, "palace" and "cathedral," that make her index of architecture unambiguous.[483]

Along with Rauschenberg, Johns, and Nevelson, Ellsworth Kelly also exhibited some of his early work at the *Sixteen Americans* show. Rothko and Kelly met only once, when Dorothy Miller introduced the two at a celebration for Rothko's 1961 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. At a subsequent Sidney Janis Gallery exhibition of Kelly's work in New York, Rothko remarked, as George Segal recalled, that Kelly's work made him [Rothko] "feel like a damned expressionist."[484] After his return to New York, in 1954, Kelly was brought into closer contact with Rothko's work, even

[482] Virginia Tillyard, "Louise Nevelson. New York, Guggenheim Museum," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 128, No. 1004 (Nov. 1986): 853.
[483] See Hilton Kramer, "The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson," *Arts*, Vol. 32 (June 1958): 26-29.
[484] Briony Fer, "Rothko and Repitition," *Seeing Rothko*, Glenn Phillips and Thomas Crow, eds. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Inst., 2005): 160.

remarking that he "admire[d] Rothko's brushwork."[485] As with nearly all of the artists discussed in this chapter, however, Rothko's often bristly responses to the work of the younger artists does not change the fact that they all shared an interest in incorporating architectural themes, motifs, and forms in their work. Much of Kelly's flattened canvases from the late 1950s are based shapes he derived and often literally transcribed from architecture, observing that "everywhere I looked, everything I saw became something to be made, and it had to be exactly as it was."[486] In *Awnings, Avenue Matignon* (1950, Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 105), an early example of his appropriation of architectural forms, Kelly has distilled the forms of seven awnings into simple blocks of blue and white color. Through its reference to a specific architectural source, Kelly's title provides the essential clue that we are not faced with what appears superficially to be a non-objective canvas, but are instead looking at Kelly's manipulation of a proper place. In a September 1950 letter to John Cage, he articulated the relationship of architecture to his paintings, expressing that he was "not interested in painting as it has been accepted for so long—to hang on the walls of houses as pictures. To Hell with pictures—they should *be* the wall—even better—on the outside wall—of large buildings."[487] Two years later, in a letter to Hilla Rebay, then director of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting in New York, Kelly reiterated that "the future art must go to the wall itself. And this is what

[485] Kelly interview by Mark Rosenthal, Sept. 5, 1997, in Mark Rothko, Jeffrey Weiss, ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1998): 356.

[486] Ellsworth Kelly, "Notes from 1969," in Ellsworth Kelly: Paintings and Sculptures, 1963-1979, Barbara Rose, ed. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1980): 30.

[487] Kelly to John Cage, excerpts reprinted in *Ellsworth Kelly: The Years in France, 1948-1954*, Yves Alain Bois, ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1992): 187-88.

I have been trying to do in my work."[488] As a comparison between his more recent *Lake II* (2002, Beyeler Collection, Basel, Fig. 106) and Paul Cézanne's *The Gulf of Marseilles Seen from L'Estaque* (ca. 1885, The Art Institute of Chicago, Fig. 107) indicates, Kelly continues to derive his abstract shapes, color, and forms from proper places, subjects, and, in this case, works of art.

As Michael Plante has argued, Kelly's interest in architectural and spatial concerns has been "concealed" in/by American museums, where his "multiple-panel paintings that are responsive to their interior setting" are generally installed in disproportionally small galleries that "downplay their interaction with the architecture of the room."[489] Arguing that "Kelly's work in general has been misread by American critics, who for too long have overlooked the importance of his Paris years," Plante related Kelly's early work to the tradition of French mural painting after the Second World War, one reinvigorated by the need to repair buildings after the war, to use architectural paintings to promote political agendas, and to champion a more collective artform rather than an highly individualized one.[490] As Jeanne Cassou, director of the Musée National d'Art Modern in Paris while Kelly was in Paris in the early 1950s, declared, "after a period of exasperating individualism, there should be a period of working toward some collective action," one that involves "the wall, the first element of the house and therefore a sign of the human community," a part of architecture that "forces the painter, like the architect, to move beyond what is closed and schematic and

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[488] Kelly to Hill Rebay, Nov. 29, 1952, Hilla Rebay archives, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

[489] Michael Plante, "'Things to Cover Walls': Ellsworth Kelly's Paris Paintings and the Tradition of Mural Decoration," *American Art*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 1995): 37.

[490] Ibid., 37.

to move toward what is the essential in their art."[491] While in France, from 1948-54, Kelly made pilgrimages out of Paris to visit architectural sites, including Romanesque churches and Unité d'Habitation, a modernist residential/apartment building Le Corbusier designed in Marseilles. Moreover, he even pitched an idea for a mural to Marcel Breuer, who rejected the proposal.[492]

Frank Stella, who once described Kelly as "the world's greatest living abstract painter," similarly conceived of flat abstract forms that related to architecture, at the same moment Rothko made the Seagram paintings.[493] Despite a fundamental difference between the Rothko and Stella as William Rubin explained, that Rothko "eliminated from the picture…references to the things of this world," whereas Stella "has aimed lower, but wider," the two painters, at the same time, labored at expanding the limitations of painting from being merely a pictorial enterprise to being a spatial one.[494] Stella's *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor* (1959, Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 108), which was included along with three other "black paintings" exhibited in *Sixteen Americans*, declared a connection and perhaps an homage to the aspects of a signature Rothko he admired most, namely "Rothko's softness, bulkiness, the one image – the presence and power of the one thing."[495] "I was very taken with Abstract Expressionism…I had always liked house painting anyway…" Stella told Alan Solomon in 1966, having

[491] Jean Cassou, *Situation de l'art modern* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1950): 140-141.
[492] Plante, 43.
[493] Frank Stella, "Salute," in Frank Stella and Franz-Joachim Verspoh, *The Writings of Frank Stella. Die Schriften Frank Stella* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2001): 247.
[494] William Rubin, *Frank Stella, 1970-1987* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1987): 7.
[495] Frank Stella, in William Rubin, *Frank Stella* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970): 10.

worked as a house painter in 1958, "I still feel rooted in Abstract Expressionism…as I probably always will be."[496]

While, as Carl André explained in a short statement printed in the catalogue for *Sixteen Americans*, that Stella's art "excludes the unnecessary," touting Stella's interest in "the necessities of painting," a number of the works he made immediately after graduating Princeton and moving to New York, in mid-1958, reference architecture directly.[497] In his pre-black paintings of 1958, he referred to buildings and places in the city through his titles, including *Astoria*, *Coney Island*, *East Broadway (Door)*, *Great Jones Street*, and *West Broadway*. By the end of the year and into 1959, with his first black paintings, he continued to reference architecture and places, including *Morro Castle*, *Reichstag*, *Arundel Castle*, *Bethlehem's Hospital*, *Clinton Plaza*, and *Tomlinson Court Park*.[498] As Robert Rosenblum illustrated, Stella, at that phase of his career, also referenced "landmarks of American architecture," including the mausoleum in Graceland Cemetery in Chicago (1890) designed by Louis Sullivan, in *Getty Tomb* (1959), and Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings for the campus of Florida Southern College in Lakeland, in Stella's *Dade City*, *Plant City*, and *Tampa*, all from 1963.[499] Stella's emphasis on the object, following his famous declaration, in 1964, that "what you see is what you see," might suggest that his allusions to architecture were contradictory to how Stella saw these

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[496] Frank Stella, in Frank Stella and Alan Solomon, "Frank Stella: Portions of an Interview," *Members Newsletter*, No. 8 (Spring 1970): 2.

[497] Carl André, in *Sixteen Americans*, Dorothy Miller, ed., 76.

[498] For the importance of 1958 as a pivotal year for Stella's work, see Harry Cooper and Megan R. Luke, *Frank Stella 1958* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2006).

[499] Robert Rosenblum, Introduction to Lawrence Rubin, *Frank Stella Paintings 1958 to 1965* (New York: Stewart, Tabori, & Chang, 1986): 18-19. Rosenblum followed Joseph Masheck in linking Stella to Wright. See Masheck, "Frank Stella at Kasmin," *Studio International* (Feb. 20, 1969).

paintings as functioning.[500] As the architectural critic Paul Goldberger has recently shown, in his catalogue essay for the *Frank Stella: Painting Into Architecture* exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum in 2007, however, Stella was indifferent to the functionality of architecture.[501]

Like Rothko, Stella's writings suggest his interest in the history of western art more broadly, and how prior artists employed hybrid pictorial-architectural concerns/ambitions. One of the themes he addressed in a series of lectures he delivered as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor at Harvard University during his tenure there, in 1983-84, was the relationship between painting and architecture in cinquecento art. He described how Italian Renaissance artists "became critical of his relationship to the surfaces of architecture and sought to modify it…creating a painted space that interacted in some meaningful, though often competitive, way with the structure…[with] Leonardo…signaling the beginning of painting's attempt to free itself from architecture."[502] Moreover, he isolated what "two great failures [that] signal the break between painting and architecture – Leonardo's *Last Supper* and Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*," arguing that Michelangelo's "florid aggressiveness" attacks prior art, making it "something one could walk through" in an architectural sense rather than "painting one could look at."[503] He provided similar assessments of Caravaggio's prioritization of the

[500] Frank Stella, from an interview by Bruce Glaser with Stella and Donald Judd, broadcast by WBAI-FM, New York, Feb. 1964, under the title "New Nihilism or New Art?," published as "Questions to Stella and Judd," Lucy R. Lippard, *Art News* (Sept. 1966): 58-59.

[501] See Paul Goldberger, *Painting into Architecture* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2007).

[502] Frank Stella, "Caravaggio," from "*Working Space,* The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University," in Frank Stella and Franz-Joachim Verspoh, 15.

[503] Ibid., 21.

spaces his cycles created, including those for the Contarelli Chapel and for the Church of San Luigi dei Francesi, both in Rome, suggesting that the cycles usurp the architecture that houses them by creating their own quasi-architectural environments.

The presence of architectural themes and motifs in Stella's work is so strong that he recently playfully ridiculed the notion of differentiating architecture from other mediums. "Everybody uses plumbing as the definition. If it has plumbing, then it's architecture," he declared.[504] In the same interview, he expounded on architecture that closely engages with the pictorial. In his view, he included Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut, Philip Johnson's Glass House, Mies's Barcelona Pavilion, and Frank Gehry's InterActive Corporation's new Manhattan headquarters, as "pictorial architecture," for the reason that all exploit pictorial, sculptural, and traditional architectural forms. "The world is so into categories that nobody wants to say," Stella noted, "'oh, he paints *and* he makes architecture.' But, Le Corbusier did both, and he was pretty good at them."[505]

Many of the architectural works just described, including Rauschenberg's monochromes, Kelly's abstractions, Stella's black paintings, and even Rothko's geometric compositions, have all generally been credited as having laid part of the foundation for the first official Minimalist works in the early 1960s. Thus, architectural themes, motifs, and references played a vital role in two of the most important styles that gained prominence ca. 1958-1965, or, the years Rothko worked on his three mural projects. With this in mind, fragments of the role architecture played in the work of the primary Minimalists from that point, namely Donald Judd, Tony Smith, Sol LeWitt, and

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[504] Frank Stella, quoted in "The ArchRecord Interview," *Architectural Record*, published online June 2007.

[505] Ibid.

Carl André, will follow. As Briony Fer has shown, Rothko's comment that "if a thing is worth doing once, it is worth doing over and over again" suggests an intriguing parallel between the repetitiveness of Rothko's abstractions and the repetition central to a good deal of Minimalist work, in line with Carl André's observation that "if a thing is worth doing once, it is worth doing again" and Donald Judd's phrase "one thing after another."[506]

Judd is "not an architect in the conventional sense" according to Peter Noever, who invited him to create the art-architectural work *Stage Set* for the 1991 exhibition *Donald Judd: Architektur* at the MAK Exhibition Hall in Vienna (see Fig. 109), "but his work is committed to architecture…what he produces in architecture."[507] In her catalogue essay for the show, Brigitte Huck agreed, noting that "Judd has been concerned with architecture for over twenty years," as of the early 1990s, "yet both this fact and the work resulting from it are known to very few."[508] Judd's architectural proclivity, or "the relationship between object and architecture…between object and space," as Huck reaffirmed, "began with his sculptural works."[509] In Judd's essay for the catalogue, he praises the Seagram Building as among "the few good buildings [that]…represent advance and enlightenment in as simple a way as any survey tells you the first buildings of the Renaissance did, contrasting architecture of this high caliber to the "unnecessary skyscrapers" that in his view debase architecture by ignoring or improperly dealing with

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[506] For Rothko's quote, see Breslin, 707. See also Briony Fer, "Rothko and Repetition," in *Seeing Rothko*, 162. See also Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2004).
[507] Peter Noever, "Architecture within Architecture," *Donald Judd: Architecture, Archiecktur*, Herausgegeben von Peter Noever, ed. (Ostfildern-Ruit : Hatje Can, 2003): 7.
[508] Brigitte Huck, "Donald Judd: Architect," in Ibid., 35.
[509] Ibid., 35.

historical architectural precedents.[510] More recently, in 2007, Peter Flückiger continued the trend to draw more attention to Judd's architectural work and writing, reaffirming that few people "are aware of his writing on architecture and how much architectural work he panned and realized during his lifetime."[511] Judd's sensitivity to architectural concerns can be found throughout the art and architectural criticism he wrote several decades previously, including a 1963 passage about Rothko. This is perhaps why, on the subject of Rothko's 1961 MoMA retrospective, Judd noted that Rothko's paintings "showed that they were improving," an uncommon stance that suggested that the most recent work in the show, the Seagram murals, were more advanced than what Rothko painted until that time. Judd consistently praised Rothko, noting once that "Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still made their work a reality, not a picture of it."[512]

Possibly the most architectural of the Minimalists, and the earliest of the group to delve into architectural themes, Tony Smith's first metal sculpture *The Black Box* (1962-1967, National Gallery of Canada, Fig. 110) established the pattern of using streamlined, mass-producible forms that harkened back to the manufacturing family into which he was born in addition to streamlined processes galvanized in postwar architecture. In his massive works, including the painted aluminum *Smoke* (1967, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Fig. 111), measuring twenty four by forty seven by thirty three feet, Smith mimicked architectural spaces. In scale and form, *Smoke* and related works echo Mark di Suvero's contemporary monumentally-scaled sculptures, the architectural

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[510] Donald Judd, "Art and Architecture, in Ibid., 28.

[511] Peter Flückiger, Donald Judd: Architecture in Marfa, Texas (Basel and Boston: Birkhäuser, 2007): 25.

[512] Donald Judd, "Abstract Expressionism," *Complete Writings: 1975-1986* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1987): 41.

methods di Suvero used to make them, including his use of cranes, and, as Barbara Rose has argued, his "architectural use of linear elements to span and extend into space, which was embraced, penetrated, or otherwise activated by di Suvero's outward angled beams."[513] For Smith, his architectural bent began when he studied architecture at the New Bauhaus in Chicago, under László Moholy-Nagy, later worked, from 1938-40, for Frank Lloyd Wright as an office clerk, and in his independent architectural practice designed more than twenty four private homes and spaces. After he relinquished his architectural work to become a sculptor, in 1961, Smith immediately incorporated techniques and styles he had worked with as an architect into his sculptures.

As with Smith's architecturally-themed work, Sol LeWitt's early box-like constructions including *Floor Structure* (1963, Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 112) emphasized the serial and modular qualities of architecture. Begun not long after he abandoned painting, in 1962, such works reflected LeWitt's prior work in I. M. Pei's office, from 1955-56. LeWitt's smaller scale works from that time, such as *Serial Project, I (ABCD)* (1966, Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 113) more closely borrowed, in form, scale, and the use of the grid, architectural models with which he was quite familiar. From there, LeWitt progressed to engage architectural spaces more directly, making his first of more than 1,200 wall drawings in 1968. As John Carlin found in his review of an exhibition of LeWitt's drawings, LeWitt's work "present[s] an apparent contradiction of a seemingly meaningless visual structure married to an implicitly complex conceptual apparatus which remained virtual through the silence of the art work

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[513] Barbara Rose, "On Mark di Suvero: Sculpture Outside Walls," *Art Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter, 1975-1976): 121.

itself."[514] However, "his art, like his writing," as Robert Rosenblum observed, "has always been in close touch with the abstract components of architecture."[515]

While many additional architecturally-minded Minimalist pieces can be brought into the discussion, including, in their obvious references to architecture, Dan Flavin's *monument 1 for V. Tatlin* (1964, Museum of Modern Art, Fig. 114), the first of thirty-nine monuments made between 1964 and 1990 to the Russian Constructivist and Robert Morris's *Untitled (Column)* (1961, destroyed), to say nothing of the many non-Minimalist architecturally-bound works of the mid-1960s, one final artist warrants a brief mention. In *Equivalent VIII* (1966, Tate Gallery, Fig. 115), Carl André used unpretentious, rough building bricks inspired by the simplified forms of Stonehenge, which had a major impact on him when he visited it in 1954. The precise patterning and geometric emphasis of his work from that time recalled his connection to Stella, with whom he shared a studio during his fruitful earliest period, in 1958-59. The symmetry, geometry, and architectural references of the black paintings significantly influenced André's work, as did Constantin Brâncuşi's totemic forms, inspired by the jambs of Romanian folk architecture. By the mid-1960s, his use of steel and other industrial materials not only referenced the railroad tracks he grew accustomed to through his work as a train brakerman and conductor in the early 1960s, but also more closely appropriated the function of architecture absent from Stella's paintings. In *144 Aluminum Squares* (1967, Norton Simon Museum) and related sculptures, which functioned not unlike the

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[514] John Carlin, "Sol LeWitt Wall Drawings, 1968-1981," *Art Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 62.

[515] Robert Rosenblum, "Notes on Sol LeWitt," *On Modern American Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999): 255.

floor on which they rested, encouraging us to walk on them as we would the floor, downplaying the sacrosanct role of the art object.

Examining the architectural concerns of the small sampling of pieces just described obviously does not provide a completed narrative for each work. However, by engaging with architecture in his own way, Rothko, first with the Seagram project, and later with the Harvard and Houston commissions, participated in a discourse that had a major impact on vanguard of the late 1950s and the first half of the 1960s. While it is unclear and probably unlikely that he did so in order to keep pace with his younger contemporaries, considering his enduring interest in architecture and architectural painting, he nevertheless continued to make inventive work despite the fact that the style he helped to establish inched closer toward being passé.

CHAPTER 7:
CONCLUSION

In May 16, 1959, less than a year after the contract between Rothko and the Seagram corporation was finalized, on June 25, 1958, he legally changed his name from Marcus Rothkowitz to Mark Rothko as he was obtaining a passport for his trip to Europe. While the change was more practical than poetic, it points toward a paradigmatic shift for him: the culmination in the Seagram work of a career-spanning interest in architecture. To the list of the many contradictions that defined Rothko and his work, including Marcus Rothkowitz/Mark Rothko, Latvian/American, timeless/modern, collective/personal, philosopher/painter, should thus be added the pictorial/architectural binary.

Like Carl Jung, with whose writings Rothko was familiar, Rothko looked to architecture and architectural themes to express and convey emotions.[516] Jung constructed his famous tower in Bollingen, Switzerland at the edge of Lake Zurich to

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[516] Although Dore Ashton remembered that Rothko "never mentioned…the teachings of Carl Jung," Irving Sandler recalled that artist-writer John Graham not only "stressed the importance of" automatic writing to Rothko and others, but introduced Jungian concepts to Rothko, through his book, *System and Dialectics of Art* (1937). Dore Ashton, "Rothko's Frame of Mind," *Seeing Rothko*, 17, and Irving Sandler, Tr*iumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970): 23. See John Graham, *System and Dialectics of Art* (1937) reprinted as Marcia Epstein Allentuck, *John Graham's System and Dialectics of Art*, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971). According to the Graham specialist Eila Kokkinen, Rothko had given some attention to Graham's book shortly after it was published. Chave, 206, note 5. Jungian concepts concerning interconnectedness in particular, as evidenced by the collective unconscious, the archetype, and synchronicity, among others, were, of course, ideally suited for Rothko's artistic sensibilities throughout his career, in the sense that he sought, with his signature painting in particular, to transcend the object in order to connect people and experiences. For a recent investigation on the connections between painting, architecture, and psychology, see Susan Bernstein, *Housing Problems: Writing and Architecture in Goethe, Walpole, Freud, and Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008).

examine in architectural forms how interior spaces function metaphorically as mirrors of the human psyche.[517] Following Jung, Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, first published in 1958 during the Seagram project, described how we are intimately connected to the architectural spaces we occupy. The space and architecture of the home we occupy shapes both how we behave in it and our moods/experiences as we perceive

[517] As Mezei and Briganti have also shown, Jung "conceptualized domestic structures, both architectural and literary, as possible fruitful replications or images of mental structures, offering grounds, as Bachelard wrote, for 'taking the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul." Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti, "Reading the House: A Literary Perspective," 841. Jung's famous Tower (Fig. 6), or what he called "a kind of monument out of stone," offers the most iconic example of his interest in architecture. See Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard Winston, Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy Series (London: Flamingo, 1971): 253. For more on Jung's tower (in relation to similarly themed towers, by William Butler Yeats, Robinson Jeffers, and Rainer Maria Rilke), see Theodore Ziolkowski, *The View from the Tower: Origins of an Antimodernist Image* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998). Jung began working on the tower in 1923, and it thereafter became an architectural project that for him represented a process of self-discovery, of returning to his childhood and to a moment when he constructed such structures. Recalling his early experiences with architecture, Jung, in his autobiography, describes being "fond of playing with bricks," and that he "built towers," which he then "rapturously destroyed by an 'earthquake.'" Carl Jung, in Ibid., 33. Having worked on the tower intermittently throughout his life, adding what he called a "spiritual tower" (1931), a courtyard and loggia (1935), and an upper room he identified as his "ego-personality" (1955), Jung employed architecture to provide himself with, as Vaughan Hart has observed, "a place for meditation." Vaughan Hart, "Carl Jung's Alchemical Tower at Bollingen," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* No. 25 (Spring 1994): 37. See also Aniela Jaffe, *C. G. Jung: Word and Image*, ed., Bollingen series (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979): 188-205; and Clare Cooper, "The House as Symbol of the Self," in Charles Burnette, Jon Lang, Walter Moleski, eds., *Designing for Human Behavior: Architecture and the Behavioral Sciences* (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson, & Ross, 1974): 130-146. The tower's interior spaces thus become metaphors for a handful of archetypes Jung variously explored throughout his career, those he would ultimately codify in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1934-1955). Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 1): Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull, eds. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969). See also Joseph Campbell, *The Portable Jung*, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1971): 59-60.

it.[518] Rothko constructed his Seagram cycle for some of the same reasons. When he did so, he re-connected to the architectural concerns that informed his earliest paintings. By making a mid-twentieth century gesamtkunstwerk, one that merged painting and architecture, Rothko participated in a wave of renewed interest in architecture that preoccupied some of the most influential artists that emerged in the wake of Abstract Expressionism.[519] While Rauschenberg, Johns, and the others mentioned embraced architecture for various reasons, Rothko did so hoping to trigger tragic responses in his viewers, something he had been attempting to do as early as ca. 1940. His penchant for tragedy was just as strong during and after the project as it was previously. In 1960, just after he abandoned the Seagram project, he remarked:

> As I have grown older, Shakespeare has become closer to me than Aeschylus, who meant so much to me in my youth. Shakespeare's tragic concept embodies for me the full range of life from which the artist draws all his tragic materials, including irony; irony becomes a weapon against fate.[520]

Rothko's connection to architecture is just one piece of a much larger puzzle in modernist and post-modernist art. Among the many artists included in this macro spectrum is Matisse, the artist Rothko perhaps admired most. As John Elderfield has recently argued, examining the Rothko-Matisse-architecture triumvirate is especially

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[518] See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

[519] Rothko adored the work of Richard Wagner. As Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty have found, Frederick Nietsche's ideas concerning music—that tragedy "arose out of the tragic chorus," or that the "Dionysiac musician…is nothing but original pain and reverberation of the image"—likely reinforced his passion for Wagner. Frederick Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, New York, 1956): 47, 39. Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko's Dark Paintings: Tragedy and Void," *Mark Rothko*, Jeffrey Weiss, ed., 266-267.

[520] Mark Rothko, in a conversation with Peter Selz in 1960, in *Mark Rothko* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York): 12.

fruitful, since it helps to explain, in Matissean terms, the spectatorial relationships we tend to have with Rothko's abstractions.[521] Borrowing a phrase from the Contemporary Freudian Christopher Bollas, Elderfield reminds us that we "surrender" to a medium that "alters the self," making a Rothko abstraction a "transformational object."[522] Twelve years after Rothko's death, a groundbreaking study in a 1982 edition of the architectural journal *Perspecta*, suggested that architectural concerns were important for many artists working in various mediums. The essay explored the intersections between art and architecture, investigating Siah Armajani, Niki Logis, Nathaniel Lieberman, Christopher Sproat, Robert Guillot, Richard Haas, and Vito Acconci.[523] A sequence of interviews with these artists revealed that issues of an architectural nature, including space and architectural imagery, were more pressing than the authors had anticipated, leading to the conclusion that such artists were no longer "content merely to embellish walls and

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[521] Elderfield recalls Henri Matisse's definition of architectural painting. Such an experience is suggested both by the vertical/human proportions of such works and also by the logistical-spatial reality that there is only enough room in front of a signature Rothko for one viewer at a time. Matisse, in his correspondence with the Russian art critic Alexsandr Romm, letters published in 1947 and written in relation to his mural *The Dance* (1932-33, The Barnes Foundation), distinguished between "architectural paintings" and "pictures." The former are inexorably linked to the wall, and are meant to be understood within the visual scope of the architecture. They derive their meaning, at least in part, from that connection. Such paintings are not figurative, since a figure consumes the viewer's attention, thereby making a viewer less aware of the architecture adjacent to the work or the space within which it is installed. With a non-figurative/architectural work, the viewer, as the only "figure," has more control over where to look in the absence of a painted figure commanding our attention, thereby more strongly participating with the architectural space of the gallery. Rothko was likely aware of this distinction. As Elderfield asserted, Rothko's "conception of his paintings' efficacy and display does seem to have been informed by" the Matisse-Romm letters. John Elderfield," Transformations," *Seeing Rothko*, 105.[521]

[522] Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object* (London: Free Association Books, 1987): note 46, p 14; cited in Elderfield, "Transformations," 113.

[523] Siah Armajani, Niki Logis, Nathaniel Lieberman, Christopher Sproat, Robert Guillot, Richard Haas, and Vito Acconci, "The Exuviae of Visions: Architecture as a Subject for Art," *Perspecta* Vol. 18 (1982): 66-107.

space…but envision[ed] their role as active participants in the creation of the environment."[524] As Logis observed, "architecture encloses space."[525] And, as Scott Burton described his own work as a mediation between art and architecture, as "a kind of resolution of the modern hostility between art and architecture."[526] Further research aimed at digging deeper into the role of architecture in vanguard art since 1950 will draw even more attention to the fact that Rothko's interest in architecture was anything but idiosyncratic. With this in mind, it is not surprising that of all of the phases of Rothko's career that have the potential for engaging dramatic literature, John Logan, in his recent Tony-award-winning play *Red*, looked to the Seagram project as a primary subject and backdrop.

The changes Rothko made to his style during the Seagram project, including his embrace of the colossal scale, his darkening palette, and his use of shapes derived from architecture, are thus best understood not in regard to logistical concerns. How to cover five-hundred-twenty square feet of space in the Grill Room with large murals seems to have been relatively insignificant for Rothko. Instead, such changes reflected Rothko's intense negotiation of architecture. As John Fischer surmised, "this is pure speculation, but I suspect Rothko's death [eleven years after he abandoned the project] may have been related to the fact that artists these days are not encouraged to paint temples."[527]

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[524] Ibid., 67.
[525] Ibid., 75.
[526] Scott Burton, "[Essay by Scott Burton]," *Design Quarterly* No. 122, Site: The Meaning of Place in Art and Architecture (1983): 10.
[527] John Fischer, in Wick, 207.

Fig. 1: Mark Rothko, *Untitled {Black on Maroon} [Seagram Mural Sketch]*, 1958
Oil on canvas, 90 x 81 ½ inches
Tate Gallery

Fig. 2: Mark Rothko, *Sketch for "Mural No. 6" (Two Openings in Black Over Wine) {Black on Maroon} [Seagram Mural Sketch]*, 1958
Oil on canvas, 105 x 152 inches
Tate Gallery

Fig. 3: Mark Rothko, *Untitled {Sketch for Mural/Black on Maroon} [Seagram Mural Sketch]*, 1958
Oil on canvas, 105 x 95 inches
Tate Gallery

Fig. 4: Mark Rothko, *Untitled {Black on Maroon} [Seagram Mural Sketch]*, 1959
Oil on canvas, 105 x 90 inches
Tate Gallery

Fig. 5: Mark Rothko, *Mural, Section 2 {Red on Maroon} [Seagram Mural]*, 1959
Oil on canvas, 105 x 180 inches
Tate Gallery

Fig. 6: Mark Rothko, *Mural, Section 3 {Black on Maroon} [Seagram Mural]*, 1959
Oil on canvas, 105 x 180 inches
Tate Gallery

Fig. 7: Mark Rothko, *Mural, Section 4 {Red on Maroon} [Seagram Mural]*, 1959
Oil on canvas, 105 x 94 inches
Tate Gallery

Fig. 8: Mark Rothko, *Mural, Section 5 {Red on Maroon} [Seagram Mural]*, 1959
Oil on canvas, 72 x 180
Tate Gallery

Fig. 9: Mark Rothko, *Mural, Section 7 {Red on Maroon} [Seagram Mural]*, 1959
Oil on canvas, 72 x 180 inches
Tate Gallery

Fig, 10: Ezra Stoller, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, *Mies van der Rohe (with Philip Johnson and Kahn and Jacobs), Seagram Building...*, 1958
Gelatin silver print, 20 in. x 16 inches
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

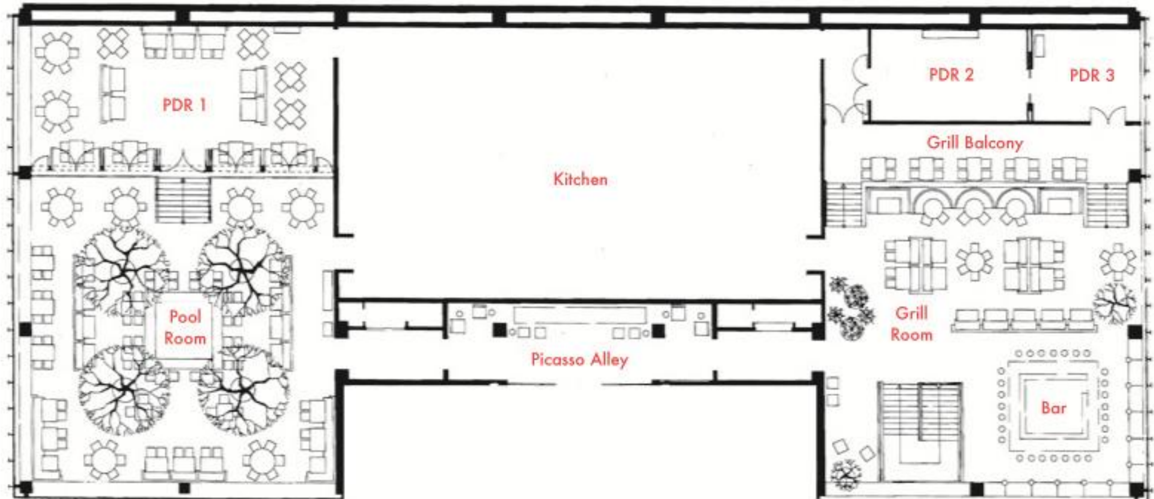

Fig. 11: Current Plan, Four Seasons Restaurant, Seagram Building, New York. What was called the Grill Room in 1958 is at the top-left, in what is now called the "Pool Room Terrace" or PDR 1 (Private Dining Room 1)

Fig. 12: (above) North wall facing 53rd Street and west/entrance wall (adjacent to Pool Room); (below) East and south walls, Four Seasons Restaurant, Seagram Building, New York

Fig. 13: The Rothko Room, Tate Modern

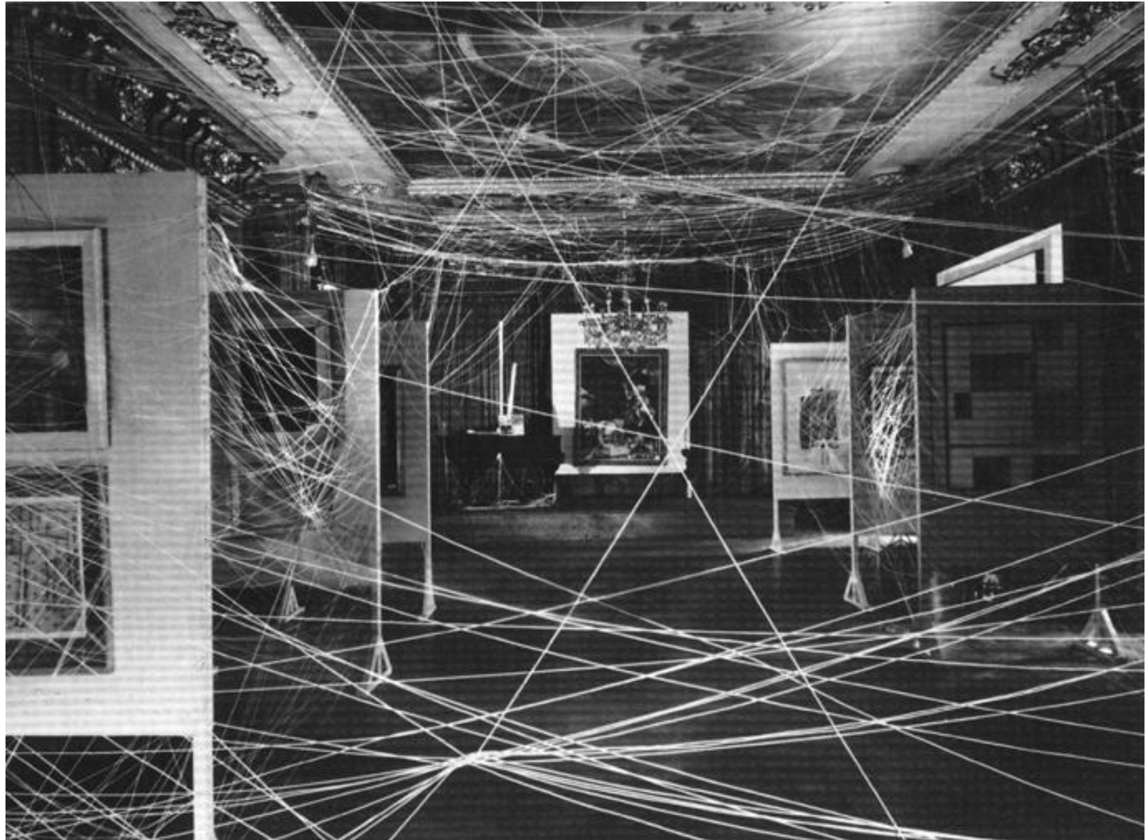

Fig. 14: Marcel Duchamp, *Mile of String*, 1942, temporarily installed on the second floor of the former Whitelaw Reid Mansion, New York, *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition

Fig. 15: Jackson Pollock, *Mural*, 1943
Oil on canvas, 97 1/4 x 238 inches
University of Iowa Museum of Art

Fig. 16: Rothko Room, Phillips Collection, Washington

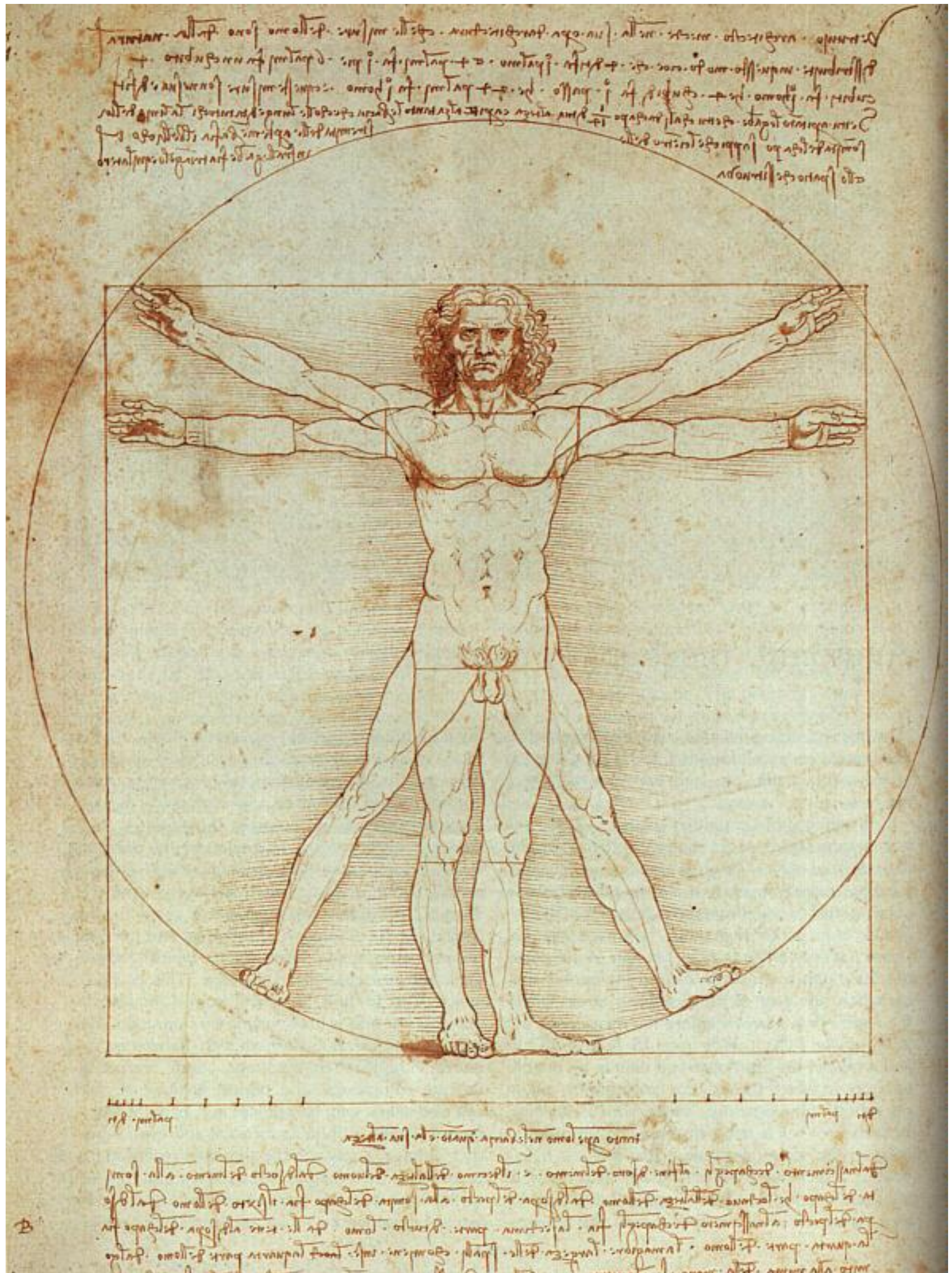

Fig. 17: Leonardo da Vinci, “Vitruvian Man” (*The Ideal Proportions of the Human Figure*, ca. 1492
Pen and ink with wash over metalpoint on paper, 13.5 x 10 inches
Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, Italy

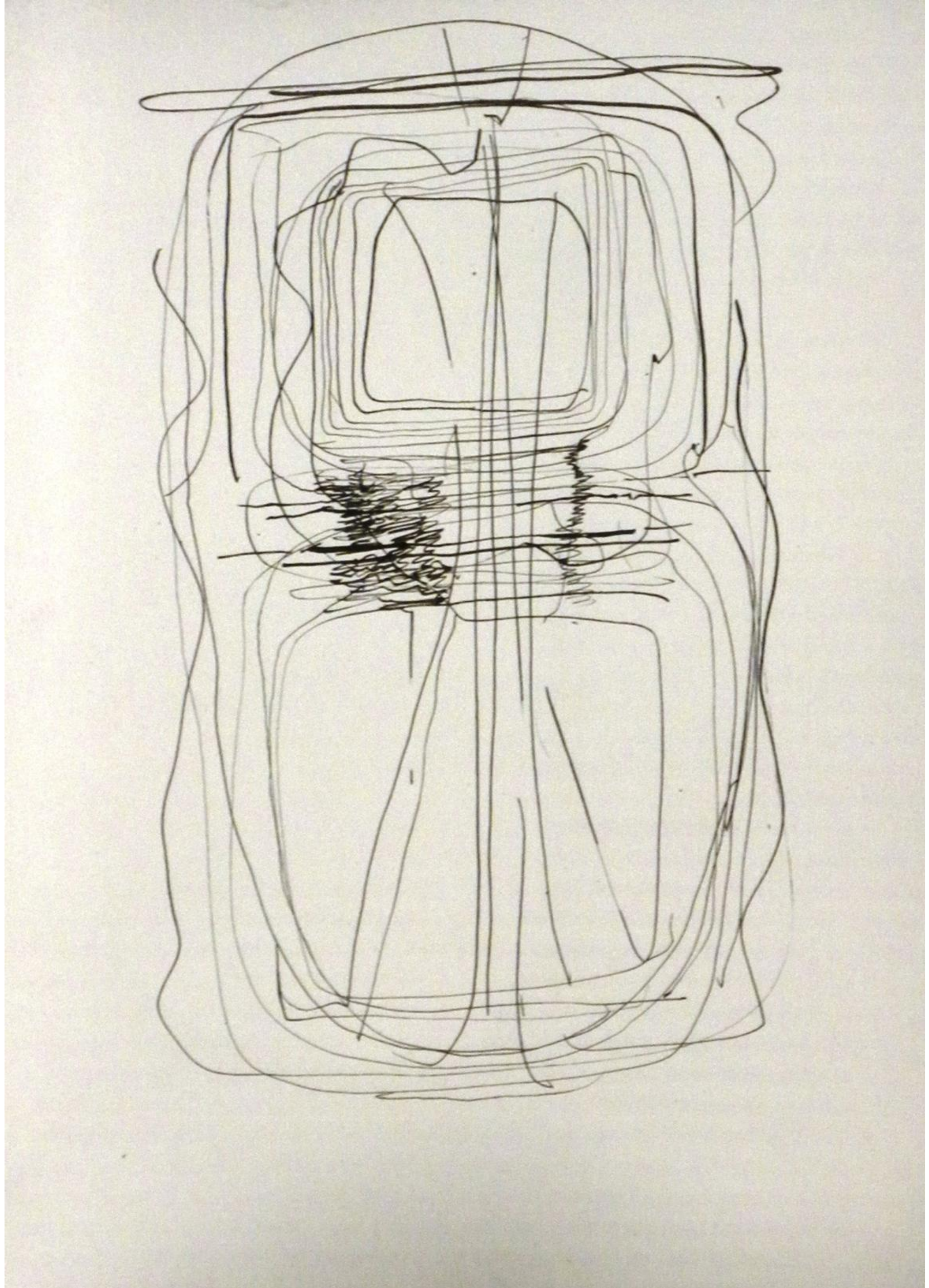

Fig. 18: Mark Rothko, pen drawing in *Golde's Composition Sketchbook*, 1947-49

Fig. 19: Mark Rothko, *Untitled [Nude]*, 1937/1938, cat. 117
Oil on canvas, 23 7/8 x 18 1/8 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 20: Section of frieze *Dionysiac Mystery Cult*, from Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Wall painting, ca. 50 BCE
National Museum, Naples

Fig. 21: Mark Rothko, *No. 7/No. 11 {Untitled}*, 1949
Oil on canvas, 68 1/8 x 43 ¼ inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 22: Fresco wall paintings in a *cubiculum* (bedroom) from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, ca. 40–30 BCE
Plaster
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 23: Detail, Fresco wall paintings in a *cubiculum* (bedroom) from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, ca. 40–30 BCE
Plaster
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 24: Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911
Oil on canvas, 71 1/4 x 7'2 ¼ inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

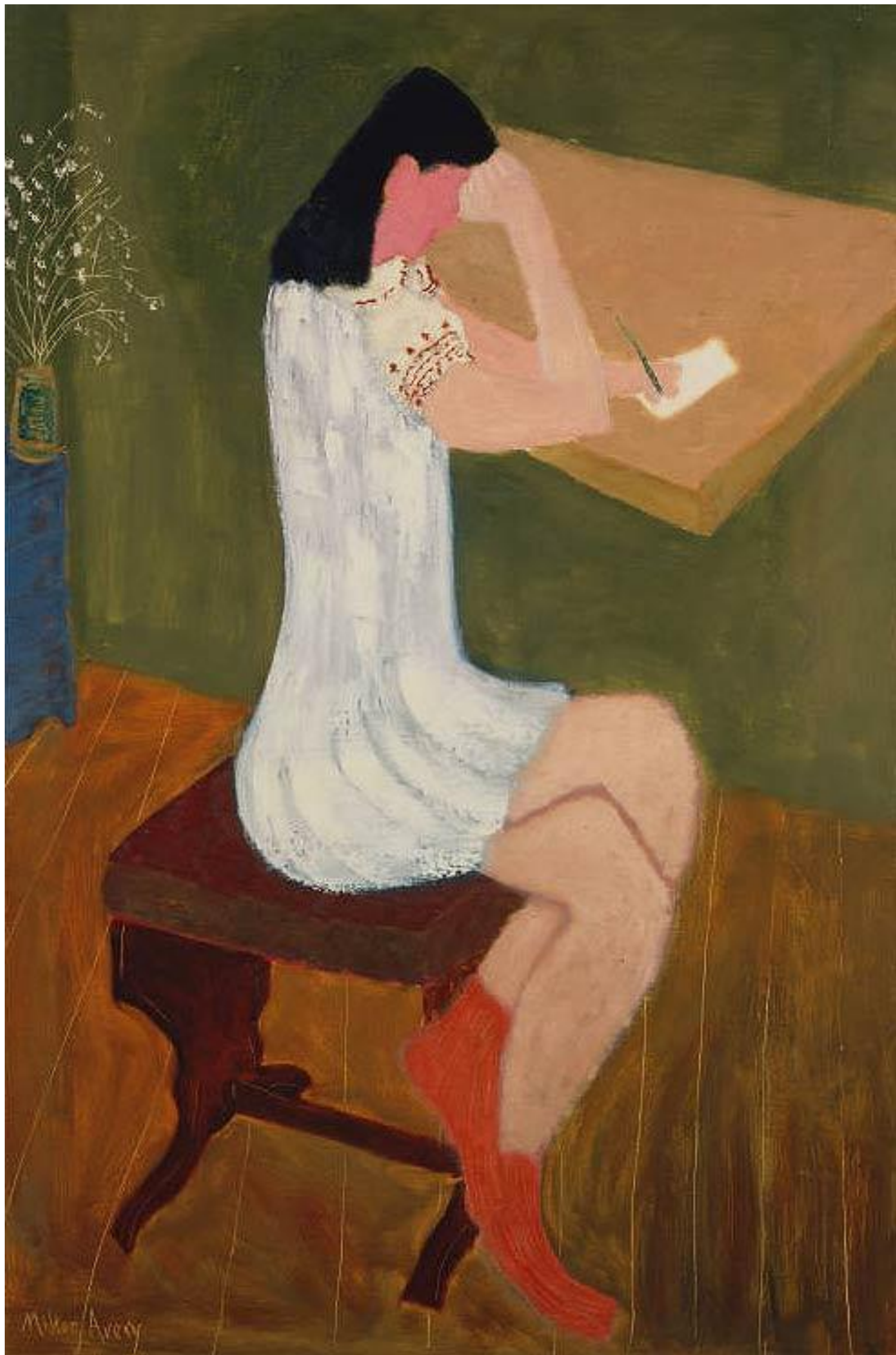

Fig. 25: Milton Avery, *Girl Writing*, 1941
Oil on canvas, 48 x 31 3/4 inches
The Phillips Collection, Washington

Fig. 26: Mark Rothko, *Harvard Mural, Tryptych, Panel I-III*, 1962, installation view, Holyoke Center, 1963

Left: Mark Rothko, *Panel One [Harvard Mural Triptych]*, 1962
Oil on canvas, 105 ¼ x 117 ¼
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums

Center: Mark Rothko, *Panel Two [Harvard Mural Triptych]*, 1962
Oil on canvas, 105 ¼ x 180 5/8 inches
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums

Right: Mark Rothko, *Panel Three [Harvard Mural Triptych]*, 1962
Oil on canvas, 105 1/8 x 96 inches
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums

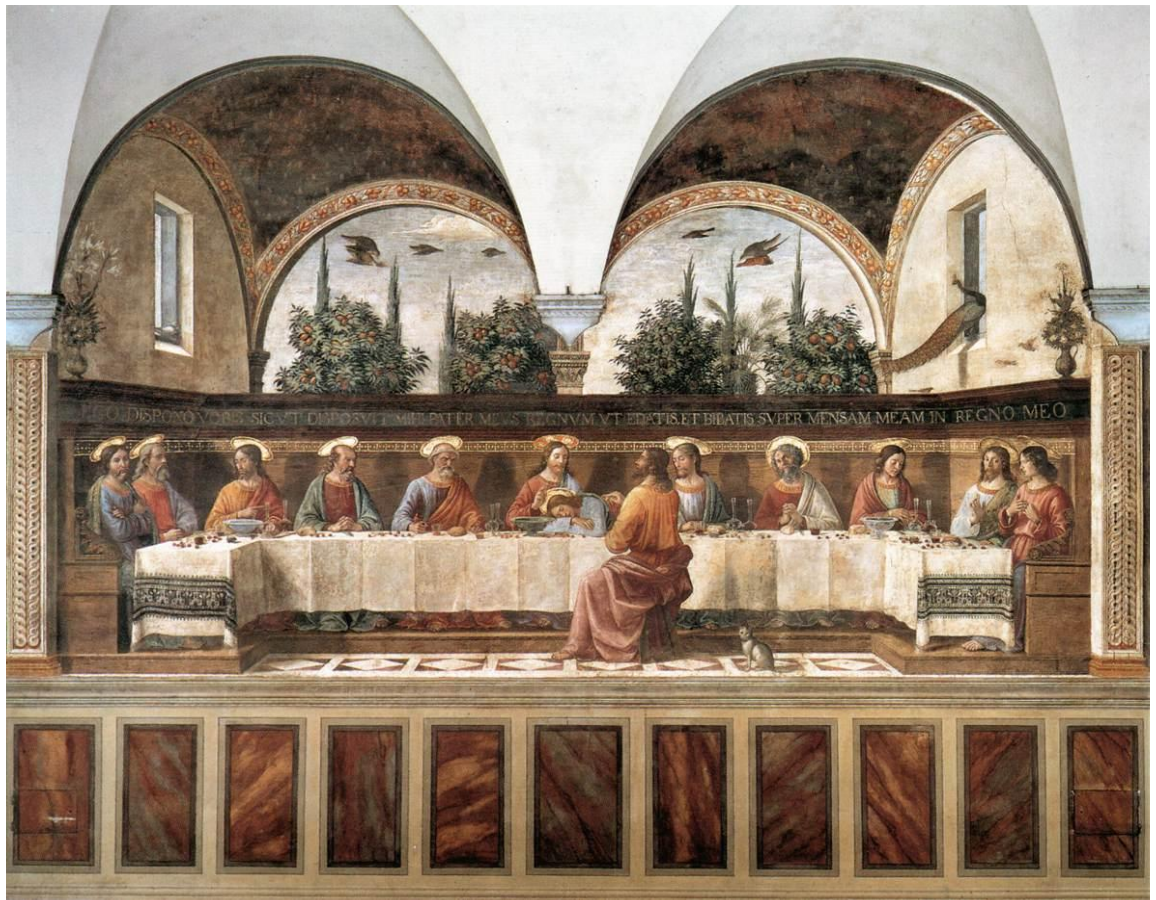

Fig. 27: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Last Supper*, ca. 1486
Fresco, 13.1 x 26 ¼ feet
San Marco, Florence

Fig. 28: *Ambush of Troilus by Achilles*, ca. 540 BCE, Tomb of The Bulls, Tarquinia

Fig. 29: Mark Rothko, *No. 5 (Reds)*, 1961
Oil on canvas, 70 x 63 inches
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Fig. 30: Giotto di Bondone, *Death of the Virgin*, ca. 1310
Tempera on Panel
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Fig. 31: Giotto di Bondone, *Crucifixion*, ca. 1315
Tempera on wood, 22.8 x 13 inches
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Fig. 32: Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*, 1920
Miniature French window, painted wood frame, and panes of glass covered with black leather, 30 1/2 x 17 5/8 inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 33: Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23
Oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels, 9 feet 1 1/4 inches x 69 1/4 inches
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Fig. 34: Charles Sheeler, *View of New York*, 1931
Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 3/8 inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Fig. 35: Casper David Friedrich, ***View from the Artist's Studio, Window on the Left***, ca. 1805–06
Graphite and sepia on paper; 12 3/8 x 9 1/4 inches
Belvedere, Vienna

Fig. 36: Casper David Friedrich, ***View from the Artist's Studio, Window on the Right***, ca. 1805–06
Graphite and sepia on paper; 12 1/4 x 9 3/8 inches
Belvedere, Vienna

Fig. 37: Hans Hofmann, *Autumn Gold*, 1957
Oil on canvas, 53 3/4 x 62 x 1 3/4 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 38: Robert Motherwell, *Open No. 122 in Scarlet and Blue*, 1969
Acrylic and drawing on canvas, 84 x 100 inches
Tate Collection

Fig. 39: Michelangelo, Vestibule, The Laurentian Library, Monastery of San Lorenzo, 1535, Florence, Italy

Fig. 40: Michelangelo, Vestibule, The Laurentian Library, Monastery of San Lorenzo, 1535, Florence, Italy

Fig. 41: Mark Rothko, *Mother and Child*, ca. 1940
Oil on canvas, 36 x 22 inches
Collection of Christopher Rothko

Fig. 42: Mark Rothko, *Antigone*, 1939-1940
Oil and charcoal on canvas, 34 x 45 3/4 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 43: Arshile Gorky, *The Artist and His Mother*, ca. 1926-ca. 1942
Oil on canvas, 59 15/16 x 50 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 44: Arshile Gorky, *The Artist and His Mother,* ca. 1926-42
Oil on canvas, 60 x 50 inches
Whitney Museum of American Art

Fig. 45: Giorgio di Chirico, *The Disquieting Muses*, 1918
Oil on canvas
Private Collection

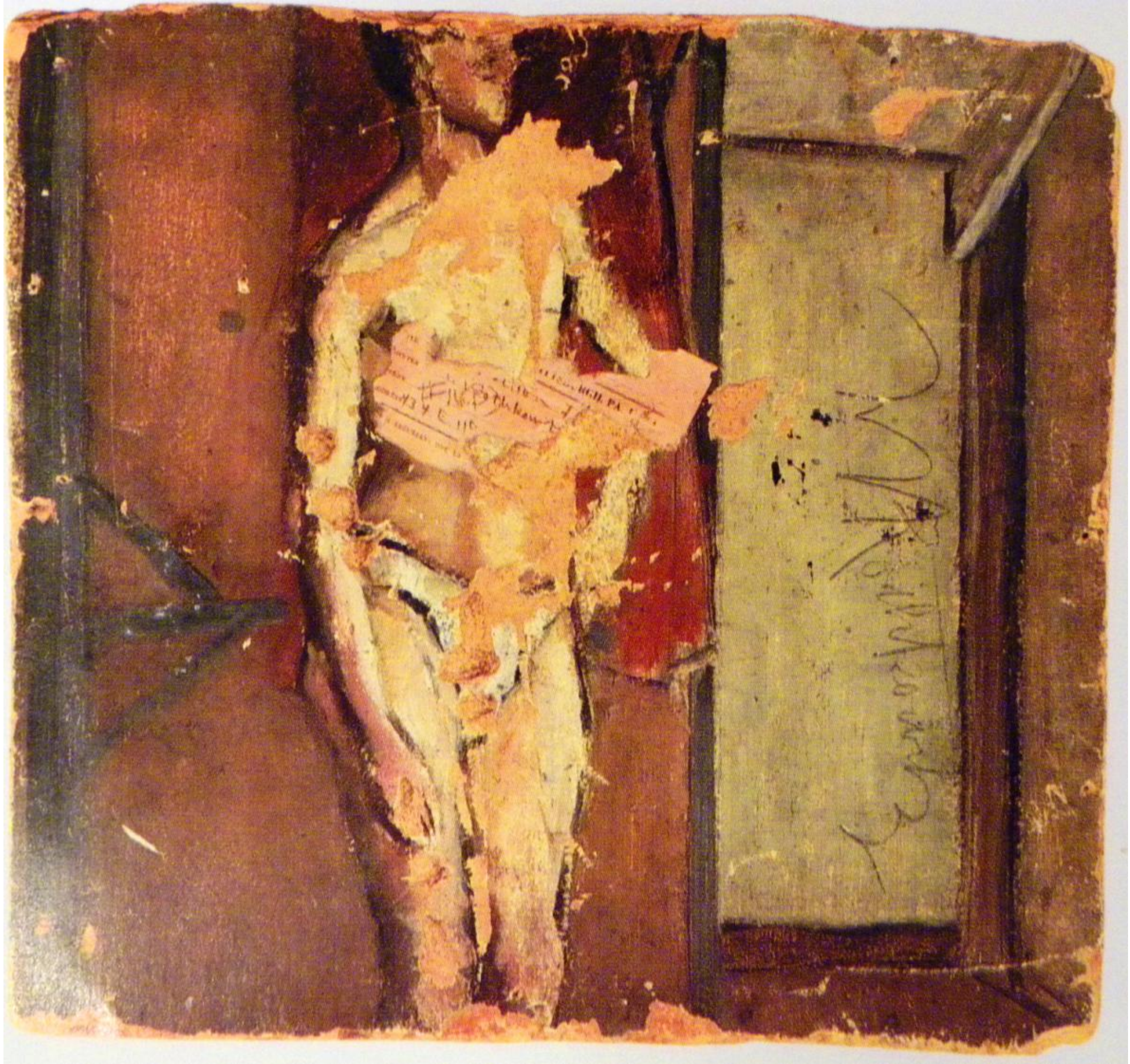

Fig. 46: Mark Rothko, *Composition I [Verso]*, ca. 1926
Oil on hardboard, 12 7/8 x 13 ¾ inches
Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko

Fig. 47: Mark Rothko, *Composition I [Recto]*, 1929/1931
Oil on hardboard, 12 7/8 x 13 ¾ inches
Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko

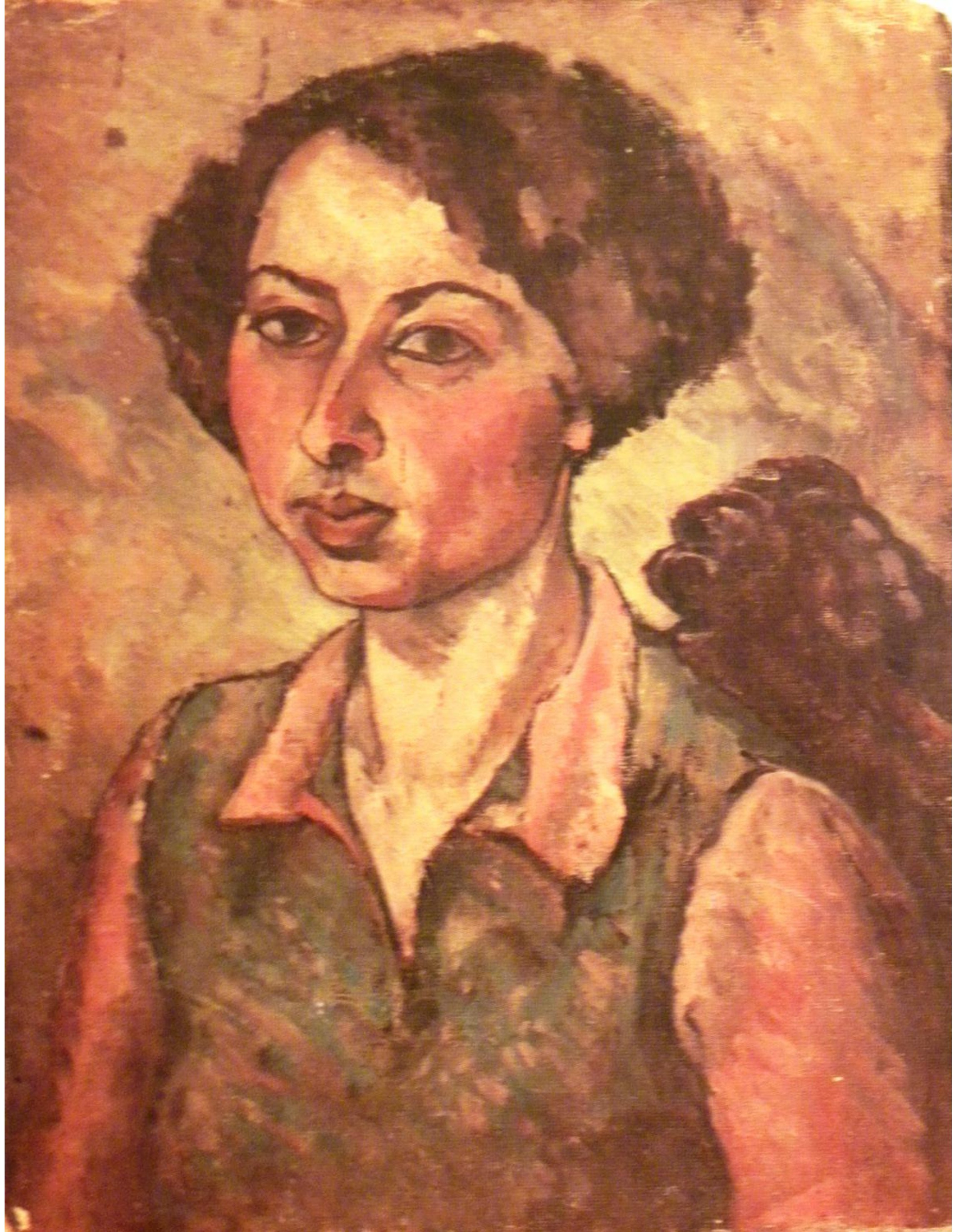

Fig. 48: Mark Rothko, *Sophie*, ca. 1927
Oil on canvas board, 17 ¾ x 14 inches
Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko

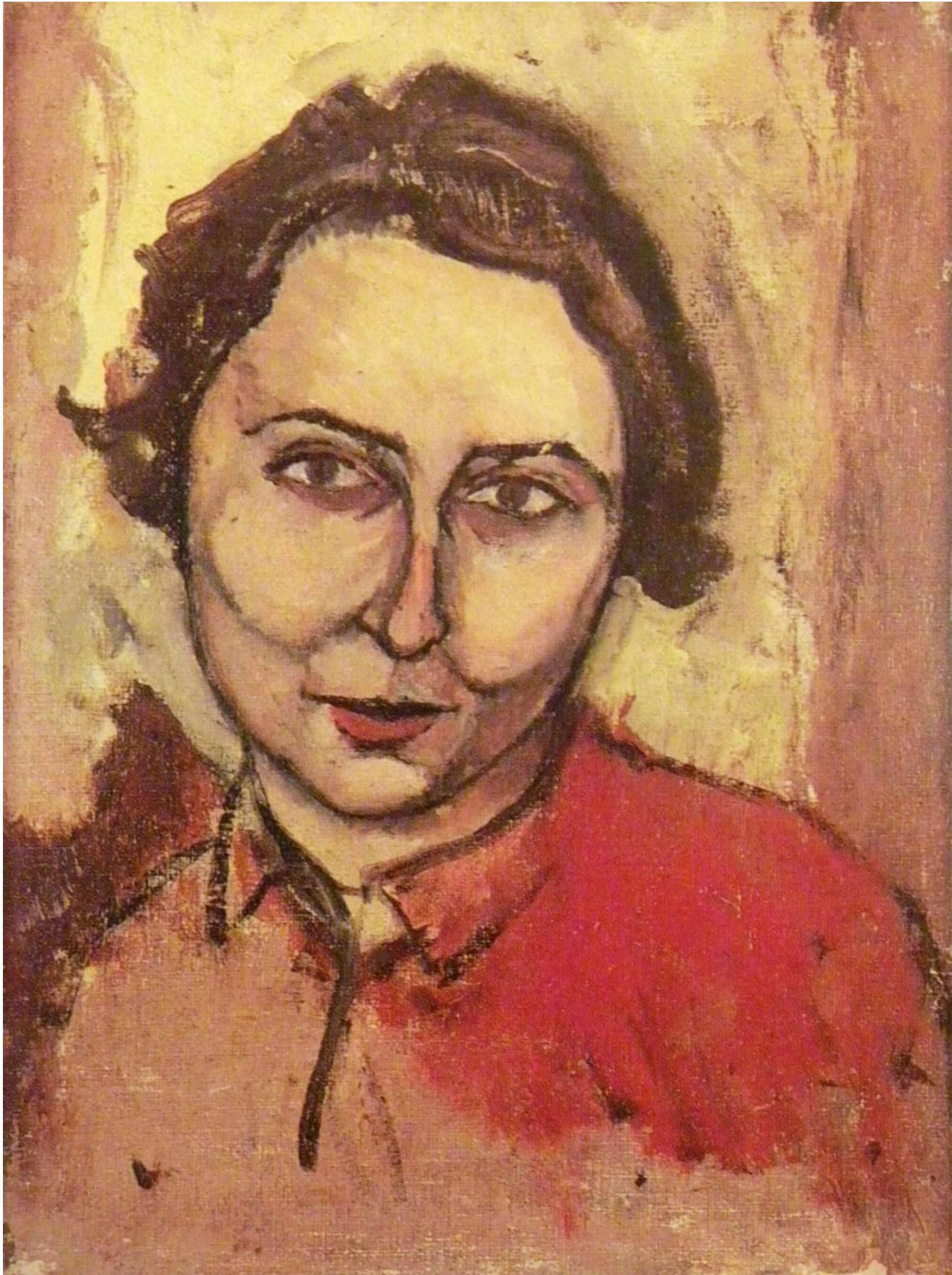

Fig. 49: Mark Rothko, *Untitled [Portrait of Leah Farber]*, ca. 1927
Oil on canvas board, 15 ¾ x 11 5/8 inches
Collection of Herbert and Esther Schimmel, Nashua, N.H.

Fig. 50: Mark Rothko, *Portrait of Rothko's Mother*, 1928/1931
Oil on canvas, 19 7/8 x 16 inches
Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel

Fig. 51: Mark Rothko, *Portrait of a Young Boy {Untitled}*, ca. 1932
Oil on canvas, 31 7/8 x 21 7/8 inches
Collection of Christopher Rothko

Fig. 52: Edward Hopper, *Chop Suey*, 1929
Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 38 1/8 inches
Private Collection

Fig. 53: Mark Rothko, *Discourse*, 1933/1934
Oil on canvas, 16 x 19 ¾ inches
Collection of Christopher Rothko

Fig. 54: Mark Rothko, *Interior*, 1936
Oil on hardboard, 23 7/8 x 18 1/4 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

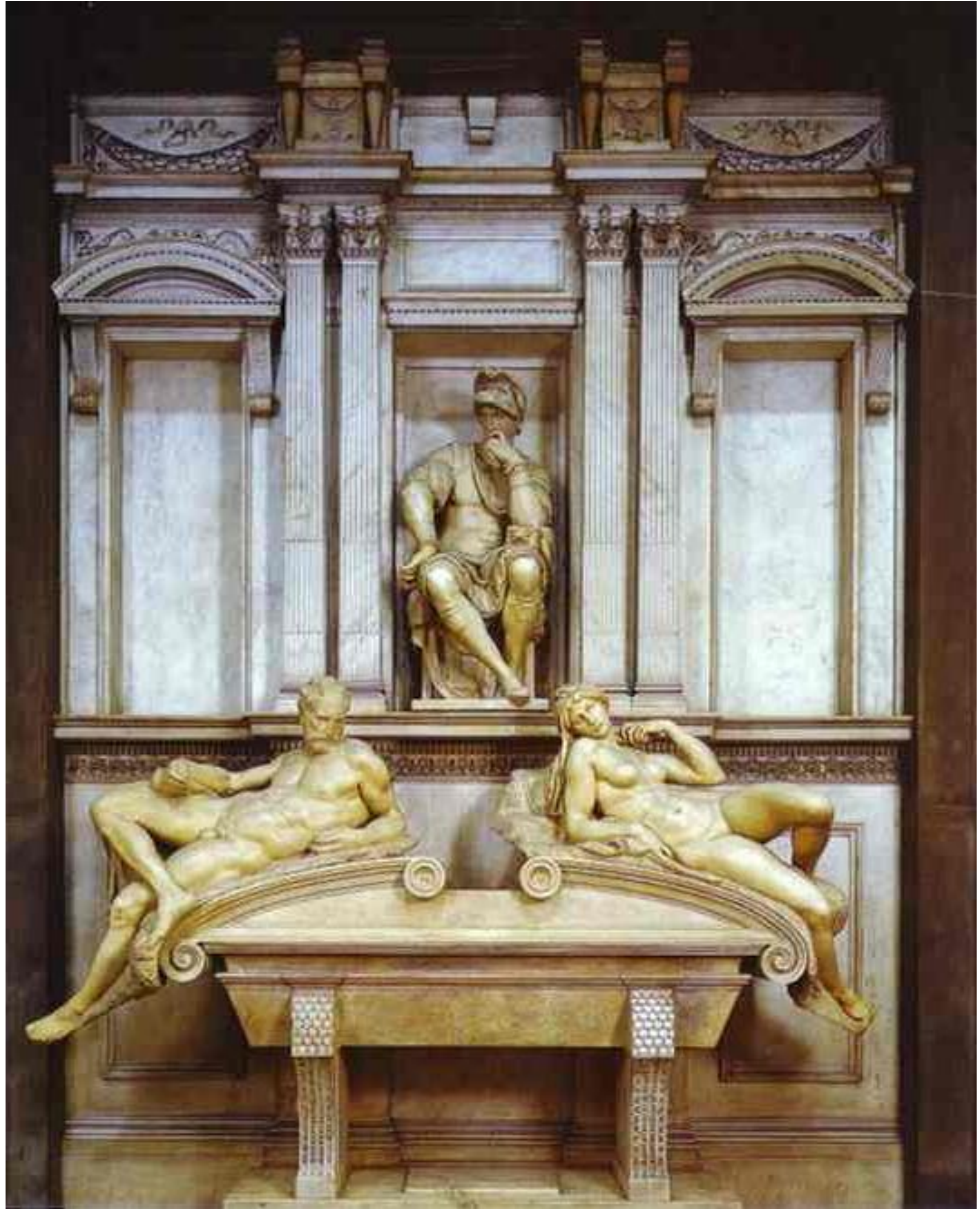

Fig. 55: Michelangelo, *Tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici*, 1526-1531
Marble
Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo, Florence, Italy

Fig. 56: Mark Rothko, *Thru the Window*, 1938/1939
Oil on gesso board, 9 7/8 x 6 7/8 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 57: Fra Filippo Lippi, *Portrait of a Man and a Woman at a Casement*, ca. 1440
Tempera on wood, 25 1/4 x 16 1/2 inches.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 58: Sandro Botticelli, *Giuliano de' Medici*, ca. 1478/1480
Tempera on panel, 29 3/4 x 20 11/16 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

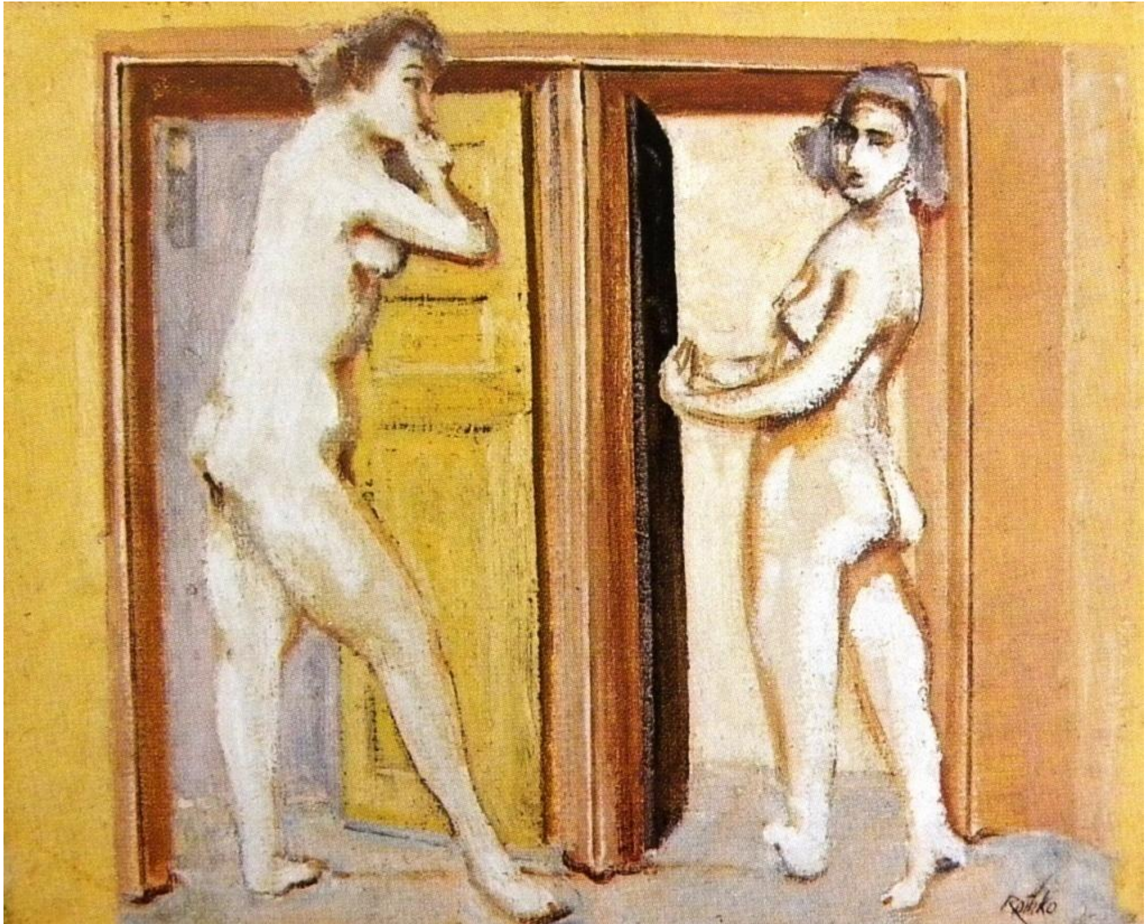

Fig. 59: Mark Rothko, *Untitled [Two Nudes Standing in Front of a Doorway]*, 1939
Oil on canvas, 16 1/8 x 19 15/16 inches
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College

Fig. 60: Pablo Picasso, *Two Nudes*, 1906
Oil on canvas, 59 5/8 x 36 5/8 inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 61: Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1940/1941
Oil on linen, 20 x 27 15/16 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 62: Mark Rothko, *Untitled [Children Around a Table]*, 1937
Oil on canvas, 30 x 38 ¾ inches
Collection of Christopher Rothko

Fig. 63: Mark Rothko, *The Party {Untitled}*, 1938
Oil on canvas, 23 5/8 x 31 ¾ inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 64: Mark Rothko, *Subway*, 1935
Oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches
Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel

Fig. 65: Mark Rothko, *Underground Fantasy {Subway (Subterranean Fantasy)}*, ca. 1940
Oil on canvas, 34 5/16 x 46 ½ inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 66: Adolph Gottlieb, *South Ferry Waiting Room*, ca. 1929
Oil on cotton, 36 x 45 inches
Private Collection

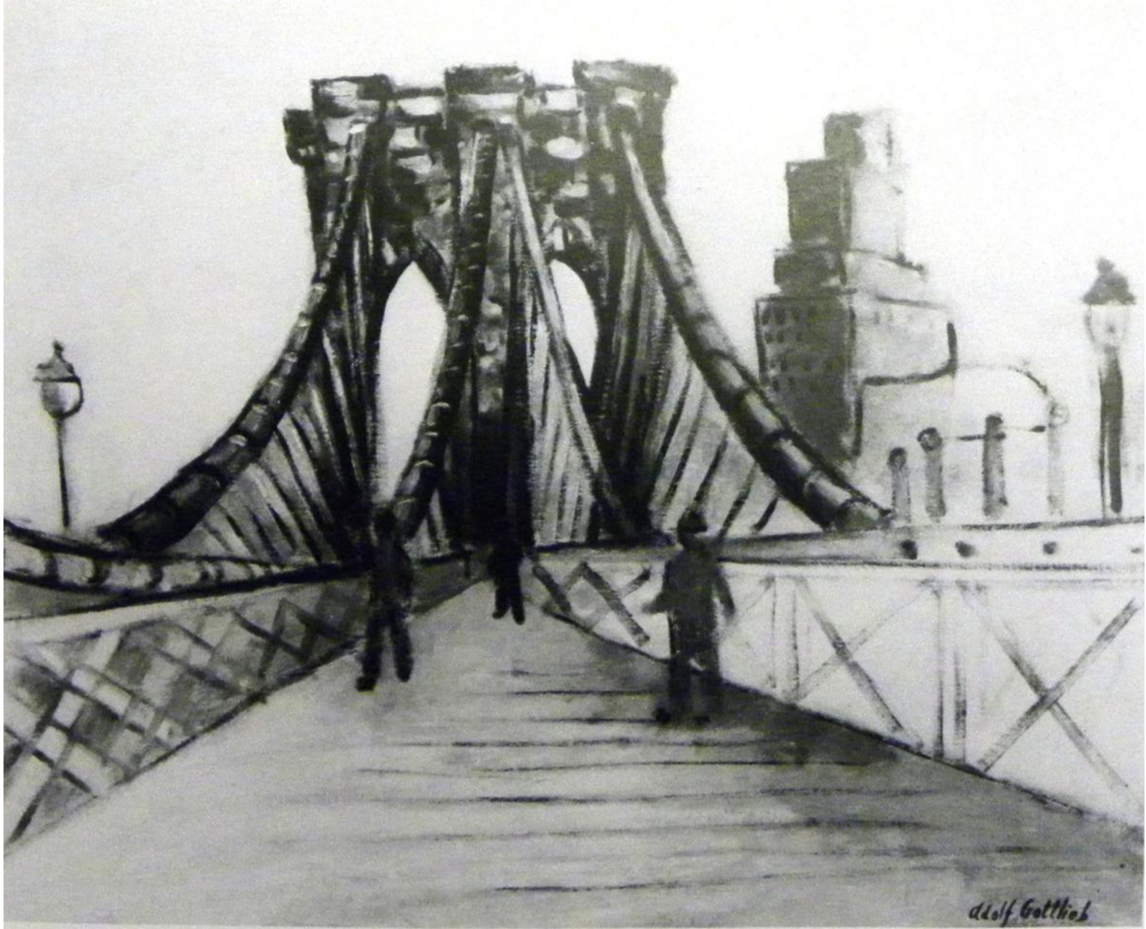

Fig. 67: Adolph Gottlieb, *Brooklyn Bridge*, ca. 1930
Oil on canvas, 25 15/16 x 31 15/16 inches
Private Collection

Fig. 68: John Sloan, *The Wake of the Ferry II*, 1907
Oil on canvas, 26 x 32 inches
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 69: Robert Henri, *Snow in New York*, 1902
Oil on canvas, 32 x 25 13/16 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 70: Mark Rothko, *The Peddler,* 1924/1925
Oil on canvas board, 13 3/8 x 11 inches
Collection of Blanche Goreff

Fig. 71: Mark Rothko, *Untitled [Two Jews]*, 1924/1925
Oil on canvas board, 16 ¼ x 11 ¾ inches
Collection of Marjorie G. Neuwirth

Fig. 72: Max Weber, *New York*, 1913
Oil on canvas, 40 5/8 x 32 ½ inches
Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Lugano, Switzerland

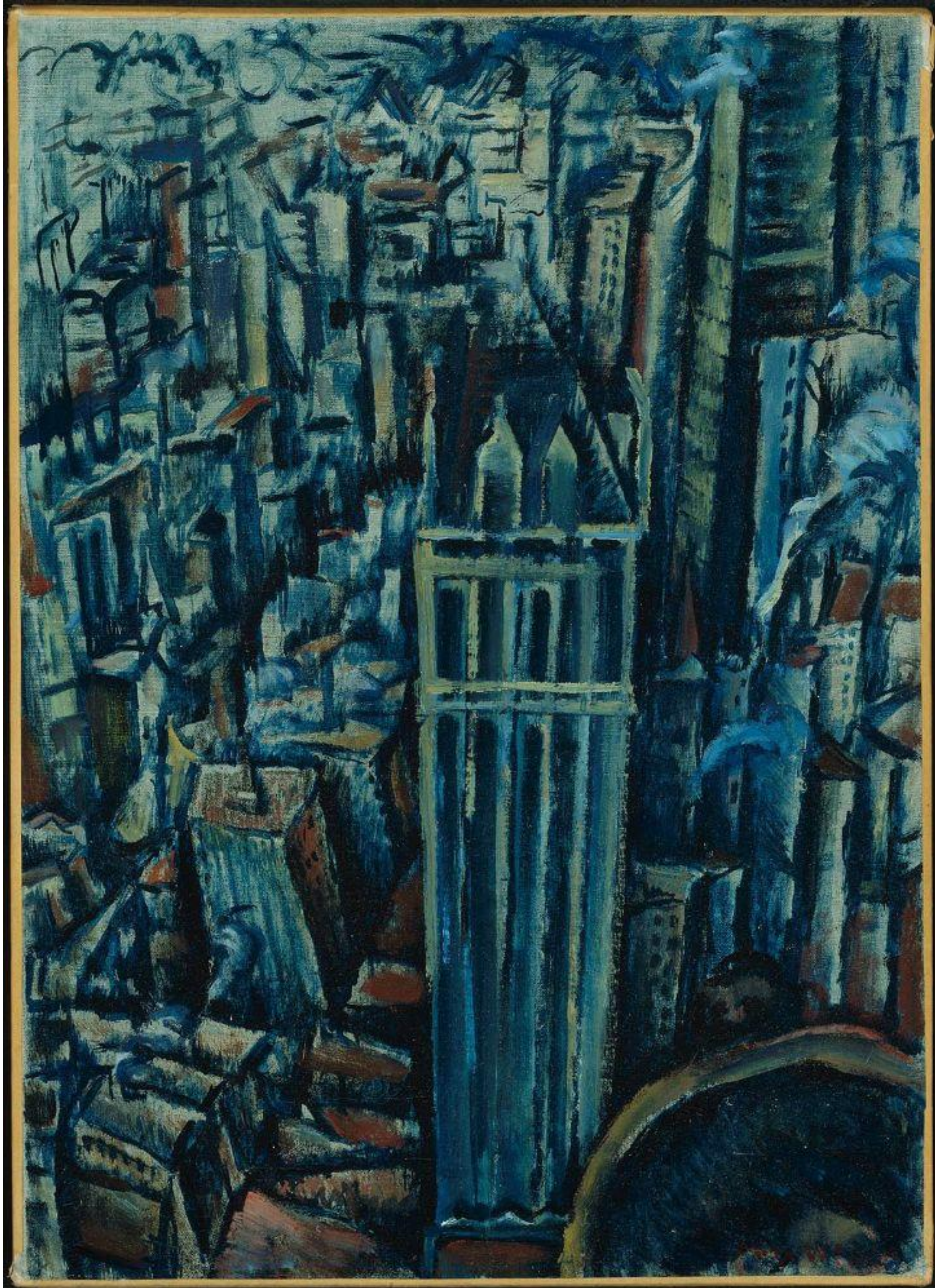

Fig. 73: Max Weber, New *York (The Liberty Tower from the Singer Building) [The Woolworth Building]*, 1912
Oil on canvas, 18 ¼ x 13 1/8 inches
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Fig. 74: Milton Avery, *The Steeplechase, Coney Island*, 1929
Oil on canvas, 32 x 40 inches
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 75: Mark Rothko, *The Road*, 1932/1933
Oil on canvas, 24 x 31 ½ inches
Collection of Christopher Rothko

Fig. 76: Mark Rothko, *City Phantasy [Recto]*, ca. 1934
Oil on canvas, 39 ¾ x 28 ½ inches
Collection of Christopher Rothko

Fig. 77: Mark Rothko, *Landscape [?] {Untitled}* (or, *Untitled (two women before a cityscape)*, 1936/1937
Oil on canvas, 22 x 27 7/8 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 78: Mark Rothko, *Untitled [Cityscape]*, ca. 1936
Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches
Collection of Christopher Rothko

Fig. 79: Mark Rothko, *Street Scene*, 1936/1937
Oil on canvas, 36 x 22 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 80: Rothko Chapel, interior, detail. From left to right:

Mark Rothko, *Untitled [Northwest Angle-Wall Painting]*, 1966
Oil on canvas, 177 ½ x 135 inches
Rothko Chapel, Houston

Mark Rothko, *Untitled [North Wall Apse Triptych, Left Panel]*, 1965
Oil on canvas, 180 x 96 inches
Rothko Chapel, Houston

Mark Rothko, *Untitled [North Wall Apse Triptych, Middle Panel]*, 1965
Oil on canvas, 180 ¼ x 105 ¼ inches
Rothko Chapel, Houston

Mark Rothko, *Untitled [North Wall Apse Triptych, Right Panel]*, 1965
Oil on canvas, 180 x 96 inches
Rothko Chapel, Houston

Mark Rothko, *Untitled [Northeast Angle-Wall Painting]*, 1966
Oil on canvas, 177 ½ x 135 inches
Rothko Chapel, Houston

Fig. 81: Dominican Chapelle de Saint-Marie du Rosarie, exterior, Vence, France, 1947-1951

Fig. 82: Henri Matisse, *The Tree of Life* (at left; stained glass) and *St. Dominic* (at right; ceramic tiles), 1950
Dominican Chapelle de Saint-Marie du Rosarie, interior, Vence, France

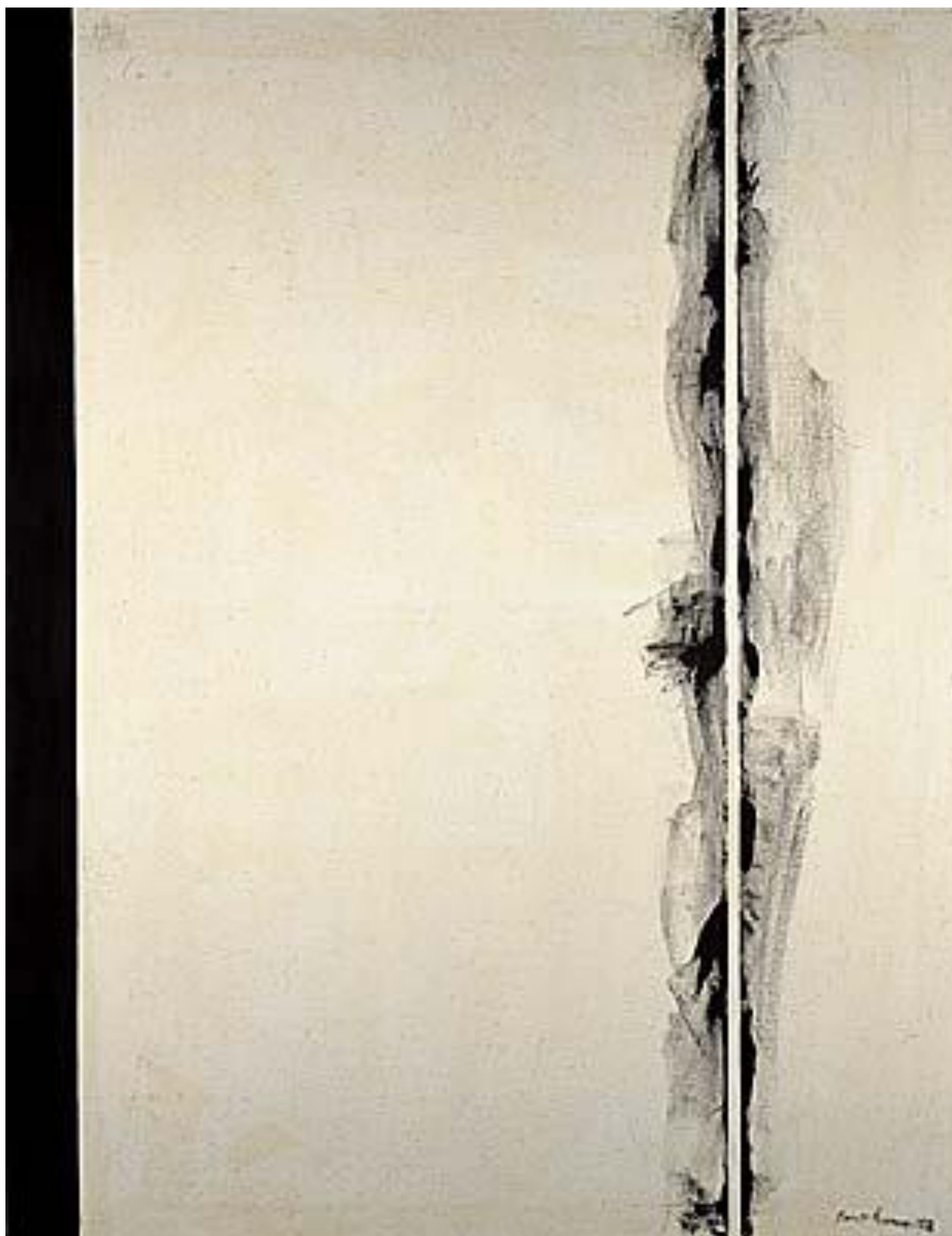

Fig. 83 : Barnett Newman, *First Station,* 1958
Magna on canvas, 77 7/8 x 60 1/2 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Fig. 84: Barnett Newman, *Stations of the Cross* (1958-66), detail of installation

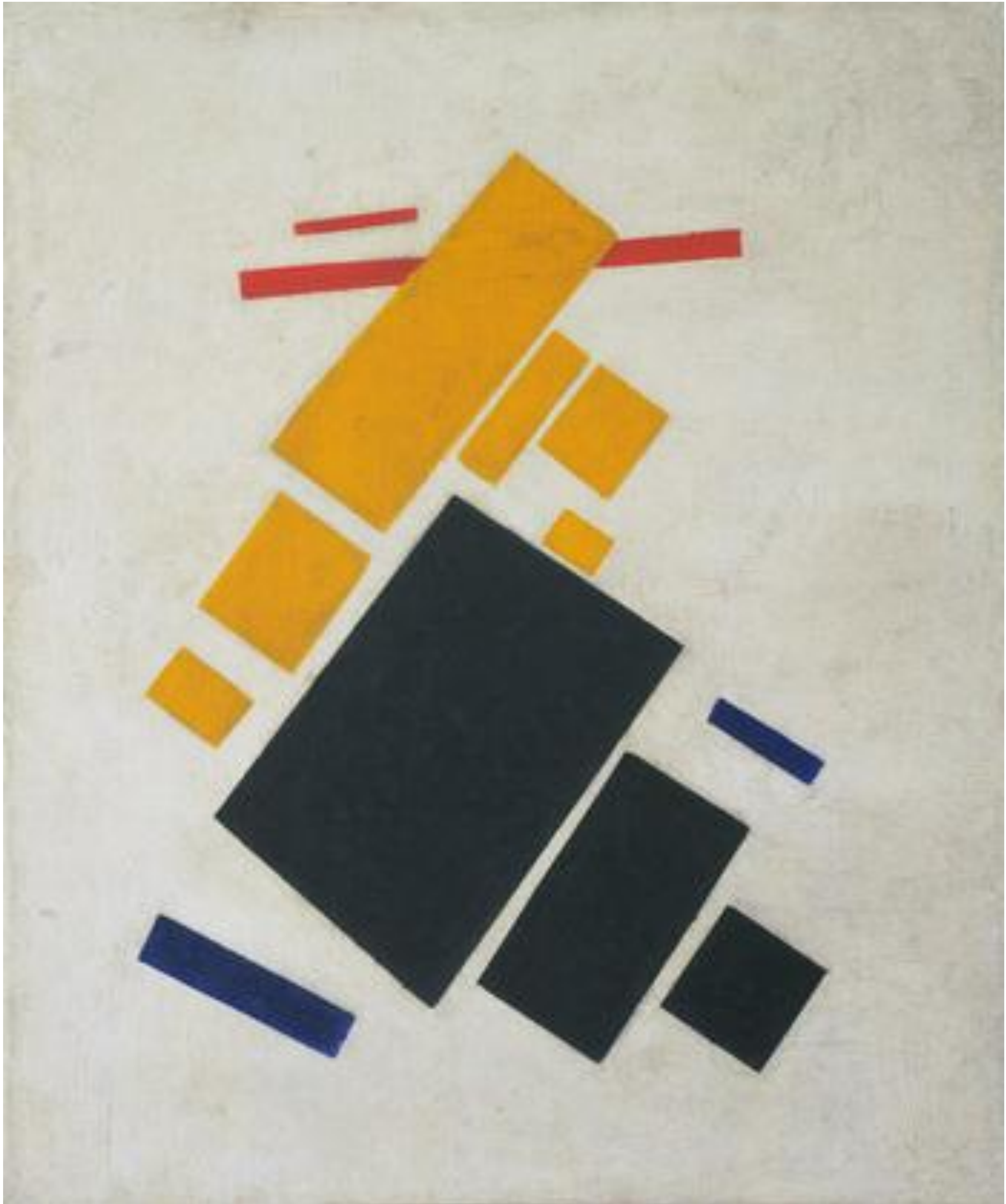

Fig. 85: Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying*, 1915 (dated on reverse 1914)
Oil on canvas, 22 7/8 x 19 inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 86: Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona Pavilion, 1928-29, Barcelona, Spain

Fig. 87: Robert Rauschenberg, *Wager*, 1957-59
Combine painting: oil, pencil, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, photographs, wood and pencil body tracing on four canvases, 81 x 148 x 2 ¼ inches
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Fig. 88: Detail, Robert Rauschenberg, *Wager*, 1957-59
Combine painting: oil, pencil, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, photographs, wood and pencil body tracing on four canvases, 81 x 148 x 2 ¼ inches
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Fig. 89: Detail, Robert Rauschenberg, *Wager*, 1957-59
Combine painting: oil, pencil, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, photographs, wood and pencil body tracing on four canvases, 81 x 148 x 2 ¼ inches
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Fig. 90: Robert Raushenberg, *Untitled*, 1954
Oil, paper, fabric, newspaper, and printed reproductions on canvas with wood, stained glass, and electric lights, 75 x 56 ½ x 18 inches
Private Collection

Fig. 91: Robert Rauschenberg, *Interview*, 1955
Combine: oil, pencil, paper, fabric, photographs, printed reproductions, newspaper, wood, baseball, metal fork, found paintings, hinged wood door, and brick on string, on wood structure, 72 ¾ x 49 ¼ x 12 inches
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Fig. 92: Robert Rauschenberg, *Trophy V (for Jasper Johns)*, 1962
Combine painting on canvas, 78 x 72 inches
Honolulu Academy of Arts

Fig. 93: Robert Rauschenberg, Estate, 1963
Oil and screenprinted inks on canvas, 8 feet x 5 feet 9 13/16 inches
Philadelphia Museum of Art

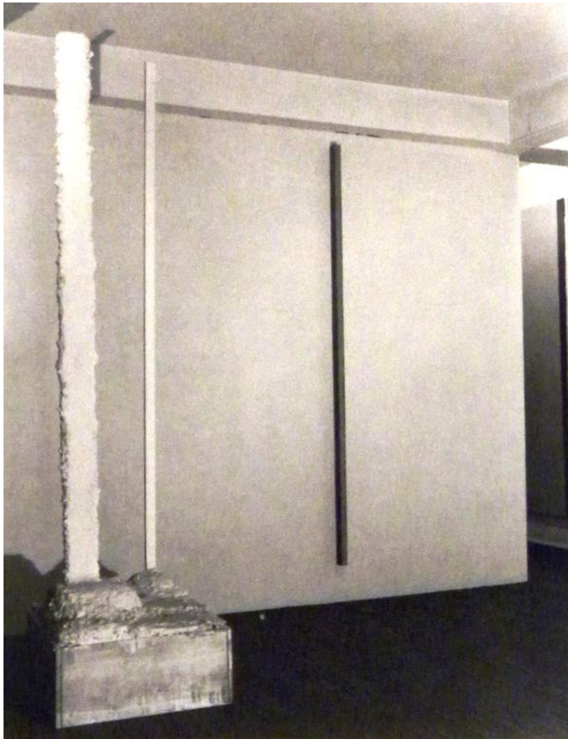

Fig. 94: (above) Robert Rauschenberg, *The Man with Two Souls*, 1950, photographed by Rauschenberg
Mixed media, 47 ¼ x 7 7/8 x 5 ½ inches
Private Collection

(below) Barnett Newman, *Here I*, 1950 (at left), installed at Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1951
Reinforced plaster, wood, and a wood-and-wire crate, 96 x 28 ¼ x 26 ½ inches
The Menil Collection, Houston

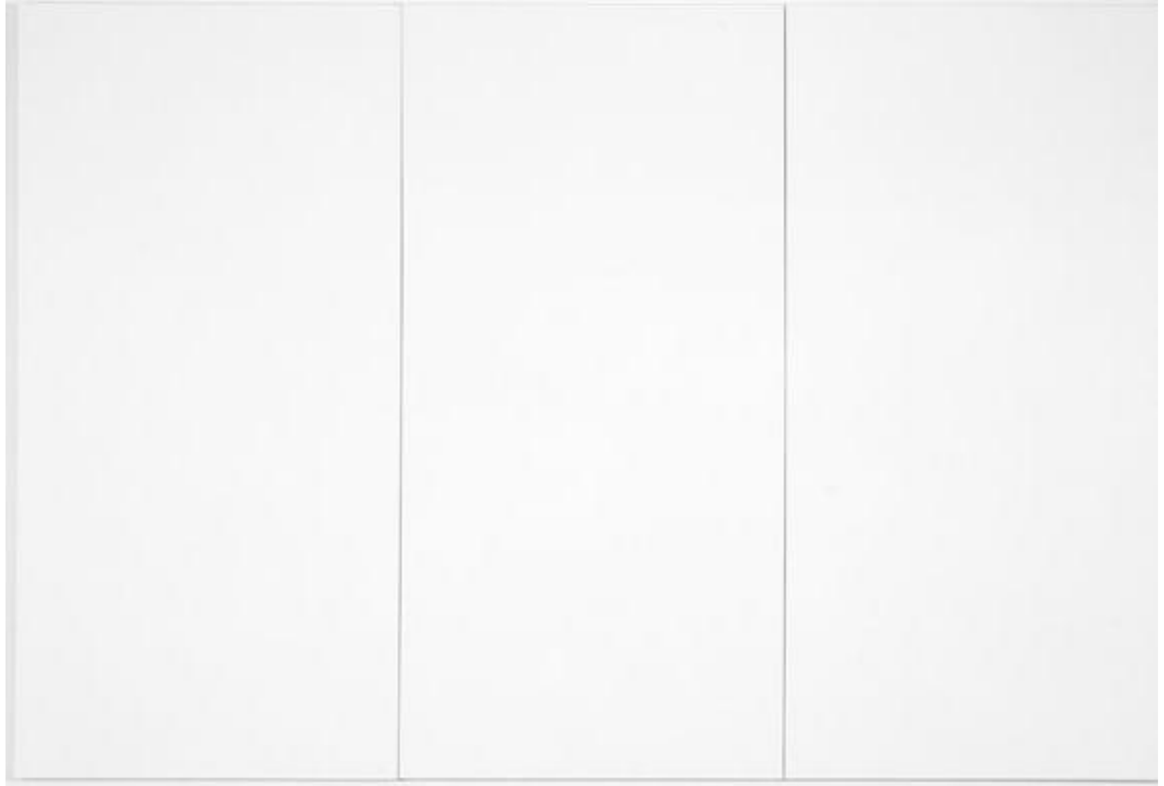

Fig. 95: Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting (Three Panel)*, 1951
Oil on canvas, 72 x 108 inches
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

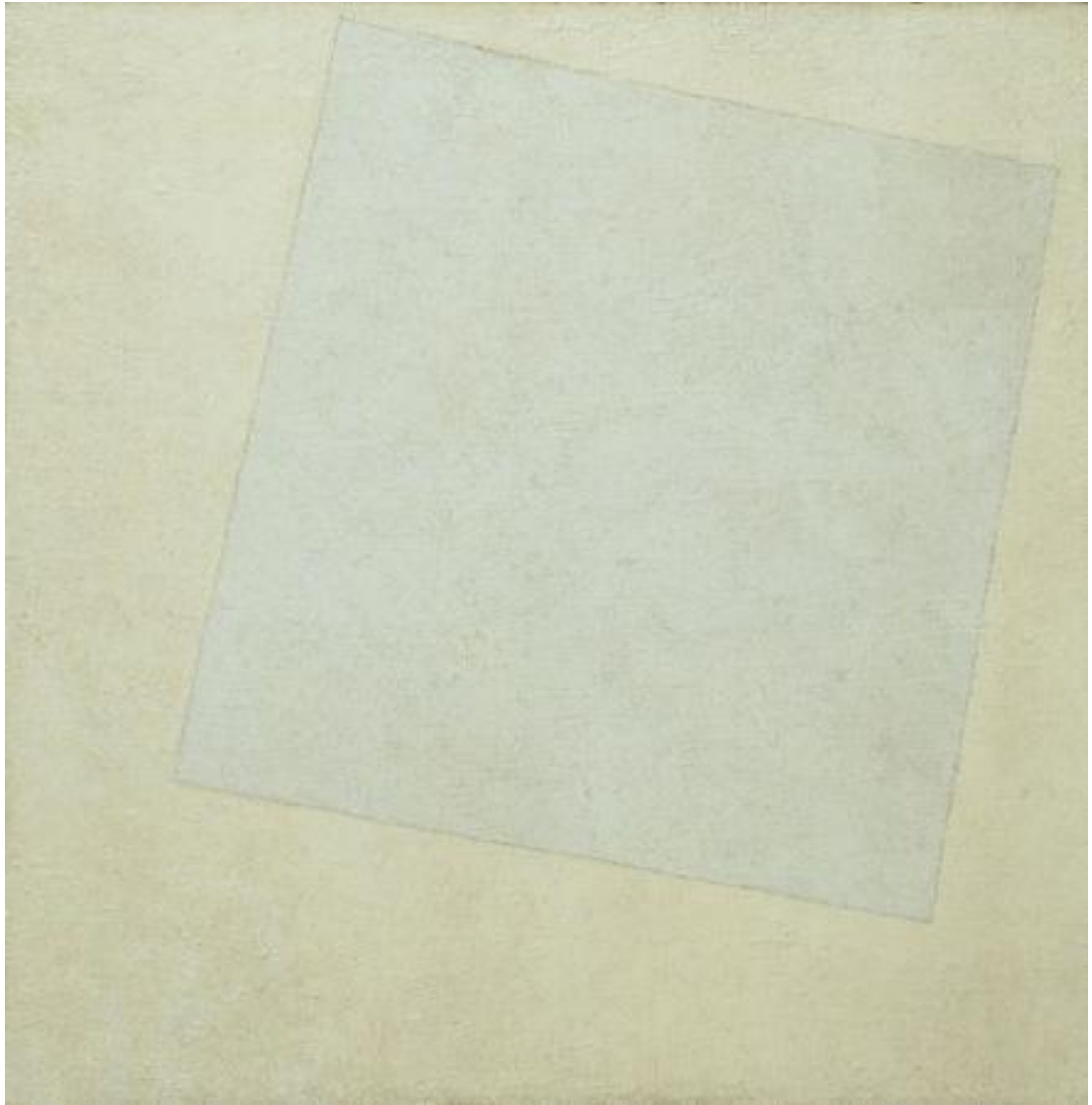

Fig. 96: Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918
Oil on canvas, 31 ¼ x 31 ¼ inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 97: Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953
Traces of ink and crayon on paper, mat, label, and gilded frame, 25 ¼ x 21 ¾ inches
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

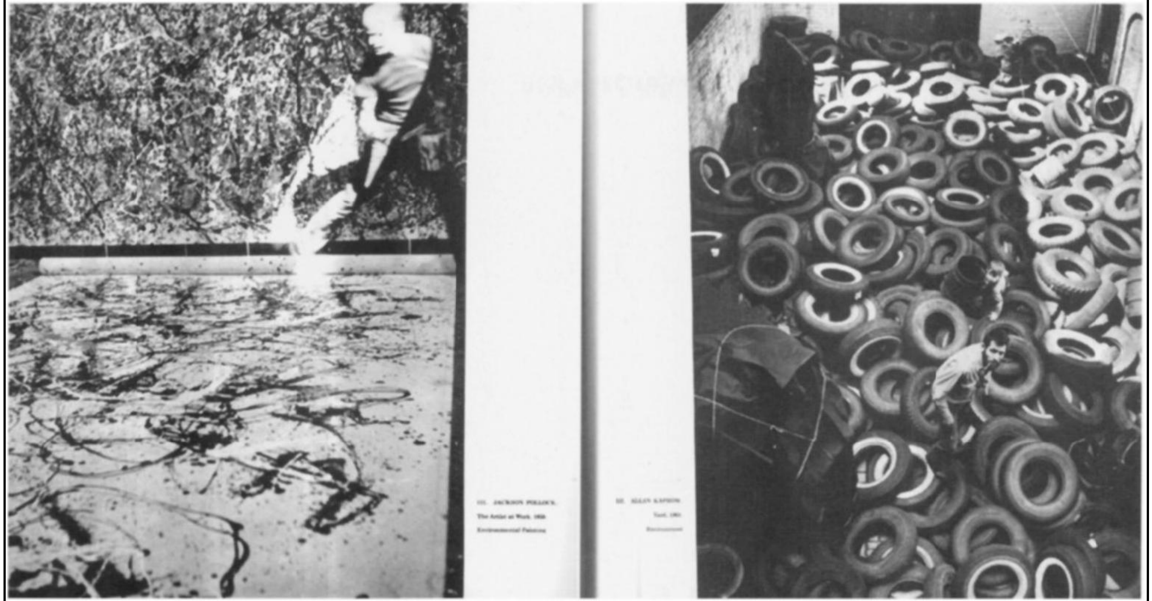

Fig. 98: Spread from Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings*, 1966
Left: Hans Namuth, Jackson Pollock, 1950
Right: Ken Haymen, Allan Kaprow, 1961

Fig. 99: Jasper Johns, *Target with Four Faces*, 1955
Encaustic on newspaper and cloth over canvas surmounted by four tinted-plaster faces in wood box with hinged front, Overall, with box open, 33 5/8 x 26 x 3 inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 100: Jasper Johns, *Target with Plaster Casts*, 1955
Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 51 x 44 inches
Private Collection, Los Angeles

Fig. 101: Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . . (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .)*, 1944-66
Mixed media assemblage, 7 feet 11 1/2 inches x 70 inches
Philadelphia Museum of Art

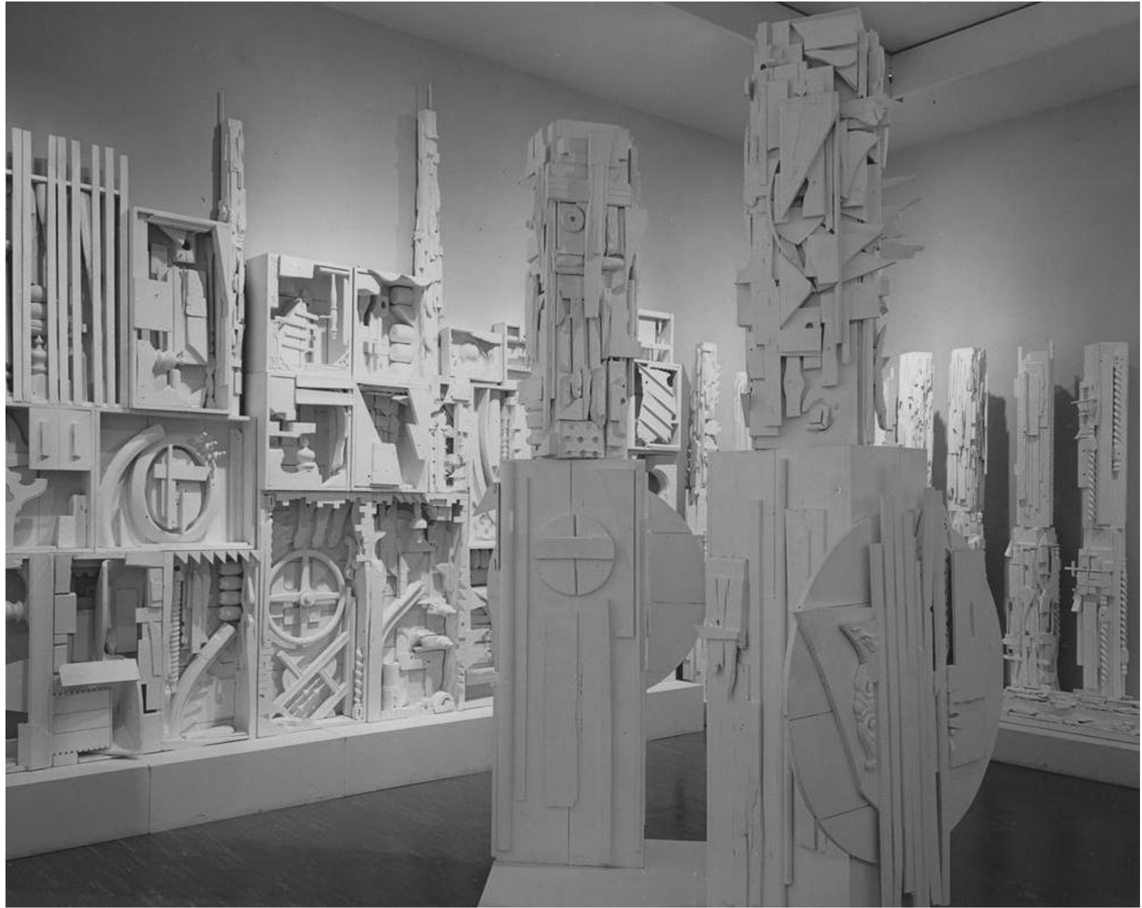

Fig. 102: Louise Nevelson, *Dawn's Wedding Feast*, 1959
Installation view of Nevelson's work at the exhibition *16 Americans*, held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, December 16, 1959 through February 17, 1960

Fig. 166: Louise Nevelson, *Case with Five Balusters, from Dawn's Wedding Feast*, 1959
Wood, paint, 27-5/8 x 63-5/8 x 9 inches
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

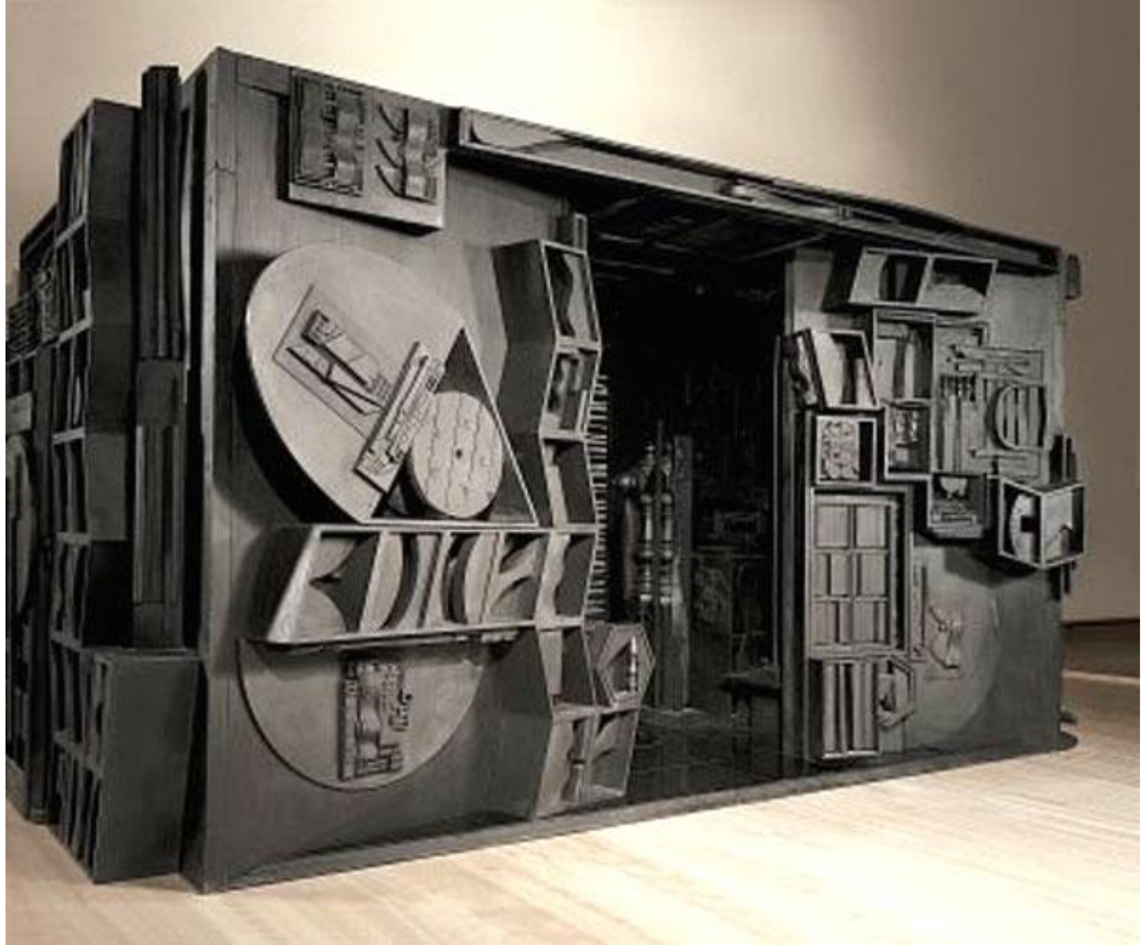

Fig. 104: Louise Nevelson, *Mrs. N's Palace*, 1964-77
Painted wood, mirror, 140 x 239 x 180 inches
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

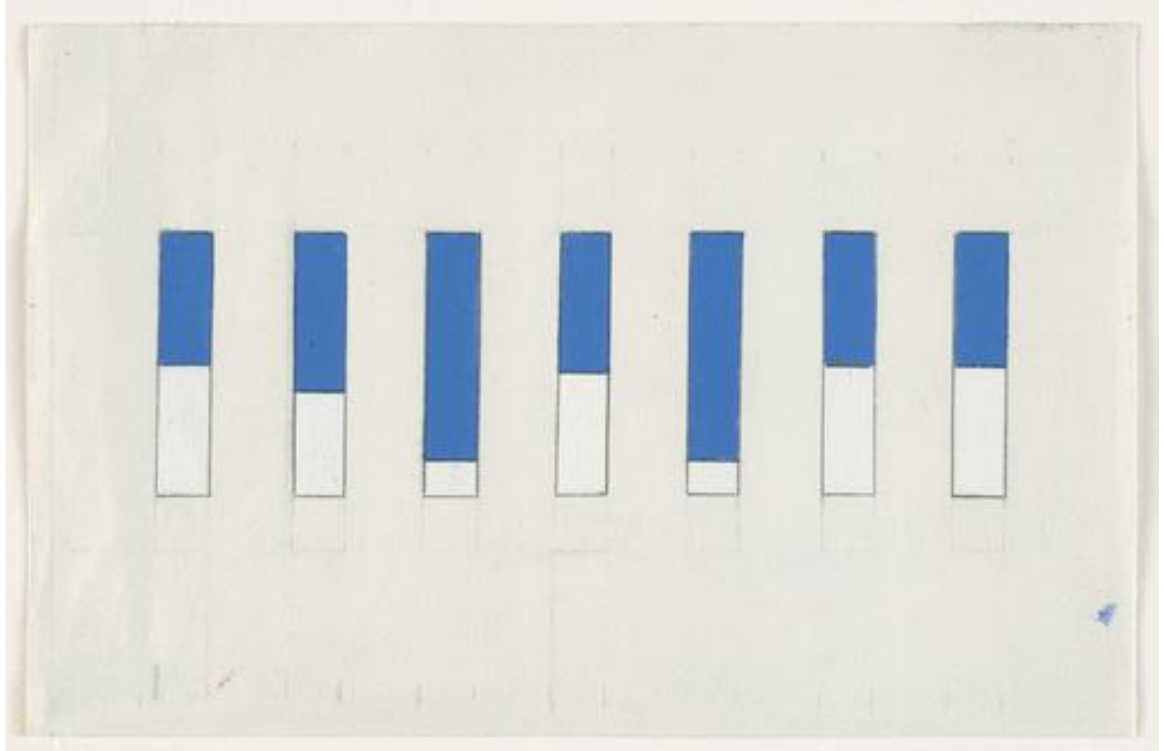

Fig. 105: Ellsworth Kelly, *Awnings, Avenue Matignon*, 1950
Gouache and pencil on paper, 5 1/4 x 8 ¼ inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

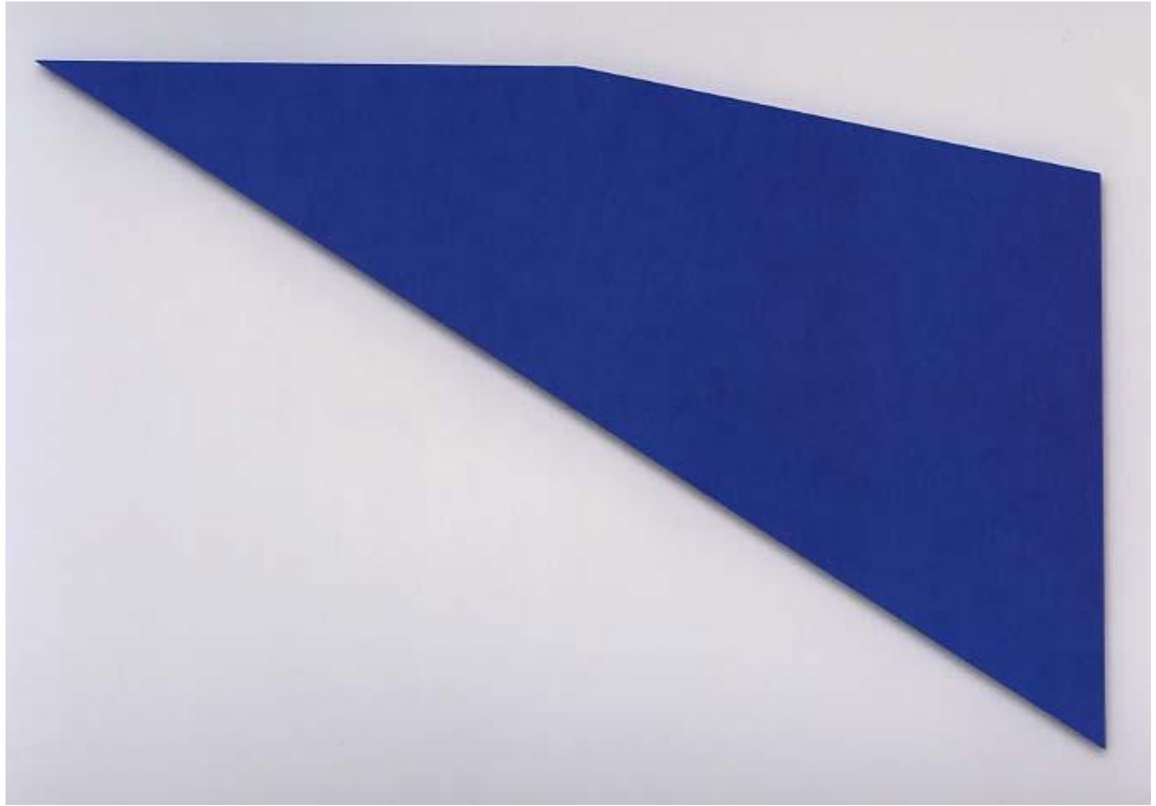

Fig. 106: Ellsworth Kelly, *Lake II*, 2002
Oil on canvas, 95 x 149 3/8 inches
Beyeler Collection, Basel

Fig. 107: Paul Cézanne, *The Gulf of Marseille Seen from L'Estaque*, c. 1885
Oil on canvas, 31 9/16 x 39 5/8 inches
The Art Institute of Chicago

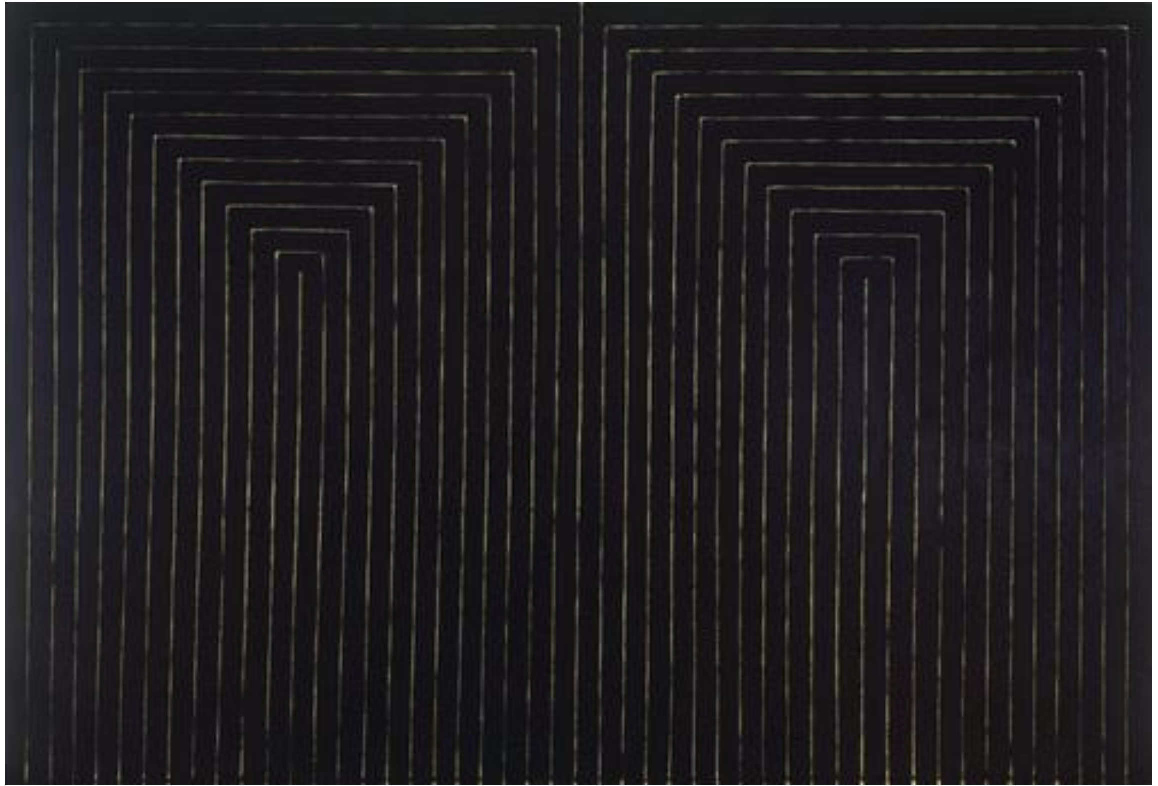

Fig. 108: Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor*, 1959
Enamel on canvas, 7' 6 3/4" x 11' ¾ inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 109: Donald Judd, *Stage Set*, 1991
MAK, Vienna

Fig. 110: Tony Smith, *Black Box*, 1962-67
Steel, 22.5 x 33 x 25 inches
National Gallery of Canada

Fig. 111: Tony Smith, *Smoke*, 1967
Black-painted aluminum, 22’ H, 45’ L, 33’ W
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Fig. 112: Sol LeWitt, *Floor Structure*, 1963
Painted wood, 6’ x 46” x 36 inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 113: Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project, I (ABCD)*, 1966
Baked enamel on steel units over baked enamel on aluminum, 20" x 13' 7" x 13' 7 inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 114: Dan Flavin, *monument 1 for V. Tatlin*, 1964
Fluorescent lights and metal fixtures, 8’ x 23 1/8 x 4 ½ inches
Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 115: Carl André, *Equivalent VIII*, 1966
Firebricks, 5 x 27 x 90.2 inches
Tate Gallery

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