



“Robert Motherwell: The East Hampton Years, 1944-1952” at Guild Hall

August 7, 2014

by Pat Rogers

The earliest mature work of Robert Motherwell will make up a major exhibition set to open at Guild Hall Museum on Aug. 9, providing a rare look at the abstract expressionist's little known artworks. “Robert Motherwell: The East Hampton Years, 1944 - 1952” will reveal the explorations of Motherwell as he transitioned from surrealism and automatism to abstract expressionism, according to the museum, and reveal works that are lesser known. Artworks for the show were lent by a collections held by MoMA, the Rothko Family, Frankenthaler Foundation and other collections.

“Robert Motherwell: The East Hampton Years, 1944 - 1952” previews on Friday (August 8) as part of Guild Hall's Summer Benefit. The show opens on Saturday with a panel discussion followed by a public opening. The exhibition is curated by Phyllis Tuchman, a long time critic and curator. It timed with the release of her new book, bearing the same name as the exhibition.



“In Beige with Sand” by Robert Motherwell, 1945. Oil on cardboard with sand and wood veneer collage, 44 7/8 x 35 inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer Jr, St. Louis Art Museum. ©VAGA, NY.

The entire museum is devoted to the exhibition presenting works by Motherwell that are relatively unknown but are rising in recognition as being “crucial to his own career as well as the history of post-war painting,” according to an exhibition release. All of the works on view were made in East Hampton while living there, according to the museum. Motherwell lived and worked in a house and studio designed by French architect Pierre Chareau. This is the first show devoted to these works, according to Guild Hall.

“Here is the earliest mature work of the youngest abstract expressionist, as he transitions from an exploration of surrealism and automatism to the vocabulary of abstract expressionism,” according to an exhibition information. “...Here we see Motherwell boldly exploring, honing his style and emerging as master while still engaging in experiment, even revising his works after they had already been exhibited.”



“Black Figuration on Blue” by Robert Motherwell, 1950. Oil on Masonite, 35 1/2 x 47 1/2 inches. Grand Rapids Museum. Museum Purchase: Kate P. Wolters Family in Memory of Richard Wolters, and Gift of the Dedalus Foundation. ©VAGA, NY.

“Robert Motherwell: The East Hampton Years, 1944 - 1952” includes oil paintings on a variety of mediums including board, paper, masonite, cardboard, homosate and canvas. Additionally, there are mixed media works on board and paper and a single work of ink on paper. Most of the art is abstract but there are works with recognizable elements and figuration plus mural studies.

Tuchman writes that Motherwell’s “East Hampton works were lionized years before colleagues such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still rose to prominence. Once Motherwell became identified with his series of Elegies to the Spanish Republic, these pivotal paintings garnered less attention and are now no longer well known.”

The exhibition and new monograph aim to change this by drawing attention to these artworks. In addition, the show also aims to explore Motherwell’s contributions to Abstract Expressionism in general and within the context of the East End community, stated Guild Hall.

As as start, a panel discussion will help put the works in context. Held on Saturday from 3 to 4 p.m. before the opening, panelist include Jack Flam, president and CEO of the Dedalus Foundation; Alastair Gordon, WSJ magazine’s contributing editor for Architecture and Design; Catherine Craft, associate curator of the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas and artist Clifford Ross. The panel will be moderated by Tuchman.

The exhibition has a public Opening Reception on Saturday from 4 to 6 p.m. On September 7, Tuchman returns to give a Gallery Talk on Motherwell at noon. The exhibition remains on view through October 13, 2014.



“Barcelona” by Robert Motherwell, 1950. Mixed Media, 30 x 38 inches. High Museum of Art, Atlanta: Purchase with funds from Alfred Austell Thornton in memory of Leila Austell Thornton and Albert Edward Thornton, Sr., and Sara Miller Hoyt Venable and William Hoyt Venable and Gift of the Dedalus Foundation. ©VAGA, NY.

Robert Motherwell (1915 - 1991) was born in Aberdeen, WA and was the youngest member of the New York School, a phrase he himself coined. After graduating from Stanford University in 1937, he made painting his primary vocation. His first solo show was presented at the Raymond Duncan

Gallery in Paris in 1939, according to the Guggenheim.

In September 1940, Motherwell moved to New York and began studying art history at Columbia University with Meyer Schapiro, who encouraged him to become a painter, according to the Guggenheim Museum. In 1941, Motherwell traveled to Mexico with Chilean artist [Roberto Matta](#), whose work with automatism influenced Motherwell and other AB-EX artists, according to [MoMA](#). After Motherwell's return to New York six months later, his artist circle began to include William Baziotes, Willem de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, and Jackson Pollock, states the Guggenheim.

In 1944, Motherwell he had his first solo show at [Peggy Guggenheim's](#) Art of This Century gallery, which became known for exhibiting art by American Abstract Expressionists, including a solo show for Jackson Pollock which helped launch the young artist. Motherwell's exhibition highlights include MoMA's landmark "The New American Painting" exhibition in 1958-59; a traveling retrospectives presented by Albright-Knox Art Gallery of Buffalo plus numerous important gallery and museum exhibitions.

BASIC INFO: "Robert Motherwell: The East Hampton Years, 1944-1952" has an Opening Reception on Saturday, August 9, from 4 to 6 p.m. A panel discussion takes place on Saturday, August 9, from 3 to 4 p.m. The exhibition remains on view through October 13, 2014. Guild Hall is located at 158 Main Street, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.guildhall.org.

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