



## Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas

*By David Anfam*

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This extraordinary book is the first volume of the definitive catalogue raisonné of the work of Mark Rothko, one of the greatest abstract artists of the twentieth century. It documents Rothko's entire output of paintings on canvas and panel, reproducing all the works in color. An introductory text also investigates every essential feature of Rothko's art.

David Anfam explores the underestimated variety as well as the amazing continuity of Rothko's pictures. These include the images for which Rothko is famous, the large, hypnotic, and poignant fields of color along with almost 400 further pictures that reveal a far less well known figure who was attuned by turns to realism, expressionism, surrealism, and the avant-garde issues of his era. Anfam presents a radical overview of Rothko's achievement, offering an analysis of its sources and themes: these extend from a study of such old masters as Rembrandt and Vermeer to his eventual groundbreaking vision of painting as an environment, expressed in the mural cycles and the architectural framework of the Rothko Chapel in Houston. Anfam pays special attention to the physical makeup of the paintings, as well as to Rothko's innovative sense of space, color, and surface, his complex technical procedures, and the symbolism of the work. This is combined with an account of Rothko's stylistic evolution and its chronology, tracing its development from figuration to an abstract vision imbued with a profound grasp of how the viewer has an interactive role to play in perceiving the works. The volume also includes the most extensive Rothko bibliography ever published. The fruit of almost a decade of research, this monumental publication is the reference point for all future studies of Rothko's art.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

When Mark Rothko (1903-70) started his career in New York in the early 1920s, America had no established art. Before his tragic suicide, he completed a mural series for the Rothko Chapel commissioned by the de Menil family, accomplishing for American painting what the Monet water lilies did for French painting in the 1920s. Recently, Rothko has received renewed attention with a traveling retrospective from the National Gallery, currently at the Whitney Museum in New York. Anfam (Mark Rothko: The Chapel Commission, Menil Foundation, 1996) connects Rothko to major figures in art history with a historical, philosophical, literary, mythical, and psychological framework for the artist's development as a painter. Within the catalog itself the reproductions are grouped chronologically, with a complete concordance. Inscription, collection, provenance, and exhibition and publication information for each painting are also provided, and the book closes with the most extensive bibliography compiled on Rothko to date. Lacking only is a chronology of the artist's life. The catalog will continue with works on paper in additional volumes. A necessary purchase for research and academic libraries. —Ellen Bates, New York  
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Review

"A landmark in scholarship for one of North America's most sublime painters." -- *The Chicago Tribune*, 12/6/98

...it's needed, it's serious and it's well-produced.... By reproducing every painting in color and supplying complete specifications for each, in chronological order, Anfam gives the reader a better sense of the slow, visceral struggle that is any great artist's path to his or her best work. And Anfam's meticulous unearthing of nearly all of Rothko's literary and art historical sources for his imagery (or lack of imagery) reveals the contest between inclusiveness (that is, acknowledging the huge and multifarious culture of the human race) and exclusiveness (getting down to visual essentials) that was always a part of Rothko's work. -- *The Los Angeles Times Sunday Book Review*, Peter Plagens

David Anfam's Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas is everything that a catalogue raisonne should be, and more besides. It is introduced by useful directives as to how the catalogue can best be used, and a brief discussion of the problems encountered in organising it. . . . In accordance with the wishes of Rothko's estate, discussion of individual works . . . is confined to the introductory essays. This means that the 836 images illustrated are allowed to speak entirely for themselves; of these 261 have never been exhibited, and 296 have never been hitherto reproduced. . . . The resulting tome is . . . beautifully produced and pleasing in format . . . We see Rothko the painter whole as never before. . . . This volume establishes Anfam as our greatest Rothko authority and is one of the most significant contributions to the history of twentieth-century art to have been made in recent years. -- *John Golding, Burlington Magazine*

Far and away the best monograph ever written on Rothko. -- *Art Forum*

Somewhere in this volume you can find just about everything you will want to know about what Rothko painted between 1924 and his death in 1970. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, John Russell

From the Inside Flap

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and panel, reproducing all the extant works in color. An introductory text also investigates every essential feature of Rothko's art.

David Anfam explores the underestimated variety as well as the amazing continuity of Rothko's pictures. These include the images for which Rothko is famous--the large, hypnotic, and poignant fields of color--along with almost 400 further pictures that reveal a far less well known yet fascinating figure who was attuned by turns to realism, expressionism, surrealism, and the avant-garde issues of his era.

Anfam presents a radical overview of Rothko's achievement, drawing upon unpublished material and interviews. Special attention is given to Rothko's sources and themes: they extend from a study of such old masters as Rembrandt and Vermeer to his eventual groundbreaking vision of painting as an environment, expressed in the mural cycles and the architectonic ensemble of the Rothko Chapel in Houston. The author analyzes the physical makeup of the paintings, as well as Rothko's innovative sense of space, color, and surface, his complex technical procedures, and the symbolism and philosophical basis of the work. This is combined with an account of Rothko's stylistic evolution and its chronology. Rothko's progress is traced from figuration to an abstract vision imbued with a profound grasp of how the viewer has an interactive role to play in perceiving the works. The volume also includes the most extensive Rothko bibliography ever published. The result of nearly a decade of research sponsored by the National Gallery of Art, this monumental publication is the reference point for all future studies of Rothko's art.

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