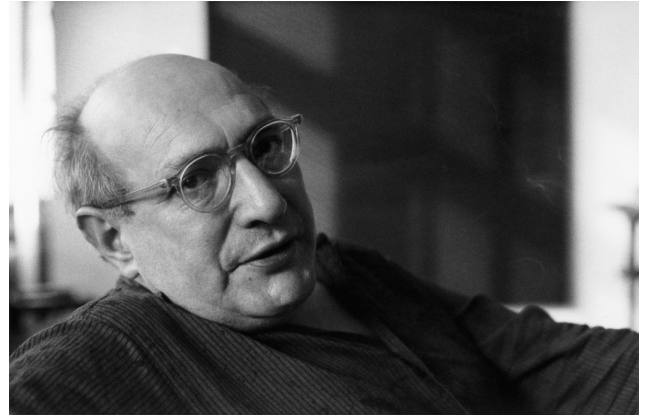


Mark Rothko

About

- Rothko was born as **Markus Rotkovich** in 1903 in Dinsk, Russia (now Daugavpils, Latvia).
- Via Kandel, "Dinsk was part of [...] The Pale of Settlement, the only area in Russia in which Jews were allowed by law to reside."¹
- Emigrated to Portland, Oregon in 1913 with his mother and sister to join his father and two brothers who had moved a few years prior.²
- Enrolled at Yale University in 1921, but left in 1923 to study briefly at the Art Students League in NYC.³
- Rothko attended few classes at the ASL and was essentially self-taught by attending exhibitions and visiting studios of artists.²
- Started using the moniker "Mark Rothko" in 1940 and legally changed his name in 1959.⁴
- Earned his income during the Depression via the Works Project Administration and teaching children at the Brooklyn Jewish Center.⁴



Alexander Liberman, Mark Rothko, 1964.

- Rothko claimed that, "teaching children enabled him to understand their ability to communicate their perceptions of reality in terms of simple visual images."⁵
- Suffered an aneurysm May 1968 and took his own life 50 years ago today. Many speculated the darker colored paintings at the end of his career to be reflecting his depression, but he denied self-expression, claiming he merely conveyed "his ideas about the condition of mankind."⁶

"It was with the utmost reluctance that I found the figure could not serve my purpose,"
- Mark Rothko⁵

Perspective Shift

- The beginning of Rothko's career was heavily influenced by Dadaism and European Surrealism following the World Wars (think Duchamp, Dalí, Picasso).⁷
- His first step towards the color-field paintings that he is widely known for consisted of giant blobs of color that freely spread.⁸
- He refined his technique a couple years later by "simplifying the forms to create paintings of soft luminous rectangles that appear to float."⁸

¹ Eric R. Kandel, *Reductionism in Art and Brain Science: Bridging the Two Cultures*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 123.

² Bonnie Clearwater, "Rothko, Mark," *Grove Art Online*, (2003), par. 1.

³ Kandel, *Reductionism in Art and Brain Science*, 124.

⁴ Clearwater, "Rothko," par. 4.

⁵ "Mark Rothko Biography," par. 9.

⁶ Clearwater, "Rothko," par. 14.

⁷ Clearwater, "Rothko," par. 5.

⁸ Clearwater, "Rothko," par. 9.

Abstraction: Color-Field

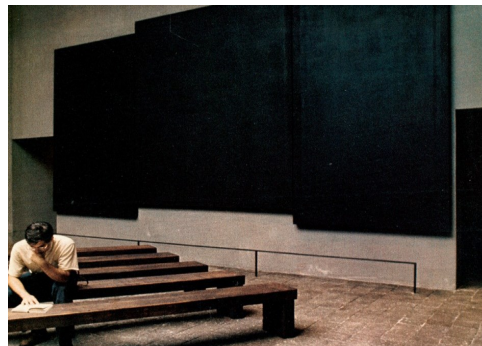
- Rothko is labeled abstract because of his “highly original approach,” in which he stopped painting figuratively in favor of “universal human drama.”⁹
- He found that the core meaning of his paintings remained throughout the years, and emphasized that he hadn’t eliminated human form but rather used symbols as a substitute.¹⁰
- Rothko rejected the abstract label, claiming disinterest in “relationships of color or form,” and that he only wished to display “basic human emotions.”¹¹



Mark Rothko, *Orange and Red on Red*, 1957.

Rothko Chapel

- The Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas was commissioned in 1965 as “an interfaith sanctuary for human rights.”¹²
- Rothko often stated that someone who truly understands the emotion behind his paintings would have a religious interaction with them, as he did.¹³
- The de Menil family recognized this and decided he was best suited to create a space in which mediation is facilitated.¹⁴



Philip Johnson, *Rothko Chapel*, 1970-1971.

- The Rothko Chapel is eight-sided and contains fourteen of Rothko’s dark-canvas pieces painted between 1964 and 1965.¹⁴

“None of Rothko’s figurative paintings are remotely capable of evoking as emotionally rich and varied, as spiritual, a response as these reductionist dark canvases.” - Kandel¹⁵

⁹ Clearwater, “Rothko,” par. 9.

¹⁰ Clearwater, “Rothko,” par. 10.

¹¹ F. Zaletilo, “Statement about Art,” *Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre*, par. 3.

¹² Kandel, *Reductionism in Art and Brain Science*, 128.

¹³ Zaletilo, “Statement about Art,” par. 3.

¹⁴ Susan E. Davidson and Eric M. Wolf, “Menil, de family,” *Grove Art Online*, (2003), par. 2.

¹⁵ Kandel, *Reductionism in Art and Brain Science*, 130.

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