

ROBERT

MOTHERWELL

PRESS KIT

Frieze

‘You Have to Be There’: The Power and Presence of Robert Motherwell’s Large-Scale Paintings

In a show at Kasmin Gallery, New York, size reveals not the late painter’s ego, but rather his belief in personal engagement

Matthew Holman

April 10, 2019



Robert Motherwell, ‘Sheer Presence: Monumental Paintings by Robert Motherwell’, installation view, 2019.

Courtesy: Kasmin Gallery, New York; photograph: Diego Flores

‘The supreme gift, after light, is scale’, wrote Robert Motherwell in a letter to the poet Frank O’Hara in 1965. As demonstrated by an exhibition of his large-format paintings that opened at Kasmin Gallery’s recently-inaugurated 509 West 27th Street space last month, the artistic possibilities of scale were a constant concern throughout Motherwell’s long career. This exhibition of mostly later work is the first to focus solely on the monumental in his oeuvre, and features seven paintings: some, like *Dublin, 1916*, with *Black and Tan* (1963-64), take great joy in expanses of chromatic juxtaposition while others, such as *Forced Entry* (1981), exercise just a handful of brushstrokes to construct a rudimentary painterly gesture. Each of the eight captivate.

The ambition to scale up paintings was shared by Motherwell's fellow Abstract Expressionists, some of whom had cut their teeth making public murals for the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s – and these artists increasingly 'reject[ed] the easel and yearn[ed] for the wall', as the critic Clement Greenberg memorably put it. But Motherwell's version of the large-format canvas remained committed to personal and ethical responsibility, not merely blown up for the sake of brashness or ego. For him, it entailed being present with the painting, rather than a photograph or reproduction, in order to engage with its reach and dimensions up close – and in so doing recover what he called a 'sense of the sublime and the tragic that had not existed since Goya and Turner.'



Robert Motherwell, 'Sheer Presence: Monumental Paintings by Robert Motherwell', installation view, 2019.
Courtesy: Kasmin Gallery, New York; photograph: Diego Flores

The exhibition's opening work, which occupies a central frontal wall, is also its most compelling: *The Grand Inquisitor* (1989-90) (earlier title: *Catalonia*), a painting completed by Motherwell in the year before his death, and perhaps the best example of his *Hollow Men* motif. Its horizontal blacks and red are overpowered by ochre oblongs and scribbles, and a yellow background that suggests paint peeling from a chipped plaster wall. Photographs taken by painter Joan Banach of Motherwell completing the work in his Provincetown studio reveal the physical demands it placed on an arthritic Motherwell as he painted while kneeling or at full-stretch, moving side-to-side to build up gestural movement.

On the reverse of this dividing wall, we return to Motherwell's long-time engagement with Spanish themes and to one of three fine examples of works from his 'Open' (1967-1991) series, typically conceived as single-colour surfaces

on which the artist constructed simple yet beguiling line formations, usually in charcoal, that have often been read as an opposing image to his more gestural and curvilinear 'Elegies' (1948-1990). *Open No. 97: The Spanish House* (1969), an architectonic build-up of vertical rectangles and tilted lines that imply figural allusion to Mediterranean windows and a roof, set against an incandescent orange sunlight, was inspired by a tatty photograph of a harbour house in Cadaqués that Motherwell had on constant view in Provincetown. Like many paintings from the 'Open' series, *The Spanish House* succeeds as a kind of abstracted realism, drawing out fundamental visual correspondences but never relinquishing its own unique spatial mystery.



Robert Motherwell, 'Sheer Presence: Monumental Paintings by Robert Motherwell', installation view, 2019.
Courtesy: Kasmin Gallery, New York; photograph: Diego Flores

While the paintings in this exhibition as a whole are unapologetically monumental in scale, they all shy away from a version of monumentality that desires to represent a definitive or absolute testament to a particular place, text or idea. Five of the seven displayed works are listed as having been produced over several years, as Motherwell revised and altered before, after and sometimes even during exhibition display. 'That is a genuine artistic practice', notes the show's director Eric Gleason, and 'if Motherwell were still working today, I think it's safe to assume he wouldn't care how his paintings looked on Instagram.' These monumental paintings had been at least partly executed to challenge the domesticity of easel painting, moving the scaled-up artwork into new and public spaces, but that does not preclude their intimacy. Far from it: you have to be there.

AD

Robert Motherwell Found Unlikely Inspiration in Architecture

A new solo exhibition on the artist at Kasmin gallery in New York takes a second look at the Abstract Expressionist painter

Katherine McGrath

March 22, 2019



Robert Motherwell in his Provincetown studio, 1969, with *Open No. 97: The Spanish House*. © 2019 Dedalus Foundation, Inc. Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

As one of the founders of the Abstract Expressionist movement, Robert Motherwell was nothing if not ambitious. “It took a lot of courage for Motherwell to make these,” remarks Kasmin Gallery’s Director Eric Gleason, as he gestures toward the sweeping canvases pinned to the gallery’s walls. “When he was making these, there just weren’t very many big spaces to show them. He knew he would be sacrificing visibility for a lot of these.” Given the sheer abundance of galleries and art spaces in New York City alone—throw a stone in Chelsea and you’re apt to hit a white cube—it’s difficult to imagine that there weren’t many spaces to show nine-foot-tall paintings in 1970s New York, but aside from Sidney Janis and Marlborough Gallery, such was the case.



An installation view of "Sheer Presence: Monumental Paintings by Robert Motherwell." Courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery. Photo: Christopher Stach.

In 2019, though, the exhibition of the artist's large-scale works, "Sheer Presence: Monumental Paintings by Robert Motherwell," feels perfectly suited for the space. "I was having lunch with Paul [Kasmin] one day a few years back, and he pointed out this space from the street," says Morgan Spangle, vice president and treasurer of the Dedalus Foundation, which Motherwell set up a decade before his death to foster the support of modern art. Spangle is referencing Kasmin's newest Chelsea space at 509 West 27th Street, which opened late last year; designed by Markus Dochantschi of studioMDA, the gallery is generous with space and flooded with natural sunlight. "When he told me about it, I thought, 'What a great venue to show big paintings!' A show like this is unprecedented, because it's a logistical nightmare with works of this size. You've simply got to have the space for it," says Spangle. Though most gallery buildings at the time were small, Motherwell and his contemporaries had institutional ambition; soon, larger exhibition spaces were built to accommodate their work.



An installation view of *Open No. 97: The Spanish House*, (1969). Courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery. Photo: Christopher Stach.

As Motherwell was a serious intellectual, it's been well-documented that his work was in constant dialogue with literature, philosophy, and history—but architecture was an undeniable influence as well. The show, which runs through May 18, features eight large-scale canvases, including three works from his “Open” series, for which he is perhaps most well-known. “The ‘Open’ series began in March 1967, when I leaned a vertical canvas against a larger vertical canvas (about 6½' x 9½'), which had its ground painted all over, in yellow ochre,” reads a statement from the artist included in his catalogue raisonné. “It occurred to me that the proportion of the smaller vertical canvas, leaning on the larger vertical canvas, was rather beautiful, and so I outlined the smaller canvas in charcoal...so that the lines looked like a door—a very abstract one.... I brought it home from the studio to look at it, and one day decided to turn it upside down, so that the ‘door’ became a ‘window.’” Just as many artists who came before him did, Motherwell saw windows as a metaphor for the relationship between inner emotions and outer senses—though in some cases he abstracted something from the physical world. One such instance, *Open No. 97: The Spanish House*, directly references and abstracts a house in Cadaqués, Spain, that Motherwell came across in a photo book. He was so taken by the image—for its architectural lines and forms, and the strong Spanish light—that he painted it and kept the photo on display in his studio for many years. In addition to his contemporaries—which included Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Willem de Kooning—architects such as Wallace Harrison, Philip Johnson, and other big names around town were counted as friends. The French architect and designer Pierre Chareau was an especially close friend and designed his East Hampton home—which was said to have been the first Modernist structure in the Hamptons (though it was torn down in 1985).



A photo of the house in Cadaqués, Spain, that Motherwell kept on view in his studio for many years. Image courtesy of Kasmin Gallery.

While never a practicing architect himself, Motherwell was thoughtful in his division of space. In his studio in Greenwich, Connecticut, where he worked from 1971 until his death in 1991, Motherwell divided the 100-foot-long carriage house into three separate studios—one for painting, one for printmaking, and one for collage. Artist friends who knew him well said that the architectural division of space was perfectly suited for him, as it allowed him to entertain and collaborate with the printmakers in his printmaking studio, while keeping his painting studio private—just for him. He never felt fully finished with his paintings, often revising and repainting them even after they'd been exhibited and catalogued. It's the evidence of these revisions that are some of the most striking aspects of the show—a sliver of bright green underpainting that jumps out at you if you look closely for it. "If you're trying to look at these paintings in JPEGs, it's not happening," says Gleason. "The painterliness, the artistry; the deliberation employed and the evolution that a lot of these have taken...you can't get that with an image. You really have to be in the room with them. This body of work requires that."

how to spend it

A Monumental Robert Motherwell show

Seminal large-format artworks by one of the youngest artists of the New York School – which included Rothko, Kooning and Pollock – go on show at Kasmin

March 17, 2019

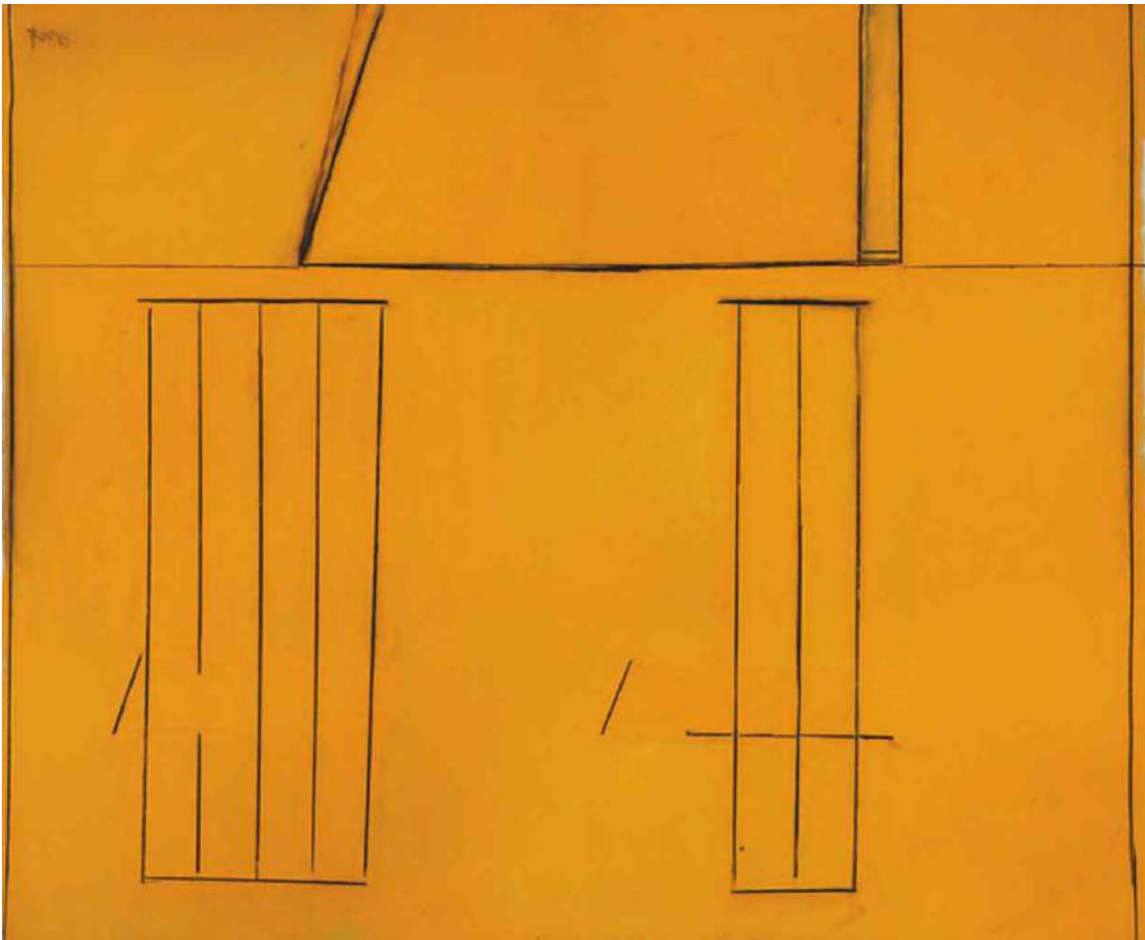
Christina Ohly Evans



Robert Motherwell in his Provincetown, Massachusetts studio in 1969

Image: © 2019 The Dedalus Foundation, Inc/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

Sheer Presence: Monumental Paintings by Robert Motherwell will be staged at Kasmin in New York from March 21 to May 18 in what will be the first exhibition to focus exclusively on the late artist's large-format works dating from the 1960s to 1990s. The event is also set to include a group of seminal paintings from The Dedalus Foundation, the arts organisation founded by Motherwell in 1981.



Open No. 97: The Spanish House (1969), by Robert Motherwell

Image: © 2019 The Dedalus Foundation, Inc/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Courtesy of Kasmin.

The abstract expressionist's masterworks, some measuring 304cm x 223cm, promise to be a visual feast set against Kasmin's spare 279sq m interior. The eight graphic canvases on view include *Dublin 1916, with Black and Tan* (1963-64); *The Forge* (1965-66/1967-68); and *The Grand Inquisitor* (1989-90). Motherwell was known for his gestural, broad brushstrokes and dramatic contrasts of colour, but this exhibition also includes subtler works such as *Open in Grey with White Edge* (1971) – a soothing acrylic with faint hints of charcoal on canvas. Select pieces in the exhibition will be for sale through the gallery, priced from \$2m to \$10m.

In a career spanning over five decades, the prolific Motherwell was a painter, printmaker, teacher and editor, and these works are among his most visually arresting. "Motherwell was an especially emphatic, intuitive mark-maker, and the large-format canvas provided a vehicle for him to really embrace his painterly ambitions," says Kasmin director Eric Gleason.

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

The New Criterion

October 2017
p. 53-54

Gallery chronicle

by James Panero

Following its summer aestivation, the New York gallery scene returned with strong openings all September. Galleries are the new museums—places where art can still speak for itself. But galleries are also a dying breed—dying not for our sins but our distractions. These days any gallery that finds a way to survive into another season seems like a triumph in adversity. Some still triumph mightily.

Consider the three-show, three-venue lineup at Chelsea's Paul Kasmin, which continues through October. At the gallery's 293 Tenth Avenue location, "Robert Motherwell: Early Paintings" examines the lesser-known, experimental abstractions of the artist's pre-"Elegy" years.¹ Around the corner at Kasmin's 515 West Twenty-seventh Street venue, "Caro & Olitski: 1965–1968, Painted Sculptures and the Bennington Sprays" looks to the personal friendship and creative dialogue between sculptor and painter.² And finally, up the block at the gallery's 297 Tenth Avenue address, in "The Enormity of the Possible," the independent curator Priscilla Vail Caldwell brings the first generation of American modernists together with some

of the later Abstract Expressionists—Milton Avery, Oscar Bluemner, Charles Burchfield, Stuart Davis, John Marin, Elie Nadelman, and Helen Torr, among others, with Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko.³

Judging from the examples in "Early Paintings," Robert Motherwell displayed graphic confidence and innovative range from the very start. In the early 1940s, Motherwell was encouraged out of the classroom and into the studio by Meyer Schapiro, his doctoral advisor at Columbia University. He visited the painter Roberto Matta in Mexico City and, back in New York, saw Piet Mondrian's first solo exhibition at the Valentine Gallery. Both were influential. By his mid-twenties, where this exhibition begins, a dual sense for narrative mood and pictorial space already infused his work, with geometry often concealing and imprisoning the forms underneath.

The Spanish Prison (Window), from 1943–44, explores the ominous undertones of abstract line and form, in a work that Motherwell later said was the first of his "Spanish Elegies." The paintings that follow here, through the early 1950s, further distill this abstract mood, with formal structure evolving into ever-more-expressive deployments of color and paint-handling—the siren flash of *Orange Personage* (1947), the blood and bones of *The Hotel Corridor* (1950).

"Caro & Olitski: 1965–1968, Painted Sculptures and the Bennington Sprays" is a revela-

tory exhibition for the many resonances it finds between the British sculptor and the American painter, who each joined the art department of Vermont's Bennington College in 1963.

Both artists famously explored the abstract potential of industrial tools and materials—Caro's oxyacetylene welding equipment; Olitski's spray guns. They also thought similarly of color and line, exploring not only new materials but also the new shapes they found in their painted and sculpted forms. The lines at the edges of Olitski's paintings frame the airy voids of his sprays, while the welded metal of Caro's sculptures traces out shapes in space. Their shared sense for seamless industrial texture, with Caro's toothy enamels and Olitski's cloud-like sprays, makes this a perfectly paired show.

There may be no greater joy than seeing the first generation of American modernists in Chelsea, where anything made before 1945 is prehistory, and the American modernists are the neglected Old Masters. "The Enormity of the Possible" gathers the best of them—the haunted forms of Elie Nadelman, the jazz syncopations of Stuart Davis, the moody mountainscapes of Milton Avery.

Charles Burchfield never painted a bad picture, and *Lilacs No. 2* (ca. 1939–63) must rank among the best of them, as flowers, trees, and house all reveal animating forces in a living, breathing verdure.

Many of the individual works here sing, but as a whole the exhibition is overhung and overthought, taking on more than the storefront space might allow with a show that wants to spread out, and with fewer lines than one might wish drawn between the generations. The installation feels like the booth at an art fair, and perhaps in a way it is—a cubicle of American art history on display, for too short a time, on a corner of contemporary Chelsea.

1 "Robert Motherwell: Early Paintings" opened at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 293 Tenth Avenue, New York, on September 7 and remains on view through October 28, 2017.

2 "Caro & Olitski: 1965–1968, Painted Sculptures and the Bennington Sprays" opened at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 515 West 27th Street, New York, on September 7 and remains on view through October 25, 2017.

3 "The Enormity of the Possible" opened at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 297 Tenth Avenue, New York, on September 7 and remains on view through October 28, 2017.

The New Criterion October 2017

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

HYPERALLERGIC

In Chelsea, Three Disappointing Art Exhibitions (And One Pleasant Surprise)

Finding a lot of forgettable work from renowned artists, and an unexpectedly happy encounter with a classic.

October 10, 2017

Paddy Johnson



Paddy Johnson writes, “Is this painting evidence of Motherwell’s truly visionary thinking — a premonition of President Donald Trump staring into the eclipse?”

There’s a particular kind of artist that gets a pass for bad work. Typically, these artists have produced some truly iconic work in their careers — so iconic that these pieces give everything else a special sheen. Whenever we look at their new work, we see it through this lens. When the new work seems terrible, we hope we’re wrong — we don’t want anything to diminish the genius that created that heroically original piece; when the new work is great, it’s further proof that we were right about them all along. And ultimately, collectors reliably buy the new work either out of a genuine interest in the artist, a desire to increase their social status, or to protect previous investments.

Perhaps it’s no surprise, then, that as this fall art season gets underway, Chelsea feels overrun with A-list artists making middling work. Take Maya Lin at Pace Gallery. Her earthworks, public art, and memorials are some of the

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most moving works of the 20th and 21st centuries. This includes the Vietnam Memorial Wall, a piece that lists all the names of the fallen American Soldiers as its structure appears to sink into the ground, and her Wave Field series, a pair of Land art works (one at Storm King and another at the University of Michigan) that consist of undulating grassy hills resembling waves 10 to 15 feet high. These pieces create a sense of awe, enormity, and poetry through simple forms. Her work at Pace did none of that.

Installation view, Maya Lin: Ebb and Flow (photo by Kerry Ryan McFate, courtesy Pace Gallery © Maya Lin Studio)
For her show, "Ebb and Flow," Lin created 11 forgettable works that explore the different states of water. The first piece a viewer encountered when entering the gallery, "Folding the Columbia," is what appears to be a root system made from thousands of green marbles affixed to the wall and the floor. (It's actually a map of the rivers in Colombia contorted to fit along the wall, floor and ceiling.) Another wall piece functioned the same way, only using recycled silver. The piece resembles something you might imagine Tara Donovan making if she were short on materials. Were it a work by Donovan, though, it would merely be a failed experiment in aesthetics; because Lin's work is inspired by environmental concerns, whatever message there is gets reduced as well. In this case, that means representing a finite and more valuable resource (water) with a more common recycled material (silver), which isn't exactly challenging the collector. Are the oil barons and princes buying the work and supporting Lin going to change their naughty ways now that they've been schooled? No.

While there was only one bad art show with a cause above 23rd street, there was more than one crappy exhibition by an A-list artist. Cheim and Read is showing new works by the 78-year-old artist Louise Fishman. She has been making work forever, and while I've never cared for much of it, I get why it's popular: it looks a lot like the grandiose Abstract Expressionist work we've seen a million times in museums. She is best known for a body of iconic works: large abstract paintings that evidenced a love of the grid. Back in the 1990s, she created greyish paintings made with beeswax and ashes she brought back from Auschwitz. They packed a punch. Fishman's new works do not.

The exhibition at Cheim and Read features a group of her recent paintings, mostly indistinguishable from Willem de Kooning's Abstract Expressionist work of the '60s. Think thick, single-gesture brushwork against the canvas with a limited palette. In fairness to Fishman, I actually enjoy the openness of these new works, in contrast to her more densely-layered work. But they still have the same problem most of her works have: aside from the fun of identifying a few historical references (Joan Mitchell, de Kooning, Robert Motherwell), there's not much else that sticks. Her worst works resemble mud. I left thinking about how much easier it must be to sell work to collectors that looks like what they already know, than to try to convince them to take the groundbreaking stuff no one knows they want yet.

Repetitiveness is a common problem, and at the higher levels this usually manifests in blue-chip artists making endless knockoffs of their most sought-after work. James Turrell, Damien Hirst, and Julian Opie are probably the worst offenders, but most artists have something they produce a lot of to pay the bills. There's nothing wrong with that, but it suits some kinds of work better than others. Amanda Ross Ho, for example, has made more than one oversized t-shirt — and usually I find them quite funny. Not this time. Though there are no biggie tees at Mitchell-Innes and Nash, she still managed to turn a pretty good joke (the show's title, "My Pen is Huge") into a groaning one-liner.

That title is the first thing you see upon entering the gallery. It's a whole lot less funny once you get into the show and realize it's a statement of fact, not a metaphor. Inside the gallery, there are two oversized, Ikea-type tables covered with ginormous pencils, pens, paint brushes, scrunchies, coins, cups, and wine glasses. Some regular-size objects are sprinkled in, too — some napkins and a comb, for example. And around the walls are several large paintings of clocks.

Many of the works in Ross Ho's show were produced in the gallery over the month of August, when she used the space as a studio after losing the lease on her Los Angeles studio. There may be a story here about gentrification, but as a viewer I felt about as much sympathy for the artist as I did when Hauser and Wirth was forced out of its enormous location on West 18th Street. Sure, it sucks, but this is an artist whose livelihood will not be destroyed

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by displacement. As such, the exhibition reads more like a checklist of trademark features collectors were likely to seek out than an effective social message.

As I reflected on the shows I've seen above 23rd Street this season, it occurred to me that the most unexpected exhibition wasn't by an art star who failed to perform, but rather one who for once didn't disappoint. Specifically, I'm talking about Robert Motherwell's paintings at Paul Kasmin.

Motherwell is an artist whose work I have come to dread due to the ubiquity of unbalanced abstraction in the secondary market. So it was a pleasure, a relief, and a great joy to see a collection of works that actually show off his skill as a painter. "Orange Personage" is an abstract painting in yellow and orange that depicts a stick figure staring into the sun. (Is this painting evidence of Motherwell's truly visionary thinking — a premonition of President Donald Trump staring into the eclipse?) The palette undulates gently, suggesting a hot summer evening in the woods or a strange circus act. Nearby, "La Belle Mexicaine (Maria)" recalls the paintings of Francis Bacon and Pablo Picasso, minus the anguish. It's a simple painting of a woman who also resembles a chicken. It's very strange and kind of wonderful, in part because, whether woman or chicken, the figure seems perfectly happy.



Robert Motherwell, "Orange Personage" (1947), oil and sand on canvas, 54.75 x 37 inches (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

In the end, the Motherwell show made my trip to Chelsea pretty good. I like being surprised and, somewhat unexpectedly, he came through in that regard. But I also wondered if there might not be a lesson in all this. I had no expectations for Motherwell, so when I saw paintings I loved, I was happily surprised and humbled. Lin, Fishman, and Ross Ho are in a less enviable position. Artists like these have been lucky enough to have one or more breakthroughs. But with that good fortune come expectations that those artists will not just have one, but continued breakthroughs throughout their careers. These are unfair standards and it makes me think that lowering expectations just a tad might be beneficial. Doing so won't transform bad art into good — it probably won't even create more Motherwell experiences — but it will blunt the disappointment of seeing extraordinary artists make the same mistakes over and over again.

<https://hyperallergic.com/404835/in-chelsea-three-disappointing-art-exhibitions-and-one-pleasant-surprise/>

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October 5, 2017

Robert Motherwell: Early Paintings | Enormity of the Possible
by MARY ANN CAWS
PAUL KASMIN GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 7 – OCTOBER 28, 2017



Installation view of Robert Motherwell: Early Paintings . Photo by: Diego Flores / Paul Kasmin Gallery © Dedalus Foundation, Inc./ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Not far apart, about two minutes or a bit more by foot, depending on what friends you see along the way, are the two present exhibitions at Paul Kasmin Gallery, at 293 and 297 Tenth Avenue.

Spanning the 1940s and 1950s, Robert Motherwell: Early Paintings means to investigate Motherwell's "ever-oscillating positions between representation and abstraction; automatism and predetermination; and object versus image." What really fascinated me were the interrelations brought up by these works, still so present in the minds of anyone who spoke at length with Motherwell about his readings (vast) and memories of other works, both visual and literary. Look at *The Dark Lady of 1947/85*, dated c. 1968 on the verso: we know how he was haunted by Shakespeare and the address of the sonnets, thus the possible depth of this viewing and the bright to contrast with the thinking of dark, we can imagine splotches at the top. And take his *Three Figures of 1941*, never on public view before, with its crossed-out inscription: *El Miedo de la Oscuridad / The Fear of Darkness*, before which I couldn't help remembering Picasso's *Three Dancers of 1925*. So many branchings out! *The Untitled (Orange, Brown)* of c. 1951 with direct reference to Rembrandt's *Flayed Ox* and Soutine's recall of it is yet another. Motherwell is great at recalls...

Perhaps of all the striking relations leaping to mind is an untitled work of 1950 where you feel the vertical bars of *The Spanish Prison (Window)* of 1943-44, and the *Elegies* all at once.

Some will wonder about the use of "enormity," and how it usually attaches to something negative, but in *The Enormity of the Possible*, it is certainly the opposite case. How could the possible ever be anything but very, very big? And this exhibition is not to be believed: John Marin (one of my and many persons' favorite) appears on the cover of the catalogue with his *Movement VI* of 1946. You would love to abscond with it under your sleeve. I didn't do that, but just stood in happiness before this work and two others, the *Sea and Boat Fantasy* (1944) with the icons on the top bar, and the more complicated *Movement: Sea Played with Boat Motive* (1947).

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Installation view of Robert Motherwell: Early Paintings

Photo by: Diego Flores / Paul Kasmin Gallery © Dedalus Foundation, Inc./ Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

As happens with almost every work here – the Milton Averys in their spaciousness and clarity, the Rothko of 1932 (!), the Pollock (!), and the very grand Lee Krasner’s very grand Seated Figure of 1938–39, an oil and collage on linen – oh my goodness! Also, let me single out three Stuart Davis works, the Black and White Variation on “Pochade” (1956–58) – right there when you come in, so remarkably recognizable straight off – and the bright, bright Standard Brand No. 2 of 1960–61, with its pencil traces, and the totally gorgeous Open Book and Fruit of 1922, which does its legibility and outpouring and gustatory enjoyment for all of us, so early! Like a wakeup to end this piece with earliness.

<http://brooklynrail.org/2017/10/artseen/ROBERT-MOTHERWELL-Early-Paintings-and-Enormity-of-the-Possible>

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A New American Art Form
June 29, 2016
Tricia Dreverts



Every intelligent painter carries the whole culture of modern painting in his head. It is his real subject, of which everything he paints in both homage and a critique, and everything he says is a gloss." – Robert Motherwell.

Known as a painter and printmaker, American artist Robert Motherwell was also an accomplished, writer, editor and public speaker. He created a new American approach to European modernism, and through his writing and lectures, he became a voice for the Abstract Expressionist movement in modern art.

Motherwell's work often contains the contrasting themes of repression and rebellion, European modernism and American modernism, and formal and emotional approaches to the creation of art.

In an interview with PBS, Motherwell, said, "If the abstraction, the violence, the humanity was valid in Abstract Expressionism, then it cut out the ground from every other kind of

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painting.” His work developed out of a desire to create not only a new American art form but also to express the general themes of humanity in art.

Born in 1915 in Aberdeen, Wash., Motherwell’s prints, collages, and paintings are characterized by bold shapes and color and a unique balance between the restrained and the dynamic. The artist died in 1991 in Provincetown, Mass.

You can view some of Motherwell’s collages through May 21 at the new exhibition Robert Motherwell: The Art of Collage at the Paul Kasmin Gallery, 297 Tenth Ave. New York City.

The exhibition features works that reveal Motherwell’s lifelong fascination with collage as an art form. *White with Four Corners*, which was first displayed in 1965 at The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. and then at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the artists demonstrated his innovative tearing methods.

Country Life No. 1, first exhibited in Robert Motherwell: Collage at The Whitney Museum of American Art in 1968, uses a repurposed envelope to offer insight into daily life. The exhibition is organized in partnership with the Dedalus Foundation. Visit <http://www.paulkasmingallery.com/exhibitio>

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SOUELLETTE.COM
Wish I Still Smoked Gauloises Cigarettes
May 10th, 2016
Suzanne C. Ouellette



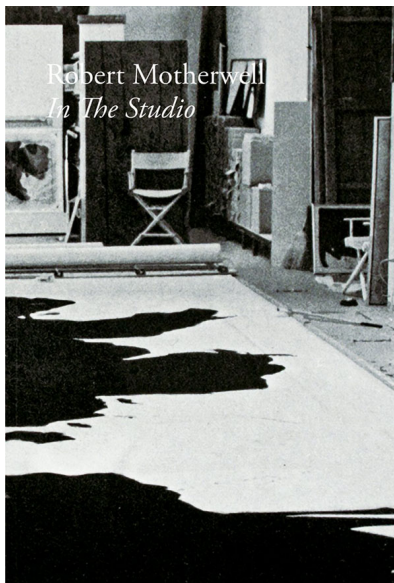
There is a stunning exhibition of Robert Motherwell's collages at the Paul Kasmin Gallery in Chelsea (on view at 293 Tenth Avenue until May 21st, 2016). Motherwell sets a simple thing like a cigarette wrapper in a background of beautiful color and thereby, makes it sing and change the viewer's heart rate.

And there are many more simple things on the gallery walls. Motherwell creates beautiful art from the stuff of daily life, the stuff at hand, the stuff delivered to him by the mailman. The remarkable emotional effect of his collages has of course to do with Motherwell's skill at selecting, tearing, pasting, and pulling stuff together to make an image. All that he knew about art also helped. But still, I find myself wondering about the difference made by the quality of the stuff he had to work with. I don't think the stuff of our daily lives is as good as what he had. For example, there is something very beautiful about the brown paper, many stamps, official labels, and hand lettered addresses in beautiful script that came with all the packages that Motherwell received, and then used in his art. Fed Ex envelopes and email messages just don't offer the same artistic possibilities, at least for me.

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Art Books In Conversation: John E. Scofield with Laila Pedro
06-03-16



In 1975, Robert Motherwell bought a chair from a young sculptor and designer named John E. Scofield. The two developed a friendship; soon Scofield became Motherwell's first studio assistant. Scofield's new book, *Robert Motherwell: In the Studio* (Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 2016), is a warm, informal memoir of apprenticeship, inspiration, and a friendship that endured until Motherwell's death. On a late April morning, he and Laila Pedro visited Paul Kasmin Gallery's exhibition, *Robert Motherwell: The Art of Collage* (April 14 – May 21, 2016). Surrounded by Motherwell's collages, they discussed fast cars, assigned reading, and the importance of mentors.

Laila Pedro (Rail): You first started working for Motherwell in 1975.

John Scofield: Bob bought a chair from me called *The Colored Chair* for four hundred and fifty bucks. I simply called him up and said, "I got a chair, do you wanna see it?" and he said "Yeah, sure." [*Laughter.*]

Rail: How did you get his number?

Scofield: He had invited me up for drinks on New Years Eve of '72. I called him up and told him that he shouldn't have moved to Greenwich, Connecticut, that it was a terrible mistake, and he said, "Well, how come?" He wasn't angry, he just said, "How come?" I said, "Greenwich is an emotional wasteland," and he said, "I know exactly what you mean." We got to be friends and I would help him out a little bit for half a day or a day. In '75 after he bought *The Colored Chair*, he said, "Gee, it looks like a Miró sculpture," and I said, "Gee, thanks." I had no idea who Miró was. I knew there was a thing at the Museum of Modern Art that was all shiny and everybody rubbed it in a certain spot and I thought, *wait a minute, could that be?*

I had to come up to speed really fast, which you had to do the whole time with him; he was a very intense, very smart guy, as you know. A writer. And he spoke in complete sentences that

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were fully edited and print-ready and so you had to be right there, or you looked like an idiot. There was a big reading list.

Rail: Can you talk about that assigned reading list? I thought it was so interesting. [Federico García] Lorca was the non-negotiable read, right? Which, of course, was important in terms of Motherwell's affinity for the Loyalist cause, and the deep feeling in the "Elegies to the Spanish Republic" (1948 – 67) series.

Scofield: I had heard of Lorca but I didn't really know anything about him, or that he was murdered by Franco's thugs. Motherwell did a painting, *At Five in the Afternoon* (1948 – 49), which is the refrain of one of the poems. The translation that Bob had read in the '40s was by Stephen Spender. Bob had to give a talk at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania and he said to me, "I want you to come down with me so that you can help me do the driving, it's kind of a long drive and I want to prepare some stuff and I may want to sit in the backseat and make a few notes or something." We ended up giving Spender a lift back to New York. It was a very interesting ride: it was a big Oldsmobile convertible with the top up, it was night time, we were late, I had to drive really fast.

Rail: I bet you hated that!

Scofield: [Laughter.] It was one of those jumbo cars that passed everything but a gas station. On the ride, Spender said, "I hear you're the last of your generation." And Bob cleared his throat and said, "Yes, there are only three of us left."

Rail: You mentioned in the book that you thought Spender felt jealous of Motherwell, I wondered if there is more to that story, because it's hardly more than a single sentence in the book.

Scofield: People were always jealous of him.

Rail: Jealous of his intellect or his talent?

Scofield: Everything. Everything! His verbal capacity—he was a painter, but he wrote so much, and so well; he knew everybody—he really annoyed a lot of people. What they didn't understand, and it took me the first of so many months to figure this out, was that the half of him sounding like the silver-spoon, holier-than-thou thing—half of it was self-deprecating comments if you really listened.

Rail: Yes, in that sort of flat, affectless way that takes a bit of an energetic mind to get at.

Scofield: You had to get into a rhythm. We just hit it off, even though we were about thirty-something years apart and I wasn't interested in being a painter.

Rail: You had this shared love of cars, too.

Scofield: Yeah, by the time I was twenty-one I had had ten cars, trucks, and motorcycles. [Laughter.] I'd buy one for fifty or a hundred bucks and fix them up, trade them for something. I'd always been involved in motors and stuff like that and he loved cars. He was totally into California car culture. He would buy and sell cars like you and I would buy a raincoat. From H&M. [Laughter.]

But as I say in the book, those cars were emblematic. If you had a hobby of collecting stamps, they are convenient to stick in a book or pin to the wall; cars are a bit more unwieldy. But they were an inspiration. He would buy one because he liked the particular green and it would sit in the driveway. We would all look at it trying to figure out what it was that he liked about it, which would jazz him up! He would do a couple of green collages and after that he didn't need the car anymore. [Laughter.]

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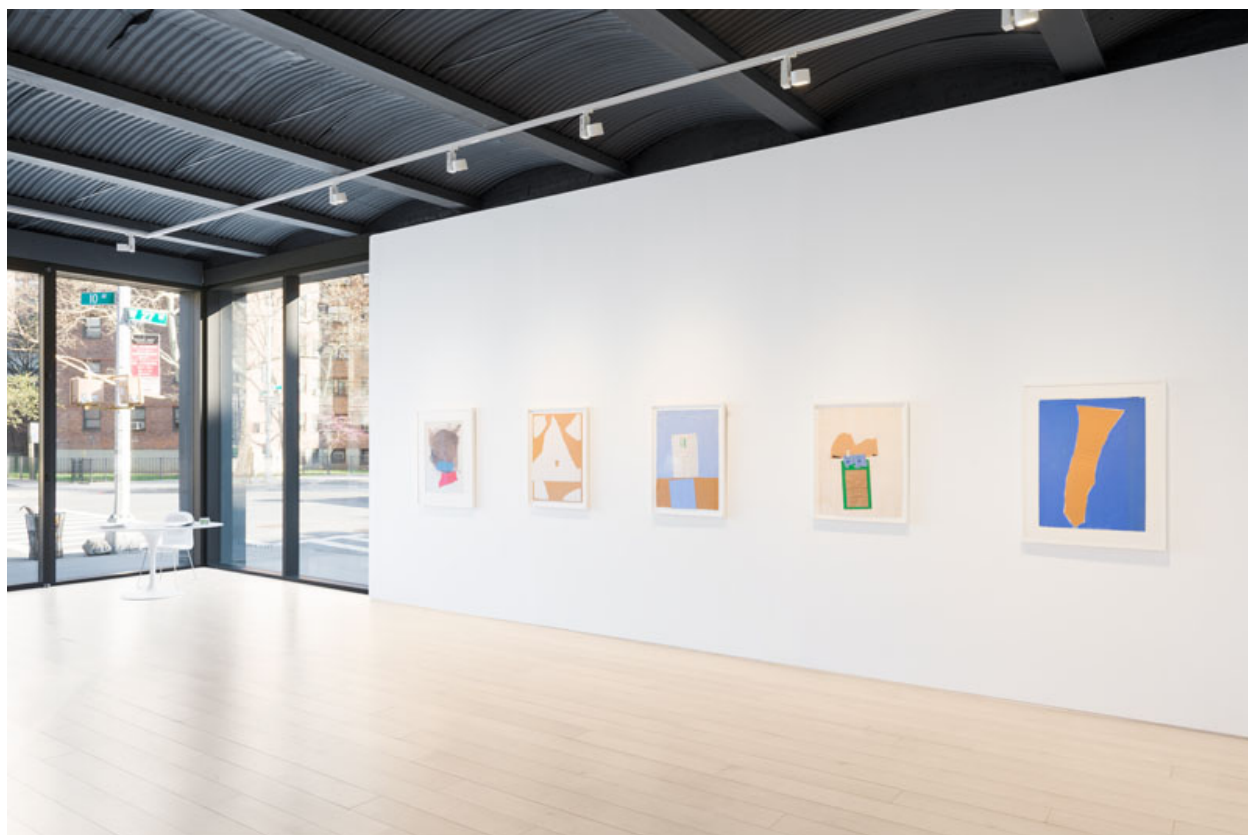
Rail: I'm looking around to see if there is a green collage!

Scofield: This one here [*McCartney in Brazil*, 1978 – 79] is a very characteristic green. In fact, I wanted to buy a pickup truck that was exactly that green color and he wouldn't let me; he said, "It looks like a telephone company truck." So he made me get one with blue and white stripes. He said, "That's more like Provincetown, get that one instead."

Rail: Right. The Provincetown colors are more over here, these blues and whites and tans [*Country Life No. 1*, 1967].

Scofield: We had a big Chevy SUV that was just about exactly that: blue with a big white band. In that sense, his life intersected his work because he didn't really have any hobbies. Everything he read and everybody he talked to, something that he bought, even if it was chips bag and he liked the stylized boat on the back—every single thing that he had contact with in the years that I knew him had to do with his art.

There was no daylight between his activities, his identity, and his art. That's probably the most fascinating thing about the whole time. Another interesting aspect of that—which I think is true of almost all people who are hard-driving like that in business or art or whatever it may be—is that if you work with them, you have to be one-hundred-and-one percent on board. If that drops down to ninety-nine percent, they know it and they have to get rid of you. That happened with a couple of people who worked for us. Bob just couldn't take it.



Installation view: *Robert Motherwell: The Art of Collage*, April 14 – May 21, 2016. Courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery.

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Rail: It had to be total commitment all the time.

Scofield: Yeah. For the first year I worked seven days a week. I was getting paid for five days. You somehow had to be there, “So-and-so is coming for lunch, can you help us set this thing up? Bob Hughes from *Time* is coming out on Saturday to do a movie with a crew, can you make breakfast?” It was always something and everything was always quasi-emergency. Most of the time it really wasn’t but he needed it to be—so it would have all that frisson and all that energy.

The great advantage he had over all of his contemporaries was that he wasn’t suicidal—he liked life, he liked to drink and smoke—he enjoyed himself. By some pure luck, I didn’t meet him until he had heart operations and couldn’t drink anything. I come from a very hard-drinking family that, in a period of almost four hundred years in America, completely self-destructed. So if he had been drinking, it would have been a total non-starter for me.

Rail: So it actually came at a very healthy and necessary point for you.

Scofield: Yeah, it was a wonderful kind of intersection, the way you just put it.

Rail: Speaking of intersections, you’re a sculptor and a designer— a maker of things in the world. You have a very felt, labor-intense way of working. Did anything about your own process change once you watched Motherwell work?

Scofield: Well, the whole subject matter was a different thing. Bob was like a rock. He would say a couple of times a month, “All you can do is represent a block of values.” His block of values was what he called “The Structure of Modernism” so for three years all we talked about was “The Structure of Modernism” and everything that related to it. He would bring in C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*—everything from that to the Rothko scandal.

The very first thing I did for him as a real job, we took a ride up together up to the Adirondacks. The purpose of the trip was to get him removed as the executor for the David Smith estate. Smith had been dead for ten years. They had been best friends, and Bob was so distraught about the whole thing that, even after ten years, he didn’t want to go up there, but felt he should. His kids were the same age as Smith’s kids and very tight—they had keys to each other’s houses. So we drove up to see the house and property where the sculptures were arranged over the hillside. We looked in the window of the studio, the famous studio with all the metalworking equipment, which was set up like a goddamn apartment. We didn’t know who did that or why.

We walked into the house, and although nobody was there, everything was open. The whole basement was filled with tables and we were walking between these things. Going really slowly, Bob was taking everything in. We got to this kind of silver collar, shining metal thing, which was called *The Lonely Man*. Motherwell burst into tears and said, “Goddamn it, I never wanted him to live up here all by himself.” We just looked at each other and said the same thing at the same time: “Let’s get out of here.” We left; his eyes didn’t dry for another ten miles. That was the beginning—that was the test. Before that I had borrowed eight hundred bucks from him and I’d paid it back already working at UMass, and so he liked the way I drove a car, and that I paid the money back, and we got along well.

Rail: You shared that “block of values.”

Scofield: Yeah. A few weeks or a couple months later he called me up and said, “Can you come work for me full time? I’ve got to do this big job for the National Gallery in D.C.”

Rail: And you stayed friends his whole life. Can you tell me about how the book came to be? You haven’t been a writer your whole life—that’s not your natural environment.

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Scofield: No! I've written a lot for my friends, and myself, but I've never been a published author before. As you know I got to be buddies with—just another crazy accidental thing—with Bernard Jacobson, whom I met at a Motherwell show. We ended up leaning against the same radiator and started dishing. He had spent the previous five years buying every Motherwell he could get his hands on.

So we got to be friends, and then he asked me to write a chapter of a book that he was going to do with several different writers, just a compilation of stories that I had already told him. I agreed, and I banged out 14,000 words, trying the whole time not to burst into tears out of missing Bob, but also striving to be truthful about the whole thing and not gloss over. He would have hated that. He was a pretty acerbic, tough guy.

Rail: But with such sensitivity; his work reverberates with feeling.

Scofield: That's the thing. How do you get a guy who is smart, tough, ambitious, *and* sensitive? You certainly don't find that on Wall Street too much, and you don't always find it in the art world—all those things in one person. I live about 600 yards from Jasper Johns now, and I bump into him at the gas station every once in awhile. One time I said, "You know what Bob said about you?" And he said, "No, what?" in this protective, leaning-back way. [*Laughter.*] And I told him, "Bob [Motherwell] said 'You and Rauschenberg and all your buddies, you guys were the cool artists. You saw all of us, the 'hot' artists, self-destruct, and you didn't want to do that.'"

Rail: That's a very intense moment. To go back a bit, there is also something special in this moment of you and Bernard leaning up against the radiator in that it recalls another Motherwell series, the "Opens" (1967 – 80s). I first met you and Bernard at a show of that series about a year ago [*Robert Motherwell: Opens, May 1 – June 20, 2015, Andrea Rosen Gallery*]. Those paintings all came from the accident of leaning one still-wet painting up against the other.

Scofield: There you go! That's very interesting.

Rail: I think that's part of the key to the sensitivity: this openness to accidents.

Scofield: That openness is unusual. When I grew up, very few grown men had that kind of thing. I was born in 1950, before Eisenhower was elected. There was a kind of conformist national atmosphere. You didn't rock the boat, you were a gentleman, you wore a hat. As far as my experience growing up in the '50s and '60s went, Bob was a very unusual guy in that he had that receptivity that you're talking about.

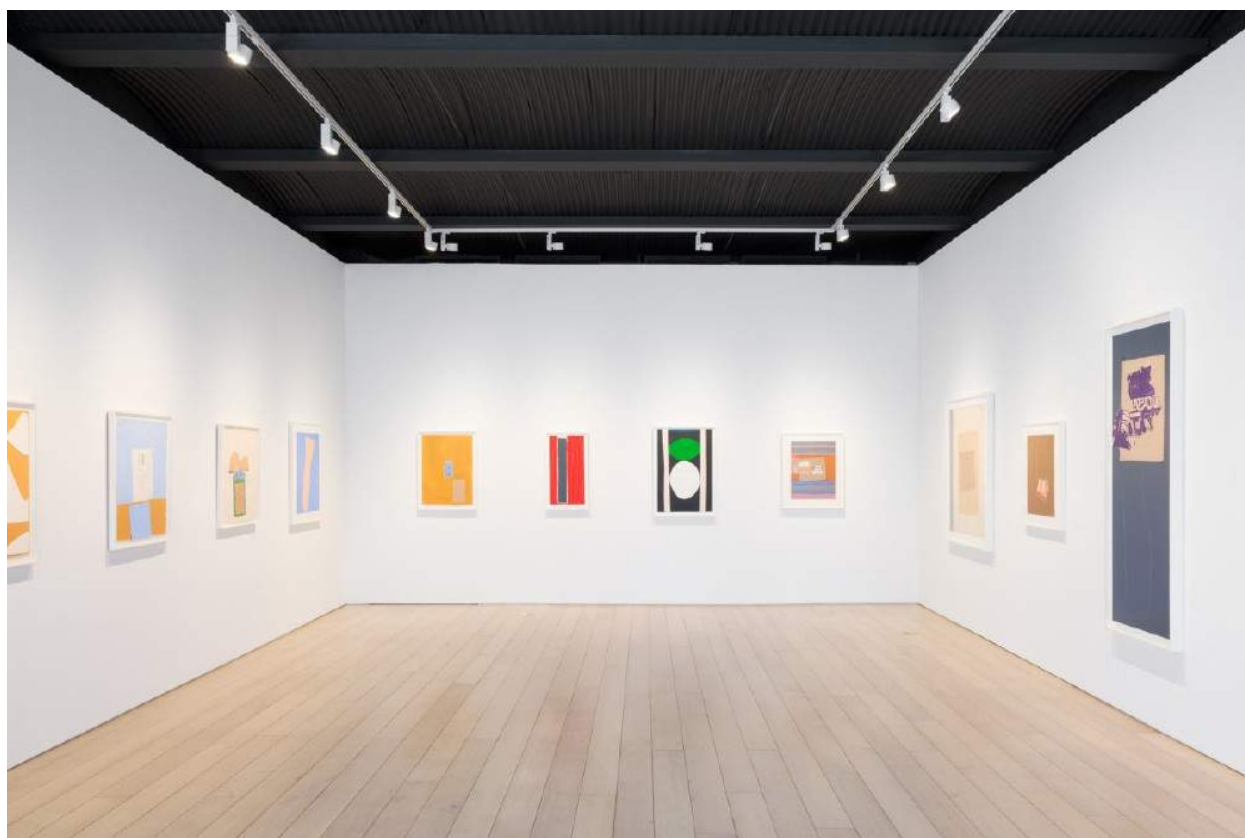
He didn't invent collage, but once he got a taste of it he couldn't stop. It's like guys who restore cars: it gets to the point where it doesn't even matter if they lose money on it; they just have to be in the process all the time. It takes them somewhere where they haven't been; it was a similar atmosphere with Bob.

As I say in the book, it was like Lewis and Clark out there on the Missouri River, and there have been about a half-a-dozen Europeans ever on that river. We are feeling our way. To carry that analogy further, there were twenty-something guys on the expedition; they would send two or three of them at a time to hunt and bring back the meat that fed everybody. Bob had that same kind of focus with the need to forage materials. It didn't matter if it was a new translation of Lorca, or a wrapper from the post office, or buying a car that was the right color or the right combination of colors: he went out into the world and would come energized and booming into the studios where we would be fixing a frame and he'd say, "I just found something!" And just the tone of his voice made you feel so happy—it was better than winning the lottery. He just had that; it was so *fun!* He didn't know what he was going to do with it—but he knew that he was going to do *something*.

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SUN☉**TIMES**

Robert Motherwell And The Preservation Of The Past
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Artwork © Dedalus / Licensed by VAGA, New York. Courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery.

“I’m such a sucker for the back of artworks,” Eric Gleason, a director at Paul Kasmin Gallery, told me. The gallery’s new exhibition, *Robert Motherwell: The Art of Collage*, was slated to open in two days, and I was previewing the works. Gleason showed me the back of one of them, which displayed stickers from the galleries and museums that had previously exhibited it. Together, they suggested the hands that had managed the piece as well as the eyes that had viewed it. “That is something that’s going to be extinct not long from now. They’ll be replaced with barcodes.”

As the backs of the works preserve their institutional history, the fronts preserve a different sort of past—one more cultural and intimate. Motherwell captured fragments of daily life, from cigarette cartons to mail to event posters and juxtaposed them with meticulously torn paper and other collage elements. Motherwell’s famous “Elegies” series reaffirms the artist’s interest in remembrance. Critic Holland Cotter has referred to him as “Motherwell, the memorialist.”

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As he attempted to conserve, Motherwell also aimed to advance his medium. “After Picasso and Schwitters and the nouveaux réalistes,” said Gleason, “Motherwell was the next artist who really created long lasting innovations within collage and pushed its borders.” In the nearly 50 years that the artist worked in collage, Gleason contends that Motherwell achieved a wider breadth and variance in the form than any other 20th century artist. “Hopefully this show will illustrate that,” he said.



Robert Motherwell, “The Irregular Heart,” 1974.
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The works on view also evidence the progression of art history itself. The earliest work, *Untitled* from 1959, is “probably the most abstract expressionist work in the exhibition,” according to Gleason. Created from gouache, pasted papers, and ink on pasteboard, the piece displays the gestural marks typical of a specific movement as well as Motherwell’s own burgeoning interests in collage and text. A red strip of paper at the bottom reads, “Nothing in human life is more to be lamented, than that a wise man should have so little influence.” The quote comes from Herodotus, himself a thorough documenter of history. Motherwell presents an alternate form of documentation through visual art.

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Far left: the earliest work in the show, from 1959.
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Country Life No. 1 (1967) and *The Irregular Heart* (1974) contain a different sort of text —mailing labels. The latter features part of a package sent from The Greenwich Drug Store to Motherwell's Provincetown home. Motherwell began the work soon after receiving diagnosis of a heart problem, and the package ostensibly contained his medication. "He always had a mortality conscious streak in him," said Gleason. "The more of your daily life you can preserve in this context... it's a form of immortality."

The process of collage creates a sense of accumulating history as the artist adds layers, one after another. The viewer sees what came first, second, etc. What make Motherwell's collages so fascinating, according to Gleason, are the compositional decisions, how he placed each individual element. "A lot of his decisions were far from the obvious ones," he said. He described some of the works as more painterly and compared the edges of the torn paper to brushstrokes. Motherwell incorporated ideas about both painting and printmaking into his work. He even used one of his own lithographs as components of new compositions. As the collages in the Kasmin show advance chronologically, innovation after innovation appears.

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Robert Motherwell, Country Life No. 1, 1967.
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Though the works may evoke bygone eras in American art, Gleason easily finds new, vivid ways to present the work. “He was totally restless,” he says. “The people we spoke to and studio assistants and friends describe the same man who was of boundless creativity. There’s so much to mine with Motherwell.”