

# bernard jacobson gallery

## Robert Motherwell: Prints

11 May 2023 – 3 June 2023

Bernard Jacobson Gallery presents a three-part showcase of works by American artist Robert Motherwell (1915-1991). The opening exhibition displays a selection of etchings, lithographs and screen prints. The second concentrates on collages and works on paper. The final exhibition presents a collection of paintings.

Born in 1915 in Aberdeen (Washington, USA), Motherwell decided to devote himself professionally to art at the age of 26, after an extensive education in both Philosophy and Art History at the universities of Stanford, Harvard and Columbia. Motherwell became a leading spokesman for the Abstract Expressionist movement and was greatly influenced, like many of his contemporaries, by the Surrealists. This introduced to Motherwell 'automatism', a practice that strives to create without conscious thought. Throughout his career, he stated that his work was an experimentation in visualising his feelings. Referring to his automatic practice as "doodling", Motherwell tapped into his deepest thoughts in order to produce pictorial imagination, which set him aside from contemporaries who were often characterised by definitive artistic techniques.

In 1940, Motherwell began printmaking and what started as a "divertissement" became a central component of his artistic practice. He was interested in the technical process of printmaking and became knowledgeable in the varying types of printing, but predominantly favoured lithography due to its material appearing like ink or crayon. These techniques served as another format to transpose his artistic vocabulary. One of the most notable characteristics of his prints are his calligraphic gestures, offering a sense of spontaneity and a strong resemblance to his drawings.

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Motherwell's works are full of exploration, serving as a mode of transitioning his unconscious emotions onto paper. Motherwell was particularly drawn to this medium and admired its physical qualities, often allowing him to spontaneously draw with a sense of immediacy, devoid from the constraints presented by painting. Motherwell resisted the preconceived notion that works on paper are of lesser value and emphasised the medium's importance in its explorative ability. Alongside his drawings, Motherwell produced many collages which were similarly used as a mode to channel his visual vocabulary and apply his automatic gesture. Such materiality enabled an intimate insight into the mind and artistic process, freeing his gestural impulses.

Motherwell's paintings equally embodied an unintentional dissociation of the conscious mind. His most famous series, *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* (1948 – 1967), included over 100 paintings paying homage to the devastation of the Spanish Civil War, being defined through the repetition of a black oval motif; recurrent yet distorted, manipulated, and compressed. Motherwell was keenly drawn to specific colours, namely ochre, black, white, and then blue. The vast abstract forms found in his paintings, monumental in scale, were individualistic - a quality which he much admired in the concurrent modernist tradition.

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