

bernard jacobson gallery

Robert Motherwell

A Centenary Survey of Major Works

24th January – 25th April 2015

“...his full maturity came after the abstract expressionist ‘period’ – in fact, after 1960 – and his career illustrates the perils of generalising about decades, groups or movements.” - Robert Hughes 1988

To mark the centenary of Robert Motherwell’s birth on 24th January 1915, the Bernard Jacobson Gallery will inaugurate its new space in Duke Street St James’s, London, with an exhibition that will survey the major series of the artist’s work. This will be the first time since the Royal Academy exhibition of 1978 that such a survey has been seen in the UK.

Robert Motherwell, born 24th January 1915, is one of the major figures in that group of artists who made the first truly internationally significant American art - the Abstract Expressionists. But Robert Motherwell is much more than an Abstract Expressionist. In the ‘60s after the initial burst of the movement in the 1940s and ‘50s, many of Motherwell’s colleagues were either dead or were making art in the same vein as that by which they had already defined themselves. Motherwell, however, had always been a tireless innovator, so while the series *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* which he worked on from 1947 up until his death in 1991, is his most famous, Motherwell was, all the time, making collages as well as whole small groups and even large on-going series of paintings that were totally divergent from the *Elegy* series. Alongside this ferocious activity Motherwell was a prolific printmaker and producer of hundreds of works on paper. It is partly the variety of his work that makes Motherwell such an important and influential artist today.

This exhibition will include works such as:

A View Number 1, 1958, which Motherwell himself considered the most Abstract Expressionist of his paintings. This painting has been exhibited in every major museum retrospective of Robert Motherwell.

New England Elegy No. 5, 1967, is part of a small group of 7 large-scale paintings one of

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which was commissioned for the John F Kennedy federal building, and is thought of as an Elegy to John F Kennedy who had been murdered 3 years earlier. The painting was for some time in the collection of the American singer Andy Williams.

Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 130, one of a group of 8 large scale Elegy paintings made in 1974-5, others from this group are in the collection of Tate, The Hirschhorn, and the Detroit Institute of Art.

Beside the Sea No. 3, 1962, one of an important group of works on paper, depicting the waves crashing against the sea wall outside his Cape Cod studio. In these works Motherwell splashed paint hard onto laminated paper. "One might say the best way to 'imitate' nature is to employ its own processes." Powerfully gestural, the works demonstrate Motherwell love of paper. This work has been exhibited in many major museums around the world from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, to the Whitechapel Gallery, London.

Open 22, 1968, one of the most austere beautiful of Motherwell's "Open" series, which having been started by a chance juxtaposition of a small canvas propped up against a larger one, occupied him for almost 20 years, making it Motherwell's most sustained investigation of form after the Elegy series. "the linear, so-called 'window' shapes of the Open series are as much a one-shot throw of the dice, in execution, as my more gestural works." The painting was exhibited in the seminal first exhibition of the Open paintings at the Marlborough Gerson Gallery in New York.

The Homely Protestant II, 1988-90, titled after a phrase from James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, a long-time literary obsession of Motherwell's, is a re-working of a much earlier semi figurative work from 1948, *The Homely Protestant I* which is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Motherwell said that he considered the figure in that painting to be himself and so, this painting, one of the last he worked on, can be considered a late self-portrait.

Exhibited alongside these works will be representative works on paper and collages.

Bernard Jacobson Gallery's new premises are in a converted car park in Duke Street St James's, London, opposite the side entrance of Fortnum and Mason, and just off Piccadilly,

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one of London's major thoroughfares. Designed by Nick Gowing architects, the gallery occupies the ground and lower ground floor of extensive contemporary exhibition space.

Bernard Jacobson Gallery was founded in 1969 as a publisher and dealer in prints. Over the last 45 years the gallery has exhibited many great British, American and European artists including; Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland, Peter Lanyon, William Scott, Frank Stella, Kenneth Noland, James Rosenquist, Pierre Soulages, Lee Krasner, Marc Vaux, Bram Bogart, William Tillyer, Jules Olitski, Helen Frankenthaler and, of course, Robert Motherwell.

Forthcoming exhibitions for 2015 include Larry Bell, Frank Stella and in June an exhibition focusing entirely on the Elegy paintings of Robert Motherwell.

As well as the St James's premises the gallery has a branch on 71st Street off Madison Avenue, New York.

PRESS ENQUIRIES

mail@jacobsongallery.com | +44(0)207 734 3431