

# bernard jacobson gallery

Robert Motherwell

Collages

5<sup>th</sup> June – 28<sup>th</sup> August 2013

"Regardless of the medium, whether it is in Eliot or Picasso or a TV thirty-second advertisement, I think collage is the twentieth century's greatest creative innovation." - Robert Motherwell

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is proud to announce its forthcoming exhibition *Robert Motherwell: Collage*, the most comprehensive exhibition of Motherwell's collages ever to be held. The exhibition will coincide with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection's upcoming exhibition *Robert Motherwell: The Early Collages*, which opens concurrently with the Venice Biennale in late May. In acknowledgment of this revolutionary 20th century invention, these two exhibitions survey the work its most important American practitioner.

In 1943 three young American painters, Jackson Pollock, William Baziotes and Robert Motherwell, were approached by Peggy Guggenheim and asked to produce work for the first exhibition of collages in the United States, at her Art of This Century gallery in New York. Motherwell was only in his 20s - the youngest of the three painters - but his powerful new experiments were exhibited alongside the great European modernists including Picasso, Ernst, Miró, Braque, and Arp. As he recounts, "Pollock and I didn't really know much about collage except that you pasted things on. We were both intimidated by the project, so we decided to try it together." Pollock and Baziotes soon abandoned the form, but Motherwell discovered a passion and aptitude for the medium which spurred him to continue with it throughout his career. As he says, "I felt a magical release. I took to it, as they say, as a duck to water."

Motherwell's major innovation with the form is the torn paper edge - a technique that reflected his love of working with paper, and his commitment to automatism. Further, he worked on a much larger scale than his European counterparts had attempted, and Americanized the medium to reflect his views that "in Europe...people take it much more for granted that certain things are for certain people. But in America, people believe everything is for everyone, including abstract art." To this end, Motherwell believed collage to be "a necessary invention", in which "one has the whole world and human history as subject matter, juxtaposition inconceivable before modern times."

# bernard jacobson gallery

While the upcoming Guggenheim show focuses on his 1940s collages, the exhibition at Bernard Jacobson Gallery presents over thirty works from the 1950s up until 1991, the year of his death. In his 1960s collages, Motherwell incorporated "everyday" fragments, echoing Schwitters' merz technique developed 40 years earlier. Collages such as *Bowes & Bowes, Cambridge* (1966), which includes a torn mailing wrapper from the Cambridge booksellers, and *La Cuisiniere* (1967), featuring a shopping bag from a Madison Avenue kitchen supply store, are examples of this.

In the 1970s and 80s, Motherwell developed entire series of collages. The collage elements in these later works were often cut and torn fragments of proofs of his own prints that he embellished with gestural brushstrokes and painted compositions, and are demonstrative of his work with the torn edge. This technique of incorporating print fragments occurs in works such as *French Revolution Bicentennial No. 5* (1987), *Irish Book* (1989), and the haunting *Night Dream* (1988).

Other highlights from the exhibition include the earliest work from 1959, *Sun and Sea; Collaged Wall VI* (1986), which incorporates sheet music from lifelong friend and composer Arthur Berger's Trio for Guitar, Violin and Piano (1972); *U.S. Art, New York, NY* (1962), which Motherwell originally intended as being part of his Beside the Sea series before adding the collage element; and *Open, Bolton Landing* (1969), which served as a model for his elegy to the sculptor David Smith, *Open No. 121 (Bolton Landing Elegy)* now in the collection of the Tate.

Robert Motherwell continues the trajectory of modern European visionaries Picasso, Braque, Schwitters, and Matisse, and his advancements with American collage are unrivalled. As Robert Hughes suggests, in making collage Motherwell became "the only artist since Matisse in the fifties to alter significantly the syntax of this quintessentially modernist medium."

The exhibition has been generously supported by The Dedalus Foundation, New York.