

bernard jacobson gallery

Robert Motherwell

Prints from the Artist's Studio

12th September – 6th October 2012

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is delighted to announce an exhibition of limited edition prints by the American Abstract Expressionist artist Robert Motherwell (1915-1991). The exhibition focuses solely on prints produced in the artist's studio. This is the first ever show dedicated to this subject and presents a unique opportunity to view these rare works.

Throughout his long and distinguished career, Robert Motherwell produced a remarkable body of work that ranks among the most notable achievements in postwar American art. In addition to creating his celebrated paintings, drawings and collages, Motherwell was a renowned and innovative printmaker; producing more than 500 works, of which 100 were produced in his studio. It is these prints which are the focus of the exhibition.

Motherwell first learned about printmaking through the surrealists, who having emigrated from a troubled Europe to the States had established workshops there for artists to work together and exchange their ideas and thoughts. In 1940 Motherwell joined them in the workshop of Kurt Seligmann in New York where he studied etching and first began to adopt the surrealist's technique of psychic automatism, an artistic strategy where chance and accident is allowed to dictate the structure of a composition freed from rational control. This experience was influential for Motherwell's development as an artist and had a lasting effect on him as well as other American artists.

His interest in printmaking was re-ignited in the 1960s. Having worked in large workshops such as Universal Art Editions and Hollander Workshop and gaining extensive experience in the various printmaking techniques during this period, Motherwell decided in 1973 to buy his own etching and lithography press for his studio in Greenwich, Connecticut, where he was able to work independently and unburdened by the constraints of a large, commercial workshop.

"I had always loved working on paper, but it was the camaraderie of the artist-printer relationship that tilted the scale definitely."

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In the same year, Motherwell hired the master printer Catherine Mosley, who worked with him in his studio for almost twenty years until his death in 1991.

“To work with such craftsmen has been a joy and a welcome break from the essential solitude in which the artist works...no modern artist is an island – individual as he is...he works and lives owing, in part, of the givingness – and skills of others.”

Working in his own studio with his own press, proved to be very fruitful for Motherwell. He was not only able to explore and develop ideas and motifs, he was also able to experiment with different paper working at his own pace and without any outside constraints. It was also inspiring for him to be surrounded by his paintings, prints and collages as well as other materials he could readily draw on as and when he wished. The prints are often intimate in scale and in very small editions.

The exhibition brings together an extensive selection of Motherwell's studio prints, ranging from bright and colourful works to dark and violent gestures, from variations on his Open series to his much celebrated Elegies, executed in different printing techniques. The show presents an impressive group of rare works rarely seen in public.