

# bernard jacobson gallery

Robert Motherwell

Open

17<sup>th</sup> June – 18<sup>th</sup> August 2009

From June 17th Bernard Jacobson Gallery will exhibit a selection of important works from Robert Motherwell's Open series.

Started in 1967, and inspired by a chance juxtaposition of a large and small canvas, the Open paintings occupied Motherwell for nearly two decades. Intimate and meditative, the Opens consist of limited planes of colour, broken up by minimally rendered lines in loosely rectangular configurations. As the series progressed, the works became more complex and more obviously painterly, as Motherwell worked through the possible permutations of such reduced means. The paintings remain suggestive and affective in spite of their simplicity, setting up a play between the dualities of content and absence, spatial recession and the assertion of surface, and thus providing an arena for the artist to work through his philosophical speculations as well as more, 'strictly artistic problems, in the viscosity of paint, of color fields, of the skin of the world highly abstracted'.

Motherwell's rare intellectual ability underpinned his work as a painter, but also led him to become one of the leading writers, theorists and advocates of the ascendant post-war movement he named the New York School. His interests in philosophy, literature and poetry enabled Motherwell to forge close friendships with the Surrealists and the European intelligentsia and thus, through his art and writing, establish a bridge between the pre-war European avant-garde and the post-war Americans. As such, he proved pivotal in establishing key concepts such as automatism and psychoanalysis at the heart of the discourse surrounding American abstraction and further, in promoting American abstraction as the key development of the international avant-garde. The works on display reveal the thoughtful and inventive manner with which Motherwell approached his work and display the prolonged relevance of his inquiries.

On Motherwell's death in 1991, Clement Greenberg, the great champion of the New York School, left in little doubt his esteem for the artist, commenting that, "although he is underrated today, in my opinion he was the very best of the Abstract Expressionist painters".

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This exhibition will reveal Motherwell as one of Abstract Expressionism's greats, alongside Pollock, Rothko and de Kooning.

21 Publishing will launch Robert Motherwell: Open, to coincide with the exhibition. With extended essays by leading critics and writers from both sides of the Atlantic, (Matthew Collings, Mel Gooding, Robert Hobbs, Donald Kuspit, Robert Mattison, Saul Ostrow and John Yau), and many illustrations, this will be the definitive book on the Open series.