



Salt Lake Art Center: Celebrating 75 years, 1931-2006

20 South West Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84101

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The Salt Lake Art Center presents the exhibition
Robert Motherwell: *Te Quiero*
from February 11 to May 31, 2006 in the Main Gallery

Public Opening Reception: Friday, February 10 from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Salt Lake Art Center



Picayune, 1968
acrylic, charcoal and collage on paper mounted to canvas
24 x 18 in.

Robert Motherwell (1915-1991) is an essential figure for understanding art of the 20th century, and the direction of contemporary art. He was a painter, a printmaker, an author, an editor.

Born in Aberdeen, WA, Motherwell's family relocated to Salt Lake City, UT (1919-1926) where they lived until the precocious 11-year-old Robert was awarded a fellowship to the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. He studied painting at the California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco (1932) and received a Bachelors degree from Stanford University (1937). Motherwell applied and was accepted into the graduate program in Philosophy at Harvard University (Cambridge, MA) which brought him to the east coast, a step closer to the hub of the American art world - New York City - where he settled in 1940, studying art history with the famed Meyer Shapiro at Columbia University, and pursuing his painting career.

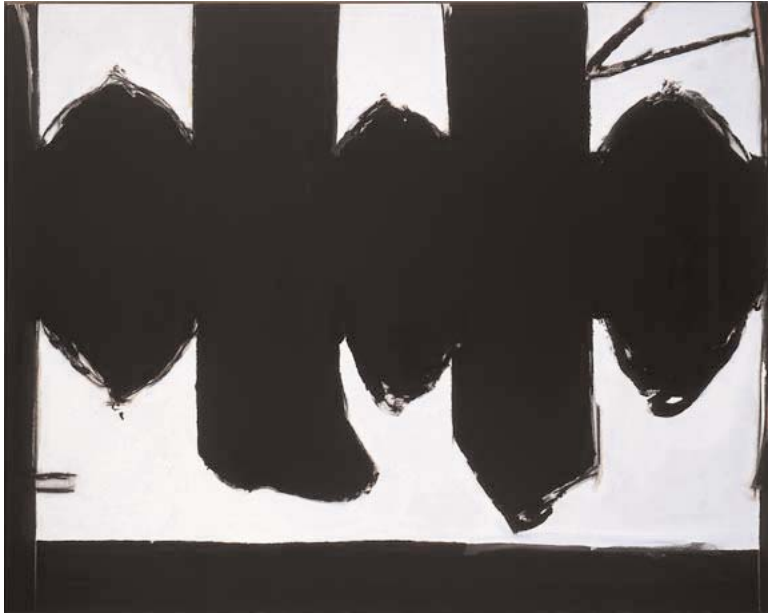
Motherwell was already associating with the likes of Hans Hofmann, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, William Baziotes and Roberto Matta as war gripped the globe and European artists fled for safe haven in the United States (especially New York). His social circle grew to include French innovators of the Dada and Surrealist schools. These artists - eschewing analytical and rational thought (and representation); encouraging spontaneity in expression; valuing personal, not universal, symbolism and meaning - were a primal catalyst in the rise of the most-celebrated first fully home-grown American art movement: Abstract Expressionism.

During the 1940s and 1950s, The "First Generation" of Abstract Expressionists (AbEx) of the New York School, the (mostly) American-born painters shook the foundations of the art world by eschewing representation, encouraging spontaneity in expressive large-scale artworks, and, according to some scholars, positioned New York as the inheritors of the "international art center" status once possessed by a Paris devastated by World War II.



Heart of Darkness, 1968
acrylic, charcoal and collage on paper mounted to canvas, 40 x 30 in.

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Elegy to the Spanish Republic #126, 1973
acrylic on canvas, 80 x 106 in., courtesy: Art Enterprises, Ltd., Chicago

As the youngest face, and one of the more scholarly members of the New York AbEx group, Motherwell exhibited his artwork but also became a representative for the group.

In 1949, with the AbEx group established, but not yet celebrated, Motherwell began what would become his greatest series - *the Elegies to the Spanish Republic* of which there were over 100 by 1965 and over 140 by his death in 1991. The first *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* was painted a dozen years after General Franco's violent *coup d'etat* in Spain, followed by the relentless imprisonment and execution of members of the intellectual class. Of the series of *Elegies*, which express themes recurrent in

the artist's expansive oeuvre, Motherwell said: "I take an elegy to be a funeral lamentation or funeral song for something one cared about. The 'Spanish Elegies' are not 'political' but my private insistence that a terrible death happened that should not be forgot... The pictures are also general metaphors of the contrast between life and death and their interrelation." A number of collages and sketches are included in the exhibition. The collages are complete, in and of themselves. Motherwell conceived of the collages as "a way to work with autobiographical material," as the paper scraps were often personal - cigarette packages, newspaper clippings, wine labels. The sketches, however, were often spontaneously created devices to explore shape and composition for other, larger artworks such as the *Elegies*, or another of Motherwell's expansive series, the *Open* series.

The exhibition's title, **Robert Motherwell: Te Quiero**, takes the name of a mixed media on paper (1973). Motherwell was purposeful in giving artworks titles, as he said, "I think titles are important; I like titles that lead into the picture and in that sense try to make them either very accurate or, if I can't, make them not misleading." In this, we must look at the artwork and see, think about the artwork and concentrate, as Motherwell explains: "In the greatest painting, the painter communes with himself. Painting is his thought's medium. Others are able to participate in this communion to the degree that they are spiritual."

*The exhibition **Robert Motherwell: Te Quiero** was organized by Art Enterprises, Ltd., and TMG Projects, Chicago. An exhibition brochure, featuring color images and quotations from Motherwell's writings, is available at no cost.*

**The Salt Lake Art Center is located at 20 South West Temple,
(between Abravanel Hall and the Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau)
Salt Lake City, UT 84101
801-328-4201 or on the web at www.slartcenter.org.
Admission to the galleries is always free.**

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