

# The Museum of Modern Art

50th Anniversary



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## ROBERT MOTHERWELL'S GRAPHICS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Robert Motherwell, best known as a painter and member of the original Abstract Expressionists, has enjoyed a deep and lasting relationship with another medium: printmaking. Over the past two decades he has explored its every nook and cranny, from the fragile mezzotint to the nearly mechanical silkscreen, donning the hat of introspective intimist or bold commentator at will.

From October 30 to December 16, 1980, The Museum of Modern Art will present THE PAINTER AND THE PRINTER: ROBERT MOTHERWELL'S GRAPHICS, a collection of some 80 prints executed between 1961-1980. The exhibition, which has been organized by The American Federation of Arts, is the first to offer a comprehensive view of the artist's work in the medium, and despite André Malraux's celebrated comment that "the chief characteristic of modern art is that it never tells a story," the story these prints tell is almost as intriguing as the works themselves.

Not one of Motherwell's contemporaries joined him in his move from Forties to Sixties aesthetic. This can be partly explained by the calligraphic bias apparent in Motherwell's paintings, as well as his life-long fascination with the actual materials of his trade. "The subject does not preexist," wrote Motherwell. It emerges out of the interaction between the

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artist and medium." Yet there is more to Motherwell's uniqueness; although the conception of the print requires the quiet introspection necessary to the creation of any art, the realization requires collaboration. The artist and the printmaker must work together to produce something that transcends the materials. As Motherwell commented about A la pintura, a book of poems by Rafael Alberti for which he made 24 prints, "To work with such craftsmen has been a joy and a welcome break from the essential solitude in which the artist works."

Shortly after publication of the livre d'artiste A la pintura, in 1972, Motherwell returned to etching. He has experimented with other print-making techniques as well, but etching and lithography remain his principal means of expression in the graphics medium.

Motherwell's recent lithographs are among the most exciting in the exhibition. Using looser lines and softer edges, they are more lyrical and seem to have even greater freedom than his early work. In La Guerra I and II the forms are smooth and weighty; the line is thin only when the ink splatters off the edges in a natural movement. In Samurai I and II and Altamira Elegy the feeling is the same; the prints seem to have happened by themselves, though that clearly is not the case.

A 254-page book titled The Painter and the Printer: Robert Motherwell's Graphics, 1943-80, by Stephanie Terenzio with a complete catalogue raisonné by Dorothy C. Belknap, will examine the collaborative aspect of print-making in interviews with printers, publishers, and dealers with whom Motherwell has worked. Priced at \$14.95, it is available at the Museum Bookstore.

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The exhibition, on view in the Sachs Galleries, Third Floor, has been guest-curated by Stephanie Terenzio, Assistant Director of The William Benton Museum at The University of Connecticut, and coordinated for The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Prints and Illustrated Books by Deborah Wye.

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