

'An Examination into Abstract Expressionism and Colour Field Painting'.

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1702273

BA Fine Art - Independent Inquiry

ADAD6001

Word Count: 6,113

Independent Inquiry Tutor: Craig Wood

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA (Hons)

University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea, presented on the 11th December
2019.

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Illustrations

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout the course of the twentieth century, numerous artists and the work they created, underwent significant development. These substantial changes occurred largely in response to the growth of different artistic thoughts resulting in the emergence of differing styles and Art Movements, which would influence the direction of the art world and its artists during later periods. Towards the 1940's, new modern art techniques were being explored and becoming popular. Amongst these new movements to the art world, were Abstract Expressionism and Colour Field Painting and as observed by Pereira, "abstract art began to attract many" (2015), which indicated more artists were beginning to experiment with this style. The wider impact of developments as highlighted by academic Maria in a Widewalls article, showed that these essential influential factors originated through previous artistic movements. Maria notes that "Abstract Expressionism brought together influences of Surrealism, Cubism, Fauvism and early Modernism as well as notable Bauhaus influences" (2016). Expanding further, influences took "inspiration from this new way of production, artists in the 1950's used a variety of mediums (including photography and painting) to create minimalist pieces of artwork using repetition of imagery" (Galerie Michael, 2015).

One such important influence was the Surrealist Movement as its main intention was to "explore the unconscious mind as a way of creating art. [...] This thought process for creating art is known as 'automatism'" (Park West Gallery, 2018). Surrealism demonstrates its influence through later art, as it is attributed as a factor that inspired the works of the artist Jackson Pollock during the mid-twentieth century.

However, before discussing artists and the work related to the two movements in detail, it is first important to evaluate the term 'abstract' and examine how it relates to artwork. The Cambridge Online Dictionary has defined abstract as only existing "as an idea, feeling or quality, not as a material object" (2019). Alongside this dictionary definition, it is important to look at the interpretation provided on the Tate Gallery's official website which explains that "abstract art is art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of a visual reality" (2019). Further supporting these two explanations of what it means to be abstract, Anfam records in his book *Abstract Expressionism*, that "abstraction was more concrete than realism" (1990:137). Therefore, these definitions provide the viewer with a foundation of knowledge of what abstract means as there is no true depiction of reality. This theory is supported by Gooding in the book *Abstract Art*, that "there was no simple agreed definition or description" (2001:9).

The Abstract Expressionist Movement, originating in New York in the 1940's just after the Second World War, became widely known for its art works as they showed personal emotions and the wonder of how gestural marks (i.e. the way artists moved creatively) became a vital contribution to how work was formed. That said, the art from the Abstract Expressionist Movement can also be closely related and derived from the cultural Movement from the early 1920's, known as the Surrealist Movement. Demange comments that the artists from the Surrealist Movement thought that "true art comes from a part of the mind called the unconscious" (2005). This supports abstract art in the sense that it came from the personal mind of the artist, considering the work produced was from a different representation of reality.

At the time of when abstraction was becoming an accepted style of art in the period of the 1940's, strong views regarding the work were prominent as it was considered to be radically different from the figurative works from previous movements, such as the works from Edward Hopper (*Figure 6*). This was regarded as an extreme change of art style, especially for the public who were used to figurative and representational works, the ideology of modernism came into action and in later years developed into post modernism. Defining both terms, the Tate's website describes them as "while modernism was based on idealism and reason, post modernism was born of scepticism and suspicion of reason" (2019). As art was going through a natural change and development, "abstract expressionism was a logical continuation of the anti-figurative aesthetic of the European Abstraction and Modernist Styles", as commented by Maria in a Widewalls article (2016). This proves that styles within the art world were progressing and new techniques were being explored. Despite mentioning these terms, the central focus of this research document will investigate the works of Abstract Expressionists and Colour Field Painters.

Within this independent research document, the term 'abstract' will be further analysed with evidence provided through examining a variety of artists from each Movement looking at how their work is significant to the era. Jackson Pollock will be the main evaluation for Chapter 2 relating to Abstract Expressionism, along with mentions from other artists. Mark Rothko will be the focus for Chapter 3 regarding Colour Field Painting. Theorists views will be accounted for, such as Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenburg and to counterbalance these two theorists, Rosalind Krauss will also be taken into consideration.

Chapter 2: Abstract Expressionism



Figure 1: Jackson Pollock, 'Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)', 1950.

Jackson Pollock, an American painter in the twentieth century, is a key artist who is a major influence within the Abstract Expressionist Movement (Seed, 2014). As an influencer himself to others through his works, his own influences came from Joan Miro, a Surrealist Painter prominent in the 1920's and an original pioneer of the Movement. As previously mentioned, artists included in the Movement thought that "true art comes from a part of the mind called the unconscious" (Demange, 2005). Pollock supported this ideology believing it was an important factor in the creation of artwork, as the ideas originated from thoughts and feelings. As well as Miro being an influence, Pollock took inspiration from Mexican painters that created murals. He took note of how they worked, particularly regarding the size and scale of their works and how they painted directly onto the surface. This interest sparked his fascination with large scale works and how paint was applied freely to the surface using non-traditional tools (Demange, 2005). Pollock then examined at how he could apply that style of working to his own methods, proceeding to experiment and explore this new process in his own unique way.

Pollock's works show him as a committed abstractionist who puts himself into his art displaying personal emotions and feelings as a way of self-expression, as he comments in the chapter '*Research as Dialogue*' written by Mancusi-Ungaro in the book, *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*, written by Varner, K and Karmel, P, "*I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate them*" (1999:117). This point of self-expression is emphasised strongly by Rosenberg, as he "saw the act of painting as inseparable from the artists' biography" (MacAdam, 2007). Expanding on this point, Pollock comments in Doss' book that, "when I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. [...] It is only when I lose contact with the paint that the result is a mess" (1983:68). This emphasises Rosenberg's idea that the work is an artist's biography, as they are putting themselves truly into their work by expressing emotions, so the result then will be true to them; or in other words, the work will be unique to the individual.

As the work would be true to the individual, this allows for multiple interpretations to be formed by the viewer, which can naturally progress into debates and conversations about the different perspectives. Philosopher Nietzsche comments within an article written by Prideaux (2018), supports the ideology of different thoughts and perspectives on work, as he expresses that "there are no facts, only interpretation". This defines abstraction due to works having no subject matter or any representation of reality; there is no realism to abstraction. Gooding mentions this idea of having little representation in her book, that "abstract art denies many of those possibilities of interpretation offered by figurative images, it demands instead an effort of the imagination, a creative response" (2001:12). Expanding on this point of using one's own imagination to creatively conjure up thoughts and feelings about the work the viewer is admiring, Rosenberg states that "Abstract Art is the clash of critical

interpretations" (1972:129), thus emphasising Nietzsche's idea of having only interpretations of the work.

As well as the work being essential for the self-expression of the artist, this style of art can also represent the time era and its cultural surroundings. As Pollock was active after the Second World War, the memories of the war were still vivid and prominent. This point can be supported by Doss, as he exclaims that "the spidery webs of Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionist paintings also reflect post war disaffection and anxiety" (1991, Ch 5:339). Further commenting on the impact the war had on Pollock's work Doss continues with:

By extension, many saw in Pollock's pictures evidence not only of the artist's personal turmoil, but that of the entire post-war era. In 1947, abstract painter Adolph Gottlieb made the following comment: [...] *'To my mind so-called abstraction is not abstraction at all. On the contrary, it is the realism of our time'* (1991, Ch 5:341).

The context of his work is representational of the time and events. It is important to note that due to the Second World War being political and with America's involvement, not only the social aspect of living changed but the arts were affected too, as Sandler comments:

Political events strongly influenced the development of American Art in the early 1940's as they had during the preceding decade. America's entry in World War II provided Social Realists and Regionalists with a new cause, and they quickly organised themselves into the Artists for Victory (1970:29).

Further comments on how this influenced social aspects, it has now been revealed that the works from the Abstract Expressionist Movement were used secretly by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) against the Soviet Union, as remarked by Saunders (1995) they used "American modern art - including the works of such artists as Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko - as a weapon in the

Cold War”. Expanding further on this idea of using art as propaganda, the CIA’s intention was to introduce “creativity, the intellectual freedom and the cultural power of the US. Russian art, strapped into the communist ideological straitjacket, could not compete” (Saunders, 1995). It is clear from Saunders’ comment, that the Soviet Union could not provide the artwork that the Americans were and how successful they had become at using art to promote another message.

The Soviet Union concentrated on the Movement known as Socialist Realism in which the artwork focussed on Russian Culture from the likes of Isaak Brodsky (*figure 2*). This can appear to have a similarity to the American Regionalism Movement. In contrast to the CIA’s use of American Art, showing how creative and free the West was, the Soviet Union embraced their culture as it concentrated its art on Socialist Realism.



Figure 2: Isaak Brodsky, ‘*Speech by V. I. Lenin at a rally of workers of the Putilov factory in May 1917*’, 1929.

Their artwork consisted of embracing their own culture and favoured the realist approach as mentioned by Martinez, “expressionist or abstract art were forbidden [...] The paintings were supposed to strive towards the absolutely realistic depiction of

things” (2015). The Soviet Union’s art was created for propaganda purposes for the country as other styles of art were banned.

Harold Rosenberg was considered one of many important art critics at the time and became a prominent individual and influencer to the Expressionist Movement. In the early 1950’s, Rosenberg coined the suitable term of ‘action painting’, which can be a direct link to Pollock’s works, such as *Autumn Rhythm (Number 50)* (Figure 1). An article written by Barcio (2018) where Rosenberg talks about what the artist produced on the canvas or surface became unplanned. Some could argue that because of the unplanned action of it, the act of making the work itself became a performance. This can be considered true to Pollock’s style, as watching videos of when he is working in his studio it involves a lot of movement around the canvas on the floor (YouTube, 2009). (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Video Still of Jackson Pollock Working in His Studio. Youtube. (2009).

From this, Rosenberg's statement of "what was to go on the canvas was not a picture, but an event" (1968:569) can be connected to the method of working that Pollock adopted. Further expanding on this point, Rosenberg mentions in his book *The Definition of Art*, that "painting was not an organisation of shapes, colour, and line; it was celebration, a 'sublime' event" (1972: 96). This supports the idea that the making of a piece was considered an 'event' as MacAdam comments:

Rosenberg also saw the act of painting as inseparable from the artist's biography. As such, the painting breaks down the boundaries between art and life, making everything, including events in the artist's life, relevant to the work (2007).

Equally important to Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg, another art critic at the time was also an advocate for the art world and become known for making the careers of artists in the Post War Period, such as the likes of Pollock (Barcio, 2017). Within the same article, Greenberg comments on how he describes the artwork and as Barcio writes, "he was a formalist [...] He talked about them (the work) in terms of colour, line, shape, form, surface qualities and medium specificity" (2017). As Greenberg concentrated more on the surface qualities than the content of the work, Rosalind Krauss, who was also another essential art critic, comments that she "criticised Greenberg's art criticism for largely ignoring the content", as mentioned by Velimirović (2018). Both Rosenberg and Greenberg "raised abstraction to the same prestige as the realistic art that filled museums and history books" (Barcio, 2017). This implies that they were trying to normalise the abstract work amongst the audience.

Some critically assessed Pollock's work and disagreed with it as art critic Coates remarked in an article (McElroy, 2010) that his pieces are "unorganised explosions of random energy, and therefore meaningless". Expanding Coates' argument, Jones agrees as he remarks that Pollock's works are "drunken monuments to pain and self-

pity” (2015). Expanding further on the discussion that Pollock’s works were contradicted with, Krauss argues in her book *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths*:

Abstraction uninformed by a subject, contentless abstraction for which the term [...] is decoration. Pollock’s work was a frequent target for the accusation that what he was doing was nothing but decoration (1986: 237).

Alternatively, in argument against these views, Frank discusses that “the degree of Pollock’s ‘utter abstractness’ must remain a fascinating problem” (1983:72) and that they are “purely visual structures” (1983:72). Specifically speaking about *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* (figure 1), Doss claimed that it “shows Pollock’s continued commitment to an art of dynamic rhythm, [...] this frenetic work conveys an aesthetic obsession with movement” (1991: Ch 5:349). Along with the commitment to his art, art critic Frank O’Hara mentions within Sandler’s book:

Pollock possessed the amazing ability to quicken a line by thinning it, to slow it down by flooding that simplest of elements, the line – to change, to reinvigorate, to extend, to build up an embarrassment of riches in the mass by drawing alone. (1970:117).

Doss’ comment on how Pollock’s movement became an ‘aesthetic obsession’ can also be noted by Rosenberg, as he expresses in his book that “the artist’s action is at a minimum, it is the paint that is active” (1972:64). This highlights the idea that the movement of the paint is important and crucial to the work and for the artist. Pollock has limited control over the movement, he can control how he handles the paint; however, he cannot determine how the paint will land on the surface. Supporting this action, Sandler comments that:

It was widely believed that his pictures were mindless, utterly lacking in control and craft. Pollock himself denied the role of chance: ‘*When I am painting, I have a general notion as to what I am about. I can control the flow of paint: there is no accident*’ (1970:116).

As well as Miro and Mexican mural painters being an influence for Pollock in how he thought and created his work, it can be suggested that Matisse could have also heavily influenced him. Mackie comments in her book *Art/Talk Theory & Practise Abstract Expressionism* that:

Matisse (whose considerable influence is evident in much of Pollock's work) said of his own drawing: *"My line drawing is the purest and direct translation of my emotion... [...] In the same way, Pollock, too, charged his lines so that line and space each become pure energy, in an art close to being pure abstract"* (1963:145).

Continuing with influences for Pollock it can be suggested he was inspired by the De Stijl Movement, in the early twentieth century. Bolt comments that Mondrian's "bold blocks of primary colour, boxed off by straight black lines, laid the foundations of abstract art" (2017). Further along within the same article, O'Hara comments that "art is all about line and colour and their aim was to express [...] through the pure language of abstraction" (2017). Despite this being commented about the De Stijl Movement, it can still be considered relevant for the Abstract Expressionist Movement and the influence for Pollock. It introduced the new aim of abstract work that celebrated the idea of pure lines and colour. This can be linked directly to Pollock's work, due to analysing *figure 1*, he truly celebrates the paint itself. Ross can support this as he mentions that "its subject matter is paint" (2005). This emphasises the fact that abstraction works are celebrating the qualities of the paint and they are representing how the artist perceived reality; they are abstracting their view of modern society. Mackie can comment on this, as she says that "abstract art in general is an art based on profound knowledge of reality [...] It reevaluates the spaces and forms observed into new terms" (1963:148). Comparing Pollock's work's to other abstractionist pieces of works from the same era, there is a notable difference in style. For instance, Ad Reinhardt's *Abstract Painting (Blue)* (*figure 4*) and Arshile Gorky's *The Plough and*

The Song, (figure 5). From observation, these works particularly focus on shapes and the vibrancy of colours.



Figure 4: Ad Reinhardt, 'Abstract Painting (Blue)', 1952.



Figure 5: Arshile Gorky, 'The Plough and The Song', 1947.

Even though the works shown along with *Autumn Rhythm (Number 50)* (figure 1) were all created within a few of years of each other, it clearly demonstrates that there are multiple interpretations from other artists offering different insights into abstraction. Schapiro comments on this point and says, “abstract art is not limited to the obvious geometric forms” (2018:14) and further expresses that abstraction “is practised differently by many” (2018:15). Interestingly, even though Pollock was influenced by Surrealist painter Miro, Ad Reinhardt comments in Chaves’ book that “intellectually and aesthetically the important thing that there was absolutely no relation between the abstractionist and surrealists” (1989:25).

As Reinhardt and Gorky were other abstractionists around the same time as Pollock, art critic Robert Motherwell comments within Doss’ book that “the abstract expressionist art of Pollock and his peers was: rebellious, individualistic, unconventional and sensitive (1991:345). This can further support the whole notion about this era that the works being produced were very radical from what the public were used to. The public were mostly used to works being figurative and representative of reality. For example, the American audience were used to works from the American Regionalism Movement during the 1920’s - 1940’s period, where abstraction works were being experimented and explored (Artspace editors, 2018). Artists such as Edward Hopper (figure 6), were significant to the American Regionalism period, as he concentrated on American scenes and painted them with true representation of reality, something the Abstract Expressionists did not focus on.

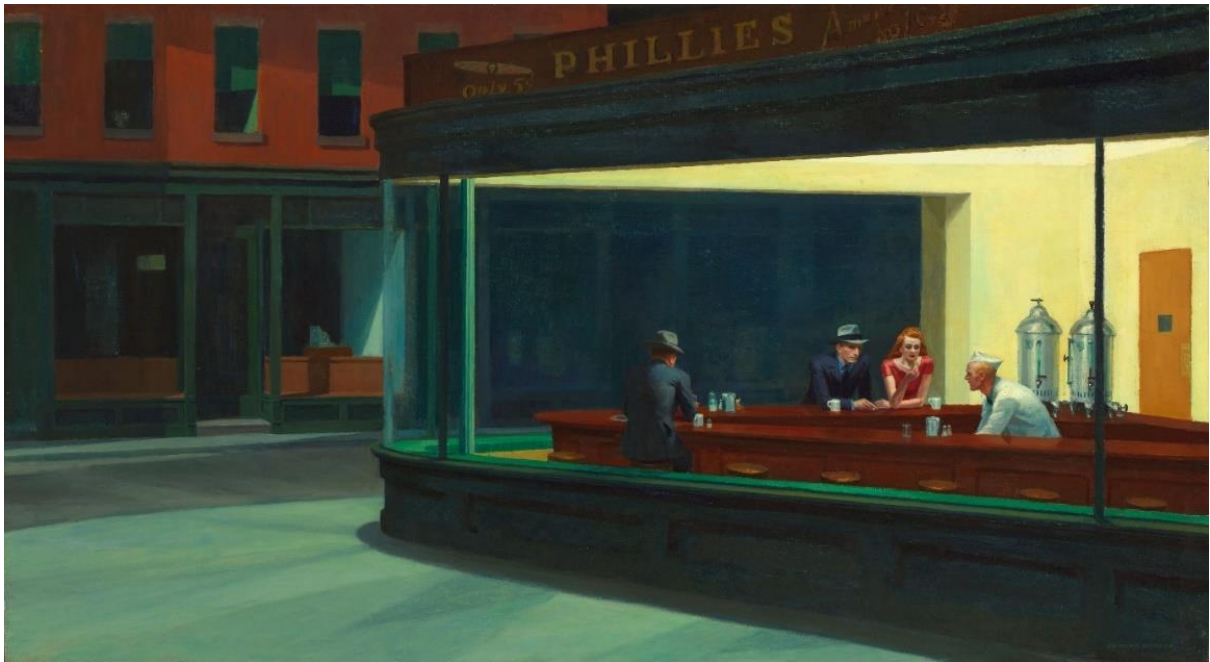


Figure 6: Edward Hopper, '*Nighthawks*'. 1942

After analysing art within the Abstract Expressionist Movement and the work it contains, it is vital to also consider the parallel Movement to this - the Colour Field Movement. Different artists will be examined and how they proved to be important to this Movement and the art world. Alongside the artists themselves, other art critics will also be taken into consideration and their viewpoints, commentary and arguments will be considered.

Chapter 3: The Colour Field Movement

The Washington Colour School was founded in parallel to the other major Movement at the time, Abstract Expressionism, within the same school of New York (Tate, 2019). It became an increasingly popular form of abstract art in the 1950's which continued to flourish throughout the 1960's and was pioneered by three painters, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still and Barnett Newman. As Sandler comments, these three artists "focussed increasingly on the expressive possibilities of colour" (1970:148). Due to the heavy priority of colour and its qualities, the Movement then became later known as Colour Field Painting.

Before examining this artistic Movement further, its precise definition should be analysed in detail as this allows for the style to be better understood. The Tate online official website explains that it "is applied to the work of abstract painters working in the 1950s and 1960s characterised by large areas of a more or less flat single colour" (2019). Furthermore, the main "intentions of the colour-field painters were visionary", as Sandler mentions in his book *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (1970:150). Despite it primarily originating from 1950, by the 1960's the idea of colour field expanded and as Tate online explains it became a:

More purely abstract form of colour. [...] It differed from abstract expressionism in that these artists eliminated both the emotional, mythic or religious content of the earlier movement, and the highly personal and painterly or gestural application associated with it (2019).

Colour Field Painting originated around the 1950's, in New York and was "largely influenced by European Modernism and its sublime geometric abstraction", as Maria comments in her article from Widewalls (2016). Art critic Clement Greenberg was an

advocate for the Movement and “championed Colour Field Painting, with its emphasis on flatness and non-illusionistic space, as the way forward for advanced painting”, as Seiferle comments in *American Art – History and Concepts* (2019). As Rothko was an original pioneer of the Movement, it can be noted by Zubek as he comments that “the Colour Field Movement has been described by many critics as indisputable and ground breaking” (2017).

Colour Field Painting adopted the style of painting works with no subject matter and little representation. Chaves supports this ideology of the Movement, as she comments that the “subject matter must be eliminated” (1989:25). Expanding more on this point explaining the main intentions of the Movement, Willette comments that:

As art seeks self-definition and determines its own uniqueness, it becomes more pure, more reductive in its means. More is eliminated — subject matter, content, figuration, illusionism, narrative — and art becomes independent, detached, and non-objective, that is, abstract (2012).

Despite the fact that the Movement was heavily focused on colour and how a variety of artists utilised colour in numerous ways as to what abstract really means, colour field paintings can be considered to be abstract as a result of little representation and depiction of reality and also a lack of subject matter. This notion of little representation can be further highlighted by Krauss, as she mentions in her book that “pure abstraction was based on the goal, taken most seriously, to make work about Nothing” (1986:237).



Figure 7: Mark Rothko, 'Orange, Red, Yellow', 1961.

Mark Rothko, who is a significant artist to include within the analysis of works for the period as he is considered to be the “most influential Colour Field Painter “, as Barcio comments (2016) and is a “dominant force in New York” (Melikian, 2012). Mackie describes his work and explains that “Rothko’s iconic paintings consist of horizontal bands of colour” (1963:203). This is quite a literal explanation of his work as you can see in *figure 7*, that the work does consist of horizontal blocks of colour. Alongside the literal explanation by Mackie of what Rothko paints, Wayne can agree in the sense that is a celebration of colour, “it is a painting of paint” (2015).

Analysing Rothko's artwork in *figure 7*, it can be interestingly noted that he mentions within Chaves' book *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, that "*abstract art never interested me, I always painted realistically*" (1989:5). Alongside his comments on abstract art, Mackie says that "to Rothko, abstract art was de-personalised and arid" (1989:27). In a way, the entire Movement of colour field painting can support the idea that the art created was not personal to the individual, as Barcio comments on this, as he remarks that "in Colour Field paintings, the artist's personality is less visible than in Action Paintings" (2016).

However, countering the comment from Rothko as to how he viewed abstract art and in comparison to his own work, Chaves says in her book, that "the paradox is that throughout the 1940's, Rothko's own art became unmistakably abstract" (1989:27) and because of the description depicted on what abstract is by many, Rothko's work can be suggested as abstraction due to little representation in reality.

For Rothko, colour is a fundamental part of him and his work, as all his pieces focus on the qualities of colour in terms of celebrating it and challenges shades in contrast to one another. Mackie supports this by saying that "colour is crucially important, and that they are filled with light. The repetition of the image is important to the power, they have authority, frontality, and a physical presence" (1963:197). Mackie further explains "Rothko's pictures are more dependent upon the right light conditions" (1963:203). Rothko's thinking process about how he finishes the edges of the paintings is interesting to mention within his use of colour, as he comments in Mackie's book:

Line tends to define an edge and accentuates any chance in depth that may exist there. With the blurring of the edges, any change in depth is minimized. [...] the blurring of the edges is achieved through scumbling over a dry ground, a technique which allows the colour beneath to be visible through the surface colour and which therefore suggests the transparency (1963:200).

Due to Rothko's specific colour palette for his work the colour he uses can be viewed as subtle. For his works to be exhibited Rothko has specific requirements, "there had to be minimal lighting, closed windows and no frames – nothing that could shift the focus from the canvases themselves" (Azarenko, 2019).

Rothko's choice of colour palette suggests the works produced later, reflected how he felt as an individual as he was battling with depression. From this, the fact that his colour palettes grew darker and heavier, he was in a way becoming self-expressive with his work. Sheets supports this, as she comments within her article, "Rothko's brilliantly coloured paintings of the 1950's were sunny and joyous, while his darker palette works in the 1960's reflected his progressing depression and foreshadowed his suicide in 1970" (2016). The comparison can be seen through *figure 7*, created at the start of the 1960's and *figure 8*, which was part of his last series '*The Black on Gray*', (Tate, 2019) towards the end of the 1960's.

Although there could also be another explanation for Rothko's exploration towards using a darker palette as he experimented with this in the late 1950's, which came from the response to the public in how they viewed his works. Many of the public glorified his use of bright, joyous colours, which resulted in Rothko developing and altering his style in painting and by doing so he would darken his palette. However, as Azarenko mentions, is that for Rothko, the initial thought to change and the actual alternative palette became a:

Realisation that his paintings were valued by the admirers primarily in terms of their decorative function was extremely painful. So in the second half of the 1950s, Rothko began deliberately laying it on thick, choosing darker shades. But it didn't really help: his artworks were still painfully beautiful (2019).

The way the public viewed Rothko's work, it can be proposed that he changed his colour palette to darker hues due to his audience's response. In connection to Azarenko's comment about Rothko's changing colour taste, the change in colour became quite significant for him, as it can be argued by Lewis, that "Rothko's palette got darker not because he was depressed but because he was stung by criticisms that his brighter work from the earlier Fifties was decorative" (2008). This highlights the thought that his works were purely decorative, which is similar to Pollock's work, as they were also considered decorative for the public as mentioned previously by Krauss in her book, "Pollock's work was a frequent target for the accusation that what he was doing was nothing but decoration" (1986:237).



Figure 8: Mark Rothko, *'Untitled'*, 1969.

It is interesting to point out that Rothko's work, "in their fundamental simplicity, their symmetry and flatness, Rothko's characteristic pictures have an austere, iconic presence" (Chaves, 1989:1). For the viewer to experience an 'austere, iconic presence' is intriguing for the individual, as everyone will understand the work differently. Supporting this, Mackie mentions, "Rothko's images are elusive because of his use of colour, and that elusiveness draws the viewer closer" (1963:27). Further expanding on the point of bringing the viewer closer in how they experience the work for themselves and what they feel whilst admiring the work, Barcio comments that "viewers confronting these paintings are often overcome with emotion, ranging from excitement and joy to soberness and even despair" (2016). From Barcio's remarks, Rosenberg comments that "his were the first paintings by an American to make an impact on the public" (1972:105). This impact highlights Rothko's belief for his work, as he "strongly believed in the importance of the personal experience of individuals to his paintings" (Zubek, 2017). This counters the argument previously noted in an article written by Barcio (2016), that the artist's personality and their own form of self-expression is less noticeable in colour field painting, than the works of the Abstract Expressionists.

However, in argument against the idea that Rothko's work draws the viewer in and is interesting, Waters comments in her article, that his "shimmering 'colour field' paintings have never been as attention grabbing, or even as instantly easy to 'get' as his macho Action Painting contemporaries Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock" (2012).

Further analysing Rothko's use of colour and how he works his palette, it can be said that colour can be used as a visual language within the arts. The idea that the art is a language the public and the viewers can agree with as Bolt comments that the "aim

was to express [...] a pure language of abstraction” (2017). This emphasises the idea that art works are a visual understanding of language and it can provide the viewer with information, whether it to be personal and unique the artist, or representing the modern reality. Expanding on the idea of Rothko’s late 1960’s painting, where his palette darkened to represent himself and how he was feeling, Rosenberg thought he “saw the act of painting as inseparable from the artists’ biography” (MacAdam, 2007). Developing further on the notion of art becoming a language, Rothko’s work became very personal to him, in the sense that it was almost a form of self-expression. Bishop mentions in her book *Rothko: The Colour Field Paintings*:

He was able to juxtapose his colours and present them in such a way that each painting functioned as its own world, where the colours had their own meaning, specific to the context of the painting. He made colour his own language, but a language with the potential to speak to every viewer (2017:7).

Composition is a key component to any piece of work and is just as significant as colour as the composition of works are thought out by the artist, in parallel to what they want to portray within their work. As Zagrobelna comments, “every artwork has some composition. [...] Composition can be used to lead the viewer to see exactly what we want them to see” (2016). The layout of a piece of work can tell a story of the artist, or even the modern reality. Supporting this point Pereira comments within an article that “artists use a visual language of shape, form, colour and line to create a composition” (2015). How the artist places their materials onto the surface is important as it can contain information for the viewer to wonder and decipher.

Although Pollock and Rothko are different in the sense that their art styles are contrasting and they were both prominent within the alternative art Movement, they have a similar outlook on the work created. Supporting this is academic Anfam, who expresses in his book that “Rothko and Pollock stood a common search for an

absolute, either of compulsive movement or colour, creating a powerful, immediate impact” (1990:137). Both artists explored the idea of colour within their work which resulted in a powerful impact piece that was shown to the public and art critics. Pollock was the one that focused more on the idea of action as he moved around his canvas whilst it was on the floor. This added a performance aspect to it. Despite them both using colour within their collection of work, colour was prominently Rothko’s area of expertise as he experimented with multiple colour palettes (*figure 7 and 8*).

Expanding within the field of colour and bringing into the modern art world in the twentieth century, it can be suggested that Rothko’s colour pieces became an influence for modern artists. Callum Innes, a Scottish based artist who introduces solid colours blocks into his own style of work and the ideology of layering colours in the artwork (*figure 9*). As Honeycutt remarks about Innes, “he explains that abstraction has always been important to him [...] What a Rothko, [...] does is they give you a moment to pause. I like this idea of seeing something and reading it and having to look at it again and again” (2016). This suggests and implies that Rothko became a significant key role and influence for Innes, which can be seen in comparing the two images by Rothko and Innes (*figure 8 and 9*).



Figure 9: Callum Innes, *'Exposed Painting Lamp Black/ Asphalt'*. 2017.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

To summarise the examination of Abstract Expressionism and Colour Field Painting through the analysis of relevant research, clearly demonstrates that the Movements are highly successful. This is illustrated through varying art works by selected artists which shows how different abstraction was perceived. Other artists from previous Movements had significant influence on abstract artists, for example Miro was influential upon Pollock in terms of conceptual thinking. Alternatively, abstract artists have proved to be an inspiration for later modern artists, such as Rothko for Innes.

The role of the CIA played an important part in promoting American modern art behind the scenes which also contributed to the success of the Movement. This was significant to the era as America became involved in a Cold War with the Soviet Union. From the research carried out, it can be implied that the Soviet Union could not address how big the impact of using art as propaganda through the CIA's activities became, mostly due to the differences in how art was viewed by those two nations.

As a result of the success that came out of these Movements, it was clear art was changing with new aims being explored through the ideology of abstract forms and compositions. Alongside new forms being experimented, ideas were being developed too as the works were regarded as self-expressionism and allowed the audience to have a personal interpretation of the artworks. It can be concluded from research that the American audience were still divided with the new style of Abstract work despite it being promoted covertly by the CIA. Before Abstract Expressionism developed, American Art was valued within the Movement of American Regionalism, which had the focus of traditional American scenes. Art works such as *Nighthawks* by Edward

Hopper (*figure 6*) were celebrated. Having said that, Abstract works from the likes of Pollock were also valued amongst the public, especially by prominent art critics.

Greenberg, Rosenberg and Krauss are regarded as significant art critics specific to the era, although they are still considered important in the twenty first century. Their views and arguments about Abstract Art altered and influenced the way artists approached their work. Expanding on this, there is a clear correlation between the audience and Rothko; as this research showed that public feedback changed Rothko's colour palette from his earlier colourful works towards a darker palette some years later as it can be shown clearly through comparing figure 7 and 8 as examples of this.

In summary, this independent document clearly demonstrates that the two Movements examined have illustrated that the works produced during this time were significant then as they are today. They have provided a legacy by continuing to influence the debate within society regarding modern art. This shows how much of an impact they have on modern artists, critics and the public.

By re-examining the two Movements sixty years later it is clear the works remain powerful as they continue to engender discussion, debate and still divide public opinion.

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