

# **Abstract Expressionism 1940's and 50's**



- **Abstract Expressionism** is a movement that started in America after WWII and held sway until the dawn of Pop Art in the 1960's.
- With this movement New York replaced Paris as the center of the art world.
- The Abstract Expressionists' goal was to create raw and impulsive art. What mattered was the act of painting itself.
- **Influenced by Surrealism**, with its emphasis on spontaneous, automatic or subconscious creation, it combined the emotional intensity and self-expression of the German Expressionists with the anti-figurative aesthetic of Cubism.



The major players in Abstract Expressionism were:

**Jackson Pollock**

**Willem de Kooning**

**Mark Rothko**

- Abstract Expressionist ART could liberate the soul of the isolated individual in a messed-up world.

- The world was pretty messed up by the late 1940's when you factor in WWI & II, The Great Depression & top it off with the horrific destruction of the A-bomb. What's an artist going to paint?

- The Abstract Expressionists liberated themselves from the need for recognizable images (tradition since the Renaissance).

- Abstract Expressionism involved very little to no subject matter (non-objective).

Paintings prior to WWII



Non-objective gestures after the war

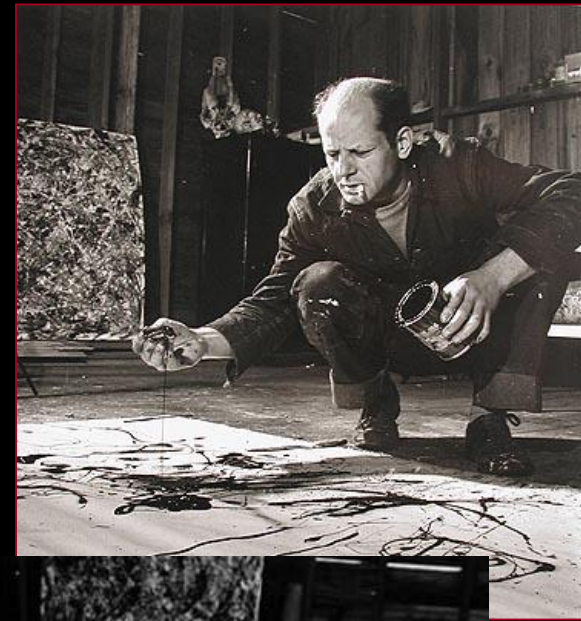
# Jackson Pollock

No one better epitomized this wildly subconscious approach than **JACKSON POLLOCK**.

Labeled “Jack the Dripper”, Pollock made a revolutionary breakthrough by **abandoning the paint brush** altogether, sloshing, slinging, flinging, pouring, ..and dripping....commercial paints onto vast rolls of canvases spread on the floor of his studio barn.

Jackson’s methods are “**action**” painting.

Pollock conveyed “**energy made visible**” in mural sized abstractions that embodied his psychic state at the moment of creation.





**Evolution of Pollock's style**



No. 1 , 1950 (LAVENDER MIST)



*Pollock, BLUE POLES, 1953*



Jackson Pollock, #5, 8ft by 4ft  
Sold in 2006 for \$140,000,000



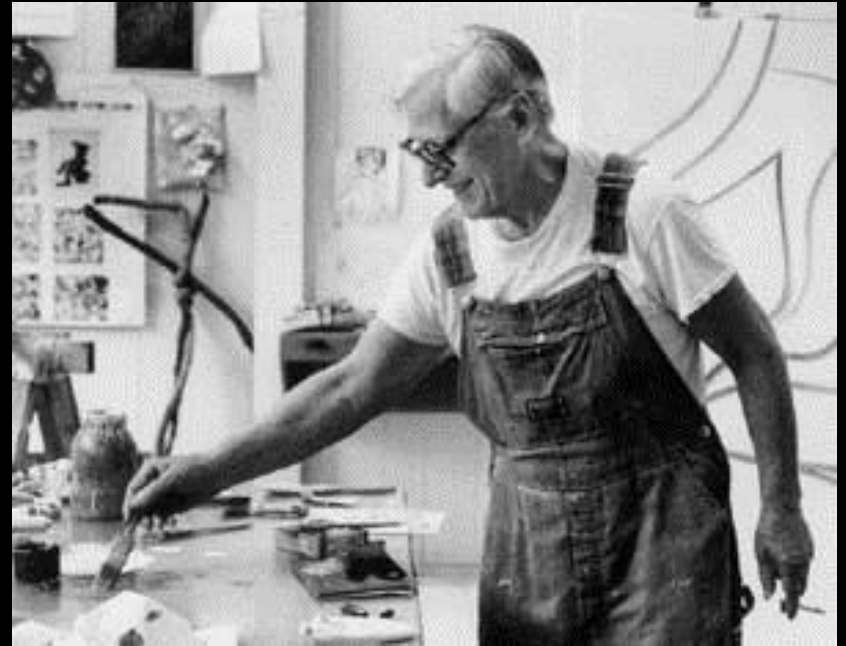
✿ Another artist who focused on the physical action of painting was **Willem De Kooning**. Using large brushes and the Surrealist technique of automatism, De Kooning created **raw, gestural surfaces**.

✿ DeKooning is known for his series of **abstract depictions of women** (which he compared to the Venus of Willendorf). These frontal images combined **slashing brush strokes** with a **vague suggestion of naturalism** to create a frightening image.

✿ As unfinished as his work looked, De Kooning was constantly reworking them in his trademark hues of **yellow, buff** and “De Kooning” **pink**.

✿ “A painting must be felt, not known”

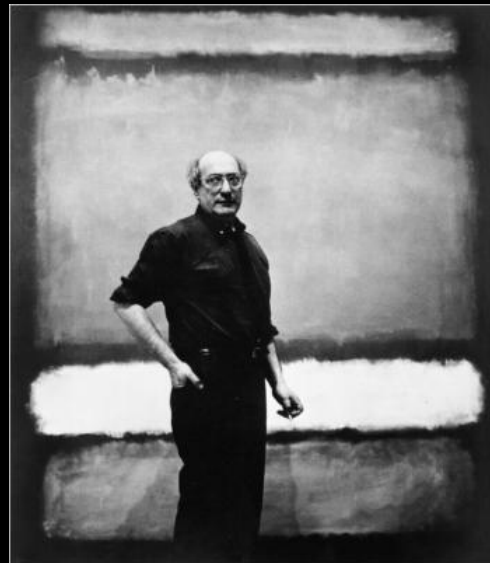
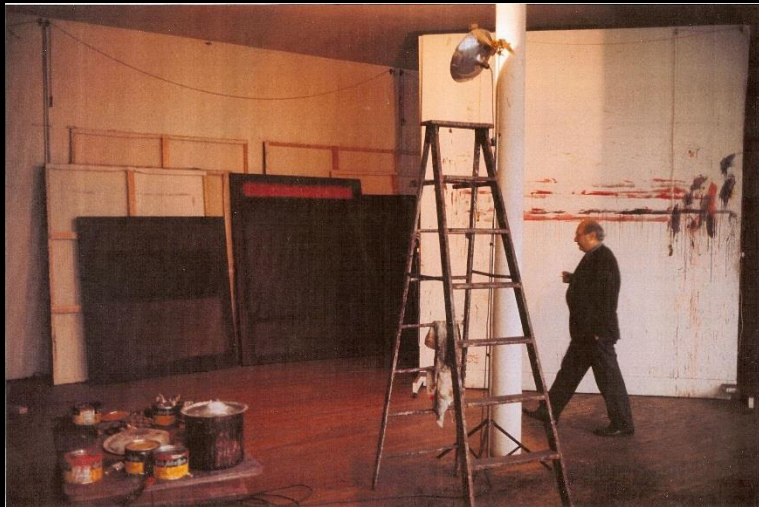




Rubbishes the idea of beauty

*Woman on a Bicycle, 1952*

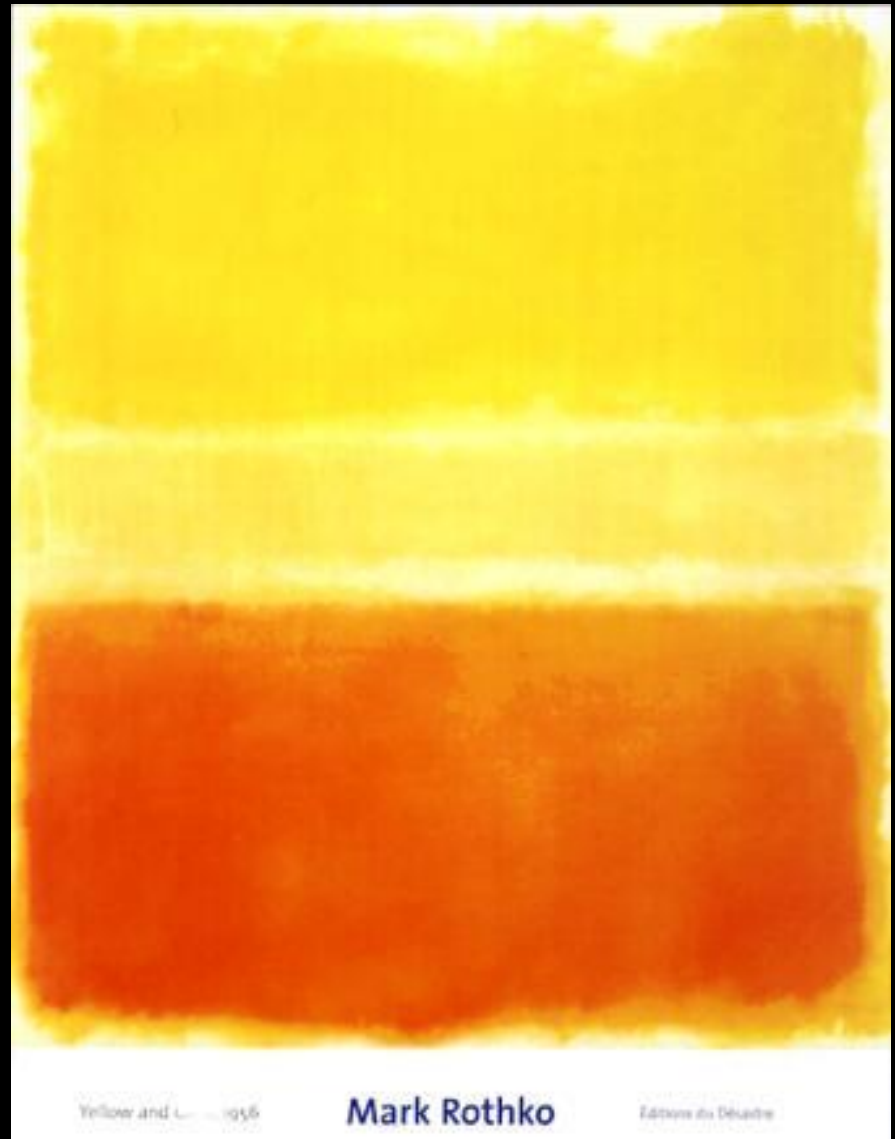
- ❑ **Colour Field Painting**, as an extension of Abstract Expressionism was primarily concerned with exploring the **effects of pure colour on a canvas**.
- ❑ Often greatly **reduced references to nature**.
- ❑ Colour Field artists painted with a **highly articulated and psychological use of colour**.
- ❑ Artists, such as **Mark ROTHKO**, were interested in the **lyrical or atmospheric effects** of vast expanses of colour, filling the canvas, and by suggestion, beyond it to infinity.
- ❑ Most colour-field paintings are **large -- meant to be seen up close** so that the viewer is **immersed in a colour environment**.





Erasing all evidence of brushstrokes **MARK ROTHKO**, covered his large canvas with coloured veils of soft edged rectangles that floated on fields of contrasting or muted complementary hues.

He wanted the viewers to **immerse themselves in the colours and react to the sensations the colours evoked.**



Yellow and L. 1956

**Mark Rothko**

Editions du Musée