

# Rothko in Britain

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In 1961 the Whitechapel Gallery held the first solo show of American artist **Mark Rothko** in Britain. This landmark exhibition is brought to life through this display.

Drawn from the Gallery's archives are original photographs, letters from the artist and new recordings of visitors' memories presented alongside Rothko's painting *Light Red Over Black* (1957), his first work bought by a British public collection.

Mark Rothko (1903–1970) was part of a generation of American painters whose style became known as Abstract Expressionism. While realising his Whitechapel Gallery exhibition he outlined precise instructions on how he wanted his work to be displayed, such as the lighting levels and the hanging height of paintings. All this created an immersive experience for the viewer.

The display sheds new light on Rothko's connection with Britain, highlighting the strong relationships he formed during his trip in the summer of 1959 and an era of dialogue between British and American artists.

Documents from the Whitechapel Gallery, Tate and personal archives attest to this connection which culminated in Rothko's donation of the *Seagram Murals* to Tate.

Excerpts from the BBC film *Cubism and After:1: Departures* (1961), directed by Michael Gill, show art students viewing Rothko's paintings at the Whitechapel Gallery. The previously unseen installation shots by photographer Sandra Lousada show visitors' serene pauses in front of the large canvases. New audio recordings capture memories of Rothko's visit to Cornwall in 1959 and the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition.

Did you see the 1961 exhibition? Tell us more  
[archiveexhibitions@whitechapelgallery.org](mailto:archiveexhibitions@whitechapelgallery.org)

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