

PearlLam Galleries

Hong Kong

ARRIVING AT REALITY:

Robert Motherwell's "Open Paintings" and Related Collages

Pearl Lam Galleries HK H Queen's

Exhibition Dates 9 January–6 March, 2019 Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm
Venue 9/F, H Queen's, 80 Queen's Road Central, Central, Hong Kong

Pearl Lam Galleries Pedder Building

Exhibition Dates 9 January–6 March, 2019 Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm
Venue 601–605, 6/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

Hong Kong—Through his transformative paintings, insightful writing, and influential teaching, Robert Motherwell's artistic practice formed the foundation of the acclaimed Abstract Expressionist sensibility. His profound contribution to contemporary art history situates Motherwell as a signal, yet under-recognized, figure in the Western canon. It is under this backdrop that Pearl Lam Galleries presents *Arriving at Reality*, a comprehensive dual-space solo exhibition of works by Robert Motherwell. Exhibiting at both the H Queen's and Pedder Building galleries in a chronological manner, *Arriving at Reality* features both Motherwell's seminal *Open* series of paintings as well as a survey of related collages spanning his five-decade-long career. In addition, the exhibition aims to contextualize Motherwell's corpus through various forms of documentation that situates him alongside his peers.

Robert Motherwell (1915–1991) was the youngest member and unofficial spokesman of the Abstract Expressionists, the first internationally influential American art movement. The Abstract Expressionists, or the New York School as Motherwell famously named his cohorts, included masters such as Philip Guston, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko. Taken as a whole, the scope of Motherwell's accomplishments is well beyond the realm of art: he provided the bedrock for an American understanding of modernism through his editorial and written work.

The exhibition's title, *Arriving at Reality*, is culled directly from the artist's own writing and his belief that the function of art is to convey a humanist truth. As Motherwell stated, "An odd contradiction, if the layman were correct in his unconscious assumption that an artist begins with reality and ends with art: the converse is true—to the degree that this dichotomy has any truth—the artist begins with art, and through it arrives at reality."

The artist began his *Open* series in 1968, a time marked by international, national, artistic and personal turmoil and uncertainties: both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy were assassinated, political demonstrations were underway in France and Mexico, the Zodiac Killer terrorized California, the artist recently separated from his wife Helen Frankenthaler, and Pop art and Minimalism took centre stage, usurping the cultural agency of abstract painting. It was under this historical backdrop that Motherwell turned to his *Open* series as an open exploration of space, subjectivity, and perhaps even a way forward. In this series, the artist furthered the trope of using a window as a set structure to investigate colour, light, geometry, and lines and his belief that primary discoveries arrive through direct and immediate contact with the materials in the studio, a notion that

supports his faith in Zen philosophy and artistic roots in surrealist automatism. The *Open* paintings often reveal a unified surface with a rectangle consisting of three lines or a colour-filled rectangular area extending from the upper edge to half or two-thirds the distance from the bottom of a monochromatic background. Lines range from sturdy to subtle and from structural to calligraphic. Space is articulated through feelings of wholeness, fluidity, continuity, serenity, freedom, and even mortality. For example, *Premonition Open with Flesh over Grey* (1974) features vertical lines stopping short of the canvas's edge, expressing the artist's awareness that all things, even one's own life, will be left undone and incomplete.

Motherwell is also recognized as one of the most important practitioners of collage, a medium he considered as the twentieth century's greatest innovation. He started to create collages in the early 1940s and was inspired by diverse materials from reality including maps, art paper, wood veneers, cloth, packing paper, etc. By the late 1950s, Motherwell's collages became more abstract and direct. He never treated collage as an activity secondary to his painting; instead, it was another form of art that afforded him infinite possibilities of personal expression. The artist enthusiastically employed techniques of surrealist automatism in his collages by splashing, dripping, pouring, and giving over to chance: a continuation of Motherwell's interest of expressing life's unpredictableness and unattainable equilibrium.

About Pearl Lam Galleries

Founded by Pearl Lam, Pearl Lam Galleries is a driving force within Asia's contemporary art scene. With over 20 years of experience exhibiting Asian and Western art and design, it is one of the leading and most established contemporary art galleries to be launched out of China.

Playing a vital role in stimulating international dialogue on Chinese and Asian contemporary art, the Galleries is dedicated to championing artists who re-evaluate and challenge perceptions of cultural practice from the region. The Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore collaborate with renowned curators, each presenting distinct programming from major solo exhibitions, special projects and installations to conceptually rigorous group shows. Based on the philosophy of Chinese Literati where art forms have no hierarchy, Pearl Lam Galleries is dedicated to breaking down boundaries between different disciplines, with a unique gallery model committed to encouraging cross-cultural exchange.

Further building on the Galleries' commitment, Pearl Lam Galleries opened its new gallery at H Queen's, Hong Kong's latest art hub, in March 2018. The four gallery spaces of Pearl Lam Galleries in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore represent an increasingly influential roster of contemporary artists. Chinese artists Su Xiaobai and Zhu Jinshi, who synthesize Chinese sensibilities with an international visual language, are presented internationally with work now included in major private and public collections worldwide. The Galleries has also introduced leading international artists, such as Leonardo Drew, Jenny Holzer, Carlos Rolón/Dzine, and Yinka Shonibare MBE, to markets in the region, providing opportunities for new audiences in Asia to encounter their work. Pearl Lam Galleries encourages international artists to create new work which engages specifically with the region, collaborating to produce thought-provoking, culturally relevant work.

Press Enquiries

Jenny Zhang / Pearl Lam Galleries
jenny@pearllamgalleries.com / +852 2857 1328

Amy Yang / Pearl Lam Galleries
amy@pearllamgalleries.com / +852 2522 1428