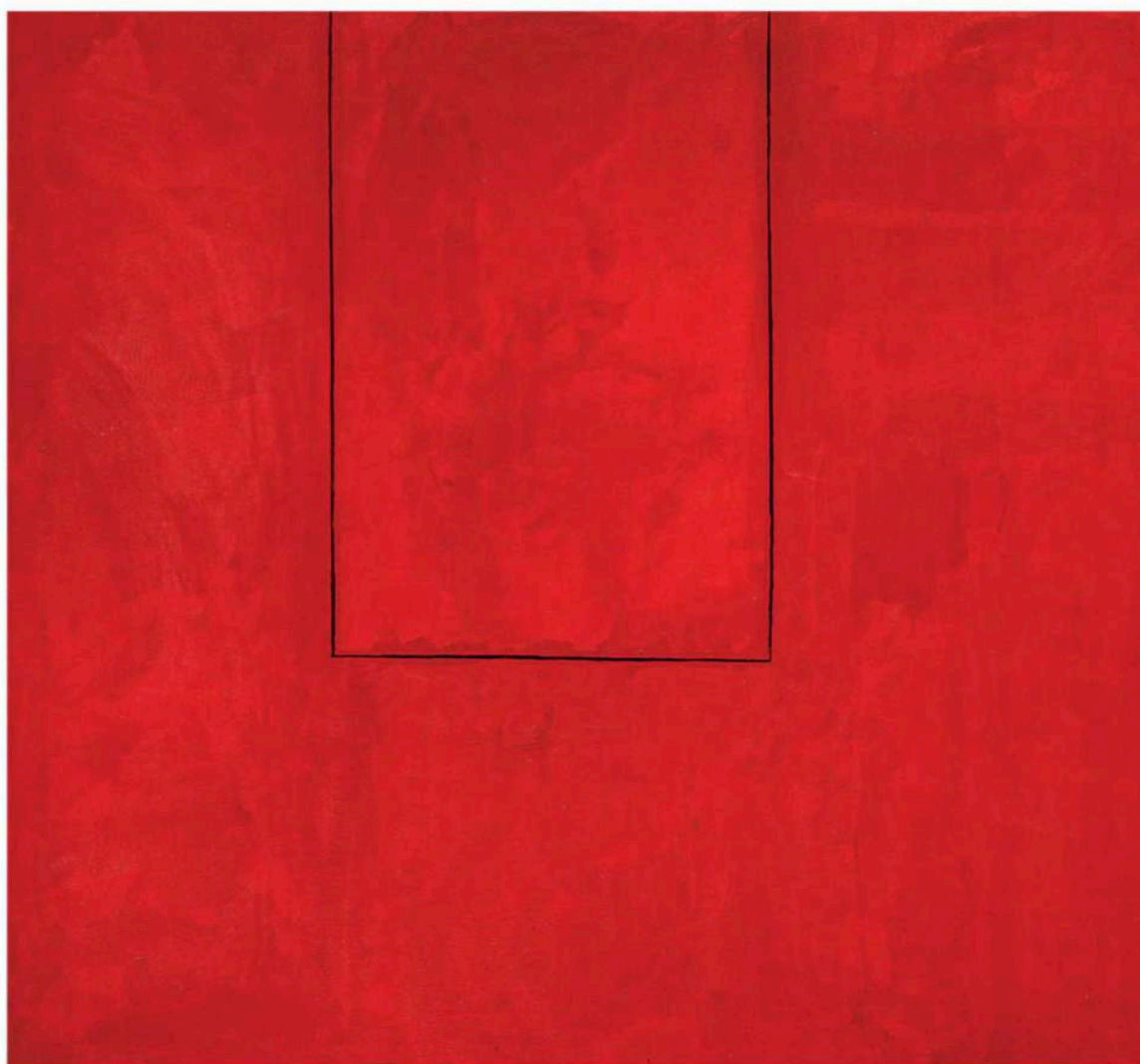


TEMPLON

II

ROBERT MOTHERWELL

MODERN PAINTERS, JUNE 2018



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Albert Oehlen's
"Woman in the
tree II," 2005,
oil, acrylic,
paper on canvas,
290 x 230 cm,
Private collection.

THE CALM AND THE STORM

IN HIS "OPEN SERIES," NOW ON VIEW
AT GALERIE DANIEL TEMPLON IN
PARIS, ROBERT MOTHERWELL
EXPRESSED THE SUBTLER, MORE
RESTRAINED SIDE
OF HIS WORK

BY MATTHEW ROSE

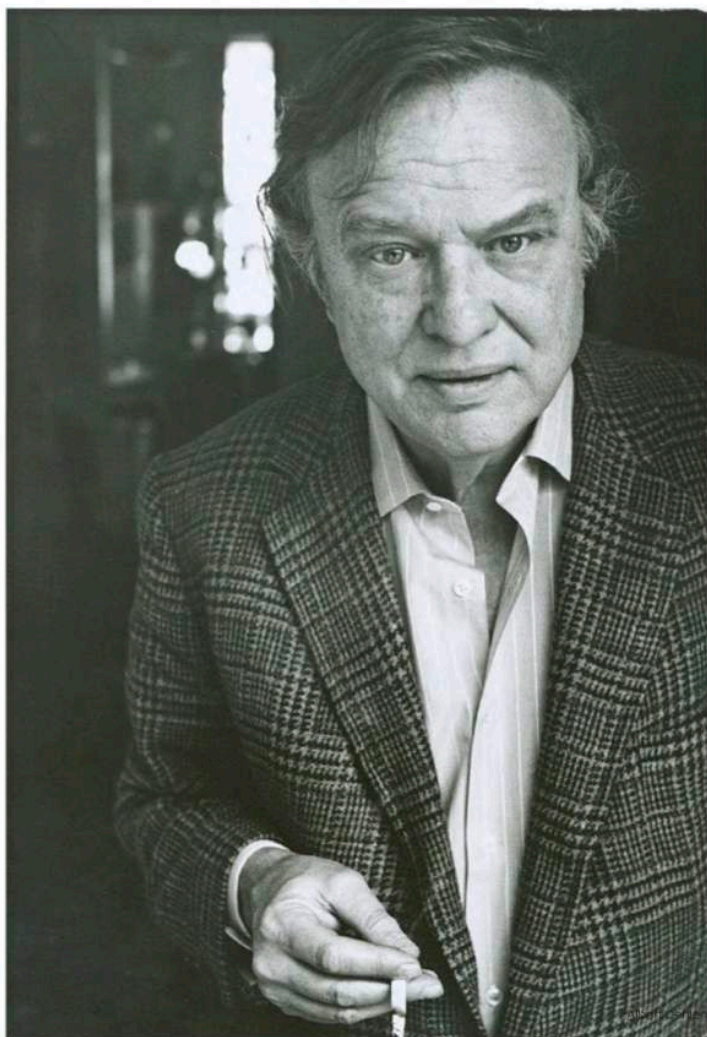
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MODERN PAINTERS, JUNE 2018



Nearly four decades ago, Robert Motherwell sat with a group of Brown University studio art students to talk about painting. I was lucky enough to be one of them. An icon of Modernism, Motherwell (1915 - 1991) casually launched into stories about his ventures into Surrealism, Automatism and his travels in Europe, where he once witnessed Picasso arranging objects on a café table in the 1950s.

"You could have cut out his table setting as an artwork," he said, remembering the simple but stunning performance by the Spanish master.

Chain-smoking throughout the two-hour gathering, Motherwell regaled us with stories of his own "New York School" contemporaries — Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollack and others — as we took it all in.

This season, Galerie Daniel Templon in Paris is presenting 20 of his "Open Series" canvases (until July 21), a selection soaked in robust reds, acid oranges, rich ochres and storm-cloud grays. The large canvases on view, produced between 1974 and 1975, recall not just the minimalist-drenched 60s and 70s New York art world, but remind us that Motherwell was also a philosopher who mined paint and canvas and color for all flavors of truth.

At that Brown gathering, the artist described painting in the most unusual terms. It wasn't blue paint he brushed on a canvas but a "piece of blue." The artist talked about "building" paintings with both ideas and material. So it is no wonder that his less well known "Open Series," begun formally in 1967 and continued throughout his life, were manifestations of the play of color, space, line and their ambiguous relationships on canvas.

The series began by accident in his

Robert Motherwell,
1969.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN BUDNICK. COURTESY OF THE DEDALUS FOUNDATION ARCHIVES, NEW YORK.

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"Dover beach no. III,"
1974,
acrylic on canvas,
195,5 x 243,8 cm.

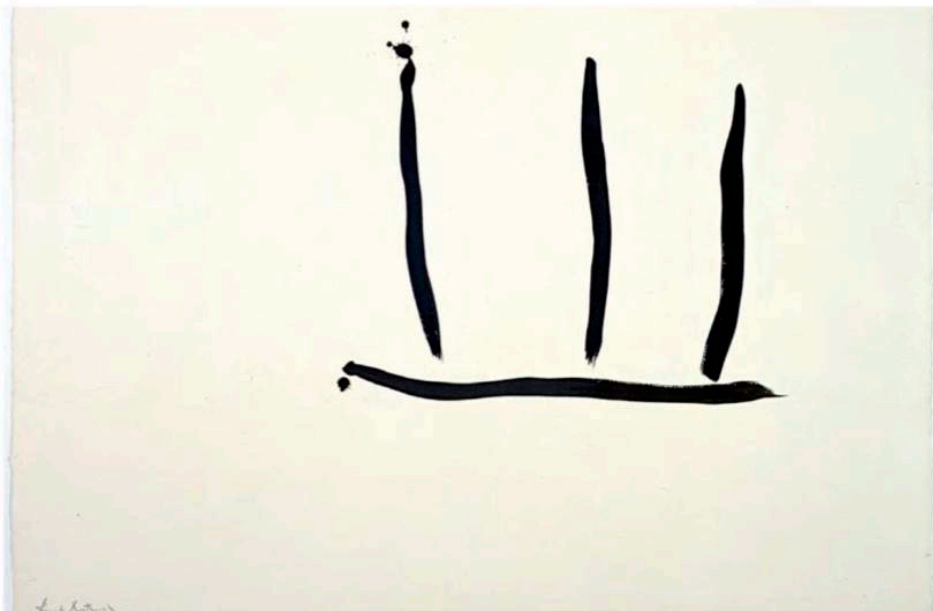
COURTESY TEMPLON, PARIS & BRUSSELS

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New York studio, when Motherwell noticed a smaller rectangular canvas leaning against a larger one. He traced the edges of smaller canvas onto the larger canvas in charcoal. The effect created a “door” or a “window.” It was a simple but powerful act: The spatial ambiguity and overt metaphor for emotional balance resonated with the artist.

“Motherwell’s works consistently express two poles of his inner being,” said Jack Flam executive director of Motherwell’s New York-based Dedalus Foundation, in a phone interview from his office in New York. “One was calm and centered and the other unpredictable and wild.”

“The ‘Opens’ speak to and from part of himself that is about a mysticism, a

calmness as opposed to the violent more emotionally engaged aspect,” he said. “These paintings express a shared universal harmony with the world.”

Motherwell began his career studying philosophy — first at Stanford, then Harvard, then Columbia. It set the ground for a world view based upon a critical assessment of existence and morality. In New York in the 1940s, it wasn’t long before he fell in with “expat” European painters and artists and began an intense exploration of all aspects of art making from Surrealism to Automatism, the latter a method of creating art without conscious thought.

As a young painter in the early 1940s crowd of newly-minted “Abstract Expressionists,” Motherwell shared their concerns about where abstraction could

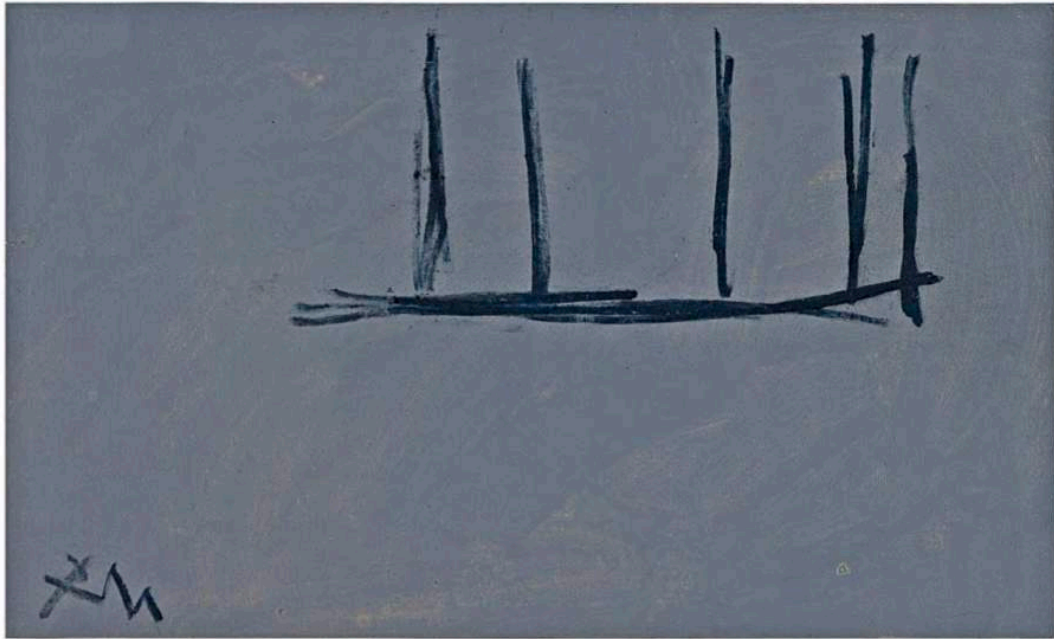
“Untitled,” 1973.
acrylic on paper,
31.13 x 41.88 inches /
79.1 x 106.4 cms.

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"Open study in charcoal on grey #1," 1974, acrylic, charcoal on paper, 46 x 76 cm.

go — exploring the unconscious, particularly its emotive power. Matisse and Mondrian played important roles for Motherwell, explained Flam, as color became the raw material to generate an architecture of form for a two-dimensional surface. The "Opens" are in many ways the result of a decades-long exploration.

Unlike Motherwell's emotionally-charged and overtly masculine "Elegies" that pay homage to the hundreds of thousands killed in the Spanish Civil War, the "Opens" belong to a different frame of mind and temperament. The "Elegies" mourn the loss of life with stark black-and-white forms and monumental shapes while the "Opens," with their simple charcoal-drawn windows or doors,

are remarkable for their conciseness, restraint and color. They explore formalism, space and painting itself, and almost always portend a subtle joy and wisdom. The "open" metaphors are literally doors or windows, a spiritual and philosophical passage.

"The surface texture doesn't come across in reproduction," said Flam about the series. "They are not color fields, but translucent; they radiate light." The orange "Opens," said Flam, are built with layers of blue or cool gray, "over which Motherwell layers orange. That surface is a critically important aspect of the series."

In post-war America the painted surface became a stand-in for consciousness. Motherwell's

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"The Mexican window,"
1974,
acrylic and
charcoal on
canvas,
194.3 x 243.8 cms/
76 1/2 x 96 ins.

COURTESY: TEMPLON, PARIS & BRUSSELS

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"Great Wall of China n°4," 1974,
acrylic and charcoal on canvas,
183 x 213,4 cm.

contemporaries worked the fields of the unconscious in unexpected ways. For example, Rothko's plunge into parcels of stacked, vibrating color seeped spirituality; Pollock tore open the violent dance of the mind-body schism, while Barnett Newman extracted a purity from stripping away the emotionalism from painted surfaces, producing some of the very first color-field works.

As Motherwell plunged into the production of these new "Open" series canvases in the late 1960s, the art world of that time was careening toward a stark formalism. Minimalism, Color Field painting and a more conceptual tilt towards the activity of painting were soaking the New York art world in the 1960s, pointing toward geometrical structure. But, said Flam, those movements gave artists like Motherwell permission to "move radically in a certain direction."

Motherwell found his own portal through one of his first painted gestures — those initial hand-drawn charcoal lines. They were key to his aesthetic; he structured his tense fields of color with them, indicating "openings," and pointing toward the barest kind of content with the fullest immersion into space.

There are in excess of 180 "Open" canvases, some numbered and others with names referring to their colors or more personal incidentals. The paintings are by far the most minimalist-looking works in Motherwell's oeuvre and reflect the ongoing reduction of painting toward pure abstraction begun almost half a century earlier in Europe.

For Flam, Motherwell consistently plumbed the subconscious to reveal something quite positive. And it came almost at the beginning of his career as a painter.

"Look at his earliest canvases," said Flam. "There are quite a few that look like the 'Opens' — the geometrical strain is there in some of those works from 1941 and 1942." MP



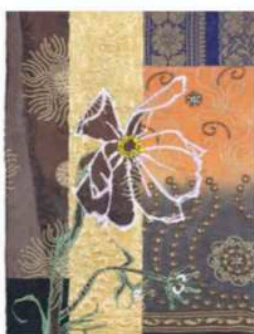
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GALLERY LISTINGS



ROBERT KUSHNER: *Small Pink Cosmos*, 2017, oil, acrylic, gold leaf, embroidery and sequins on panel, 24 x 18 inches at DC Moore Gallery, New York

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18 E 79th St,
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info@acquavellagalleries.com
acquavellagalleries.com

Modern and Contemporary Masters

Casey Kaplan

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New York, NY 10001
+1 212 645 7335
info@caseykaplangallery.com
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Matthew Brannon: *"Concerning Vietnam,"* through June 16
Jason Dodge, June 21-July 27

Cheim & Read

547 W 25th St,
New York, NY 10001
+1 212 242 7727
gallery@cheimread.com
cheimread.com

Al Held: *"Paris to New York 1952-1959,"* through July 6. Catalogue available with text by Matthew Israel
"All over the moon," Laurel Sparks, Lily Stockman, Richard Tinkler, curated by Jack Pierson, July 12-August 30

DC Moore Gallery

535 W 22nd St,
New York, NY 10011
+1 212 247-2111
info@dcmooregallery.com
dcmooregallery.com

Robert Kushner: *"Reverie: Dupattatopia,"* through June 16
Katia Santibañez: *"A Timeless Gaze,"* through June 16

David Nolan Gallery

527 W 29th St,
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+1 212 925 6190
info@davidnolangallery.com
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Joninde Voigt: *"Integral,"* through June 23
"Parentheses: The David Hartt Class of Graduating Students from the Penn MFA Program," June 28-July 26

Di Donna

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didonna.com

Surrealist, Modern, Post-War Art
"Moon Dancers: Yup'ik Masks and the Surrealists," through June 29

Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art

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Modern, Post-War and Contemporary Masters

Edwynn Houk Gallery

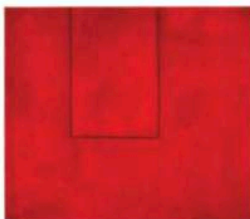
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info@houkgallery.com
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Erwin Blumenfeld, through June 2

Galerie Buchholz

Fasanenstraße 30, 10719 Berlin
+49 30 88 62 40 56
post@galeriebuchholz.de
galeriebuchholz.de

Florian Pumhösl, June 8-July 28
Atsuko Tanaka, June 8-July 28



ROBERT MOTHERWELL: *California Window*, 1975, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 72 x 84 inches at Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris

Galerie Daniel Templon

30 rue Beaubourg,
75003 Paris
+33 142 72 14 10
info@danieltemplon.com
danieltemplon.com

Robert Motherwell: *"Open Series,"* through July 21

Galerie Eigen + Art

Auguststraße 26,
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49.30.280.6605
berlin@eigen-art.com
eigen-art.com

Carsten Nicolai, through July 7

Galerie Greta Meert

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info@galeriegretameert.com
galeriegretameert.com

Jean-Luc Moulène, through June 30
Carlos Caballero, through June 30

Galerie Hans Mayer

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40213 Düsseldorf
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galerie@galeriehansmayer.de
galeriehansmayer.de

Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi

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10785 Berlin
+49 30 26 39 49 85
info@bortolozzi.com
bortolozzi.com

Danny McDonald: *"Search Parameters,"* through June 23

Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

78 Rue Julien Lacroix,
75020 Paris
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galeriewolff.com

William Anastasi: *"Conic Sections, 1968-2018,"* through June 16
"Summer Show," June 23-July 28

Galerie Karsten Greve

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galerie-karsten-greve.com

Pierre Soulages: *"Peinture,"* through June 23

Galerie Krinzing

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1010 Vienna
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galeriekrinzing@chello.at
galerie-krinzing.at

Marina Abramović, through June 9

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528 W 26th St,
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galerielelong.com

Ursula von Rydingsvard: *"Torn,"* through June 23

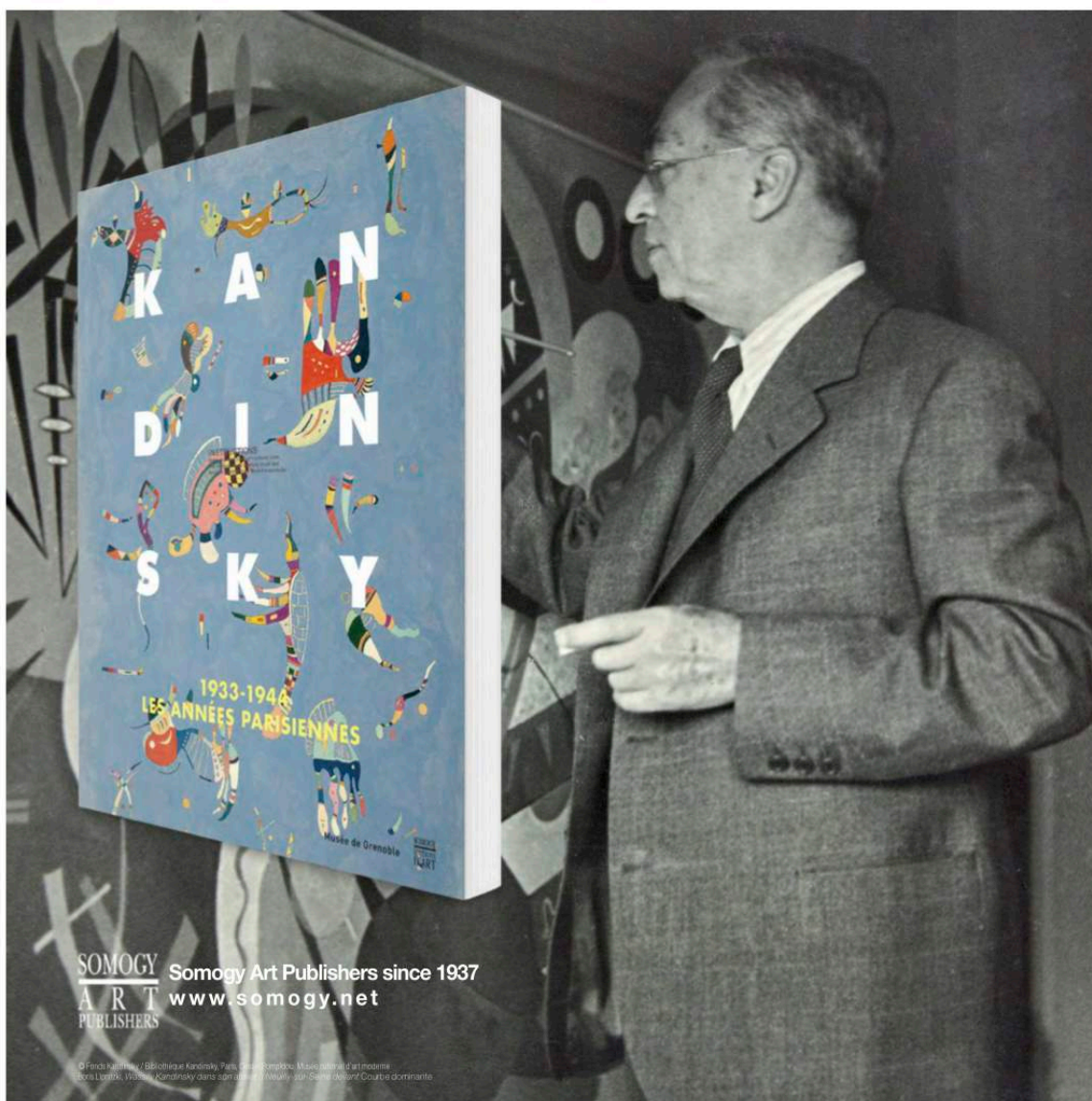
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