125 NEWBURY

For immediate release

Gottlieb/Rothko: The Surrealist Years

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395 Broadway
New York





Left to right: Mark Rothko, *Gethsemane*, 1944 © Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Adolph Gottlieb, *Composition*, 1945 © The Adolph & Esther Gottlieb Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

New York – 125 Newbury will present *Gottlieb/Rothko: The Surrealist Years*, an exhibition of paintings and works on paper by two of the central protagonists of Abstract Expressionism: Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb. Curated by Arne Glimcher, this sequel to *Gottlieb/Rothko: The Realist Years*—presented at 125 Newbury in 2025—brings together works from 1941 to 1951, a pivotal decade in which the two artists broke from Realist figuration and forged a new language of Surrealist abstraction. During this time, Rothko and Gottlieb maintained a remarkably close artistic and intellectual dialogue, together turning to the language of myth, notions of automatism, and the power of the unconscious to uncover new ways of picturing a world that had been radically reshaped by the vicissitudes of history.

The works in the exhibition center around 1942–1946, a time when the devastation of World War II and the Holocaust profoundly altered the material and psychological landscape of Western culture. The impact of the war on artists was deeply consequential. Faith in progress, reason, and classical humanism had been shaken. Artists faced the challenge of addressing a reality that seemed increasingly beyond conventional forms of representation. For Rothko and Gottlieb, myth, archaic imagery, and invented signs offered new ways to explore deep human experience—a pre-industrial psyche, untainted by the sins of modernity.

Rothko and Gottlieb had been close friends and artistic compatriots since the late 1920s. In 1940, each began moving away from conventional representation: Rothko through mythic and biomorphic imagery, Gottlieb through a lexicon of pictographic forms. The paintings of both artists from the 1940s are defined by a shared interest in symbol, myth, and the possibility of excavating a new visual language from the deep fissures of the shared past. Their thinking was shaped by important encounters with the works of Picasso, Miró, Klee, and other European Modernists, as well as by the arrival of European Surrealist artists in New York during the war years.

As Gottlieb and Rothko absorbed key ideas of the Surrealist movement—automatism, myth, dream, and the unconscious—they made them their own. In 1941, Gottlieb began developing paintings composed from stylized, abstracted, and simplified figures, animals, and symbols within an irregular grid. This exhibition includes a selection of these Pictographs, including an early example from 1941. Gottlieb would continue working in this idiom, evocative as much of carved ancient glyphs or runes as of the paintings on the inside of prehistoric caves, for the next decade and into the mid-1950s. At the same time, Rothko's assault on classicism took a more organic, biomorphic turn. In *Gethsemane* (1944), a highlight of the exhibition, Rothko pictures the pathos of the biblical story of Christ's betrayal and final hours in a psychologically charged yet entirely abstract form.

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The closeness of Gottlieb's and Rothko's thinking during the decade is echoed in two jointly authored statements published in 1943. In "Rothko and Gottlieb's Letter to the Editor," published in *The New York Times* on June 13, the two artists responded directly to the critic Edward Alden Jewell's dismissal of their work. "We favor the simple expression of complex thought," they wrote, famously going on to call for subject matter in modern painting that could be both "tragic and timeless." Later that year, in the October 13 WNYC broadcast of "The Portrait and the Modern Artist," the two artists expounded on the role of myth in uncovering new possibilities for modern painting, declaring that "the whole of man's experience becomes his model."

Gottlieb/Rothko: The Surrealist Years returns to this moment when the familiar world had become strange, when painting was searching for a new language to grapple with the reshaping of reality in the wake of war. Across both artists' works, fragments of mythic form hover between recognizable and unknown. Rothko and Gottlieb remain bound together in this epic quest, each finding his own way forward. The abstractions that would come later are already embedded somewhere here—but so is the strange, unsettled world from which they emerged. They presage what was to come, but the works of the 1940s also stand on their own: mysterious, searching, and charged with the uncertainties of their time.

Mark Rothko (b. 1903, Dvinsk, Russia; d. 1970, New York), a pioneer of the New York School, is predominantly recognized for his mesmerizing Color-field paintings of immense scale produced between 1949 and 1970, which followed his works of figurative and biomorphic imagery. His stylistic explorations resulted in a proliferation of works on paper and canvas, with layered transparencies of vibrant pigments and earth tones culminating in luminous and ethereal soft-edged compositions. His approach to painting emphasized an experimental engagement with process in order to fully articulate a universal expression. Among Rothko's artistic philosophies, he held that painting was a deeply psychological and spiritual experience through which basic human emotions could be communicated.

Rothko has been the subject of over ninety solo exhibitions held at institutions worldwide. Important solo exhibitions have been held at Tate Modern, London (2009); National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2010, 2011, 2023–24); Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, the Netherlands (2014); The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas (2015); Seoul Arts Center, Hangaram Art Museum (2015); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2017); Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna (2018); Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam, the Netherlands (2019); Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2023); and Tate St Ives, United Kingdom (2024), among many others. Rothko's work is held in virtually every major international public collection of postwar art. He received his first commission in 1958 for The Seagram Building, New York, from which he ultimately withdrew, followed by a commission from Harvard University in 1961. At the height of his career, Rothko received his most prominent commission from John and Dominique de Menil in 1964. Asked to produce murals for a non-denominational chapel in Houston, Texas, Rothko created a suite of fourteen dark palette paintings for the site, which, in their meditative quality, enact a total environment. Known as the Rothko Chapel, the building was posthumously dedicated to the artist upon its inauguration in 1971.

Adolph Gottlieb (b. 1903, New York; d. 1974, New York) was a leading figure of the New York School. An advocate of abstraction, he produced paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, and tapestries with an aesthetic vocabulary underpinned by automatism, primitivism, and Surrealism. He first received widespread recognition for his Pictographs series, which combine biomorphic abstraction with totemic imagery in compartmentalized compositions. In 1950, Gottlieb organized the protest of an exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for which he and a group of fellow artists became known as the Irascibles. Further refining his approach, Gottlieb developed his Labyrinths, Imaginary Landscapes, and Bursts series, works that he created with painted gestures and abstract forms that prompt an immediate, visceral impact on the viewer.

Gottlieb's works are held in over ninety public collections worldwide, including The Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan; Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Spain; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate, London; Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among many others.

125 Newbury is a project space in New York City founded in 2022 and helmed by Arne Glimcher, Founder and Chairman of Pace Gallery. Named for the gallery's original location, which Glimcher opened at 125 Newbury Street in Boston in 1960, the venture is located at 395 Broadway in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood, at the corner of Walker Street. Occupying a 3,900-square-foot ground-floor space in a landmark building with 17-foot ceilings, the interior of 125 Newbury has been fully renovated by Enrico Bonetti and Dominic Kozerski of Bonetti/Kozerski Architecture.

Guided by Glimcher's six decades of pioneering exhibition-making and steadfast commitment to close collaboration with artists, 125 Newbury presents up to five exhibitions per year. Directing and shaping 125 Newbury's program, Glimcher organizes exhibitions of work by artists—both within and beyond Pace's roster—who inspire him, often highlighting a specific aspect or focused period of their practice.

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