

# The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

1: Cubism

2.: Surrealism

**3: Abstract Expressionism**

# **About Abstract Expressionism (a.k.a AE)**

Impressionism: Representation of the sensations in the eye of the artist: Monet

Expressionism: Representation of the feelings in the artist: Munch

Abstraction: Non-representation

Abstract Expressionism: Non-representational expression of the feelings of the artist

**Harold Rosenberg, 1947.**

Here are six American artists, who feel no nostalgia for American objects and landscapes—no scenes of childhood, no regionalism of cowboys, country stores, cornfields, lighthouses, oil wells, no city streets, no social syntheses.

These painters shows no sentiment about their past, nor, what is perhaps even more unusual, for the past of the art of painting as a tradition. Their nostalgia is rather for a means, a language, that will formulate as exactly as possible what is emotionally real to them as separate persons. And beyond their separateness, each hopes for future simplicities of human communication.

On the western shore of the Atlantic, then, these artist have sought out, made their own, and applied to the needs of their special passions the international idiom of 20th C. painting... assimilating all national vestiges into a transcendental world style. And only to this extent, and in this subjective sense of a creative transformation, is America present in this work.

It would almost be correct to say that Art is the country of these painters. Except that they did not receive Art as a continuing spiritual tradition embracing them all in the same movement. Art to them is rather the standpoint for a private revolt against the materialist tradition that does surround them.

Attached neither to a community nor to one another, these painters experience a unique loneliness of a depth that is reached perhaps no where else in the world. From the four corners of their vast land, they have come to plunge themselves into the anonymity of New York.

At the same time, however, the very extremity of their isolation forces upon them a kind of optimism, an impulse to believe in their ability to dissociate some personal essence of their experience and rescue it as the beginning of a new world. For each is fatally aware that only what he constructs himself will ever be real to him.



**William Baziotes**

I cannot evolve any concrete theory about painting. What happens on the canvas is unpredictable and surprising to me.



**William Baziotes**

Once I sense the suggestion, I begin to paint intuitively. The suggestion becomes a phantom that must be caught and made real. As I work, or when the painting is finished, the subject reveals itself.





**William Baziotes**

I work on many canvases at once. In the morning I line them up against the wall of my studio. Some speak, some do not. They are my mirrors. They tell me what I am like at the moment.



**Willem DeKooning**

Art never seems to make me peaceful or pure. I always seem to be wrapped in the melodrama of vulgarity. I do not think of art as a situation of comfort.





**Willem DeKooning**

Some painters, including myself, do not care what chair they are sitting in. It does not even have to be a comfortable one. They are too nervous to find out where they ought to sit.



**Willem DeKooning**

Rather, they have found that painting—any kind of painting, any style of painting—to be painting at all, in fact—is a way of living today, as style of living, so to speak. That is where the form of it lies. It is exactly in its uselessness that it is free. Those artists do not want to conform. They only want to be inspired.



**Arshile Gorky**

I say that the eye is not open when it is limited to the passive role of a mirror...the treasure of the eye is elsewhere!





**Arshile Gorky**

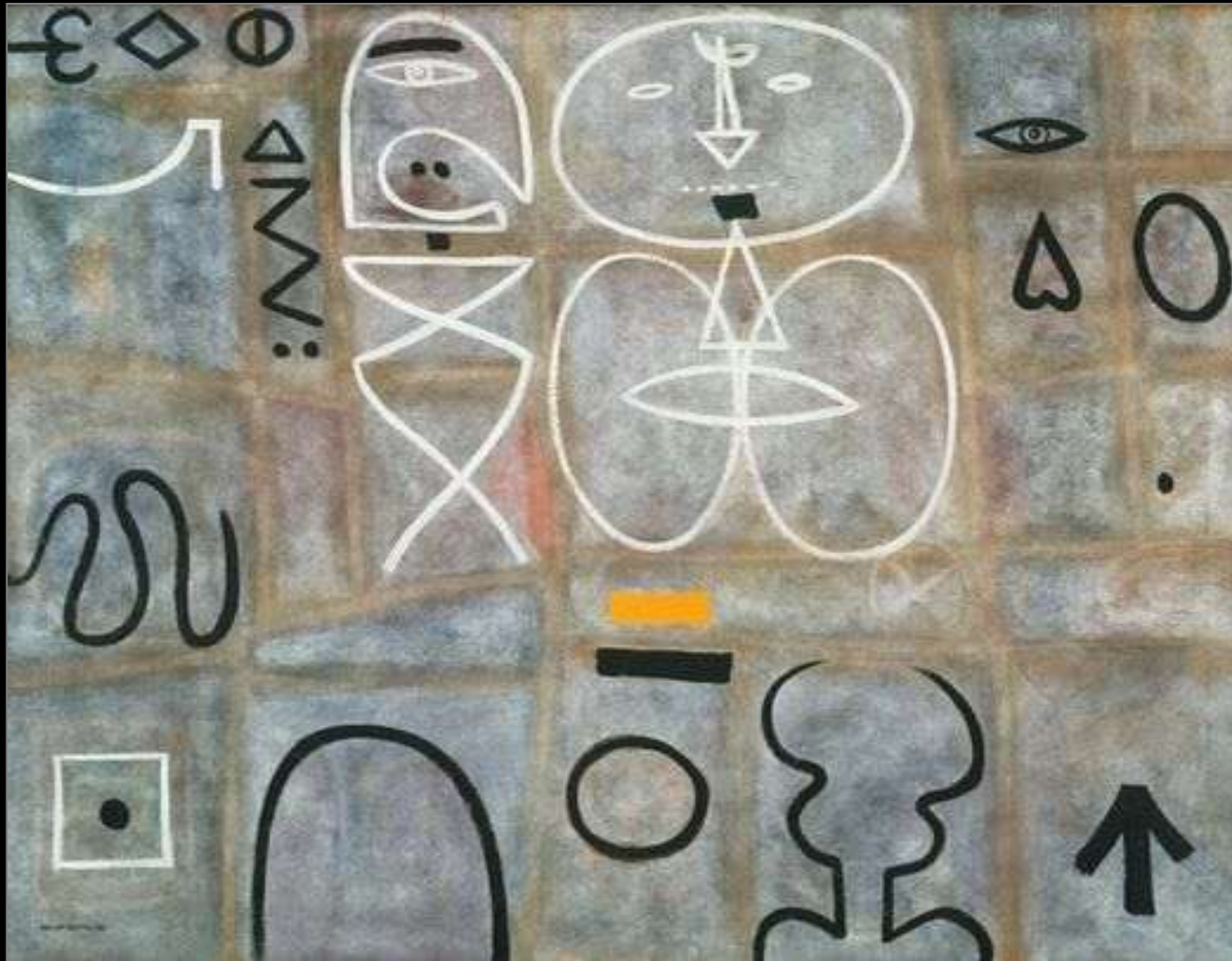
Truly, the eye was not made to take inventory like an auctioneer... it was made to cast a lineament, a conducting wire between the most heterogeneous things—the relationships which connect without possible discharge of continuity, innumerable physical and mental structures.



**Arshile Gorky**

I say that the eye is not open when it is limited to the passive role of a mirror...the treasure of the eye is elsewhere!





**Adolph Gottlieb**

Painting values are not just black and white. I prefer innocent impurity to doctrinaire purism, but I prefer the no-content of purism to the shoddy content of social realism.





**Adolph Gottlieb**

Paint quality is meaningless if it does not express quality of feeling. The idea that a painting is merely an arrangement of lines, colors and forms is boring.



**Adolph Gottlieb**

Subjective images do not have rational associations, but the act of painting must be rational, objective, and consciously disciplined.



**Franz Kline**

If you're a painter, you're not alone. There's no way to be alone. You think, and you care and you're with all the people who care, including the young people who don't know they do yet...



**Franz Kline**

Jackson always knew it: that if you meant it enough when you did it, it will mean that much... You don't paint the way someone, by observing your life, thinks you *have* to paint.





**Franz Kline**

You paint the way you have to in order to *give*, that's life itself, and someone will look and say it is the product of knowing, but it has nothing to do with knowing, it has to do with giving. The question about knowing will naturally be wrong. When you've finished giving, the look surprises you as well as everyone else.



**Robert Motherwell**

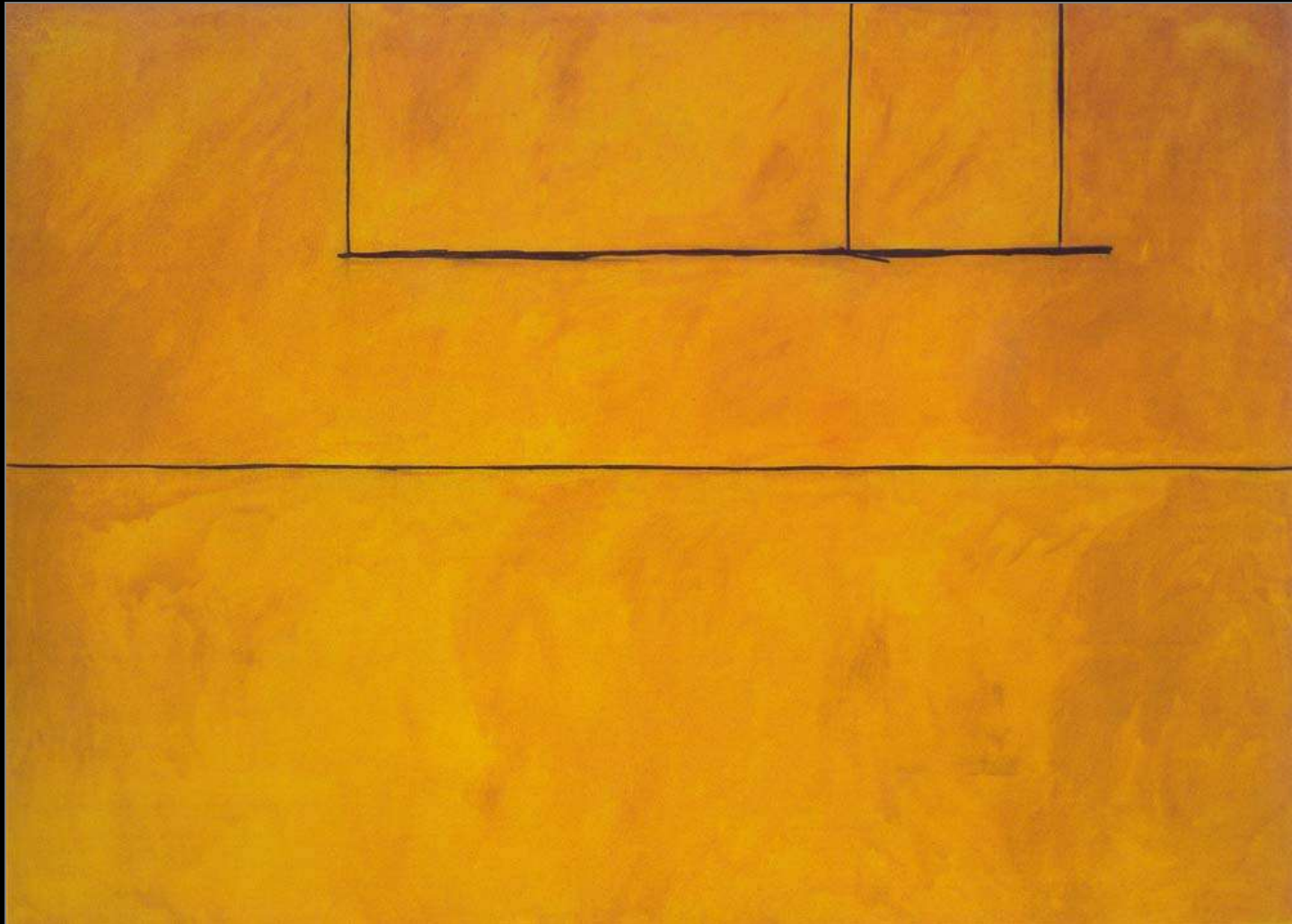
Voyaging into the night, one knows not where, on an unknown vessel, an absolute struggle with the elements of the real.





**Robert Motherwell**

The function of the artist is to make actual the spiritual so that it is there to be possessed.



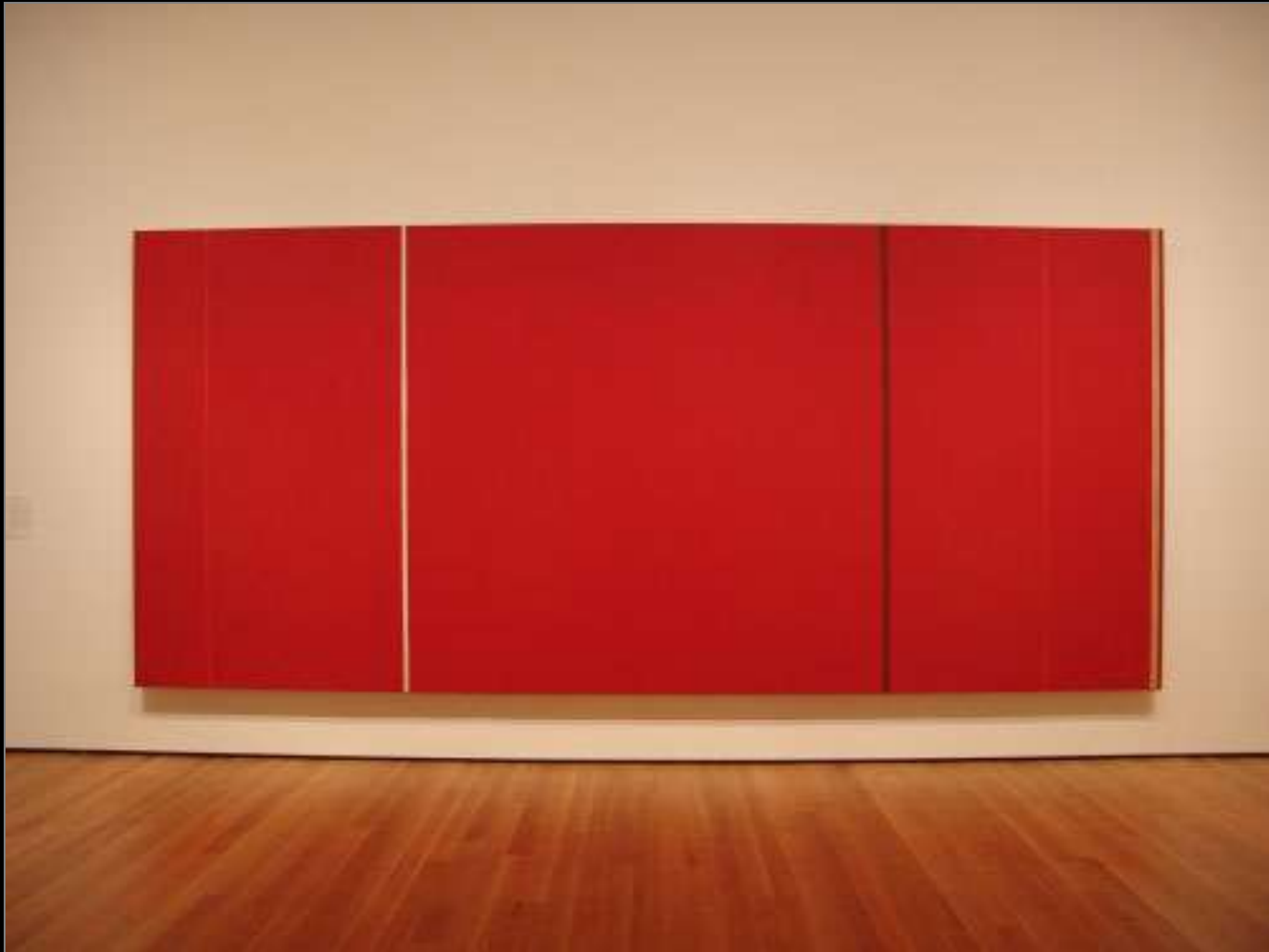
**Robert Motherwell**

If anything in the world can teach a man to venture, it is the ethical, which teaches to venture everything for nothing, to risk everything, and also therefore to renounce the flattery of the world-historical. Without ethical consciousness a painter is only a decorator.



**Barnett Newman**

We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute. We do not need the obsolete props of an outmoded and antiquated legend. We are erecting images whose reality is self evident, and which are devoid of the props and crutches that evoke associations with outmoded images, both sublime and beautiful.



**Barnett Newman**

We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting.



**Barnett Newman**

The image we produce is the self evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history.





**Jackson Pollock**

My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretch my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of a hard surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel more a part of the painting, since this way I walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting.





**Jackson Pollock**

I continue to get further away from the usual painter's tools, such as easel, palette, brushes, etc. I prefer sticks, trowels, knives and dripping fluid paint or heavy impasto with sand, broken glass and other foreign matter added.





**Jackson Pollock**

When I am *in* the painting, I am not aware of what I am doing. It is only after a “sort of get acquainted” period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.





**Mark Rothko**

Subject is crucial, and only that subject matter is crucial which is tragic and timeless.



**Mark Rothko**

The progression of a painter's work, as it travels in time from point to point, will be toward clarity, toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer.



**Mark Rothko**

As examples of such obstacles, I give (among others) memory, history, or geography, with are swamps of generalizations from which one might pull out parodies of ideas (which are ghosts) but never an idea in itself. To achieve this clarity, is inevitably to be understood.



**Clyfford Still**

We are committed to an unqualified act, not illustrating outworn myths or contemporary alibis. One must accept total responsibility for what he executes.





### **Clyfford Still**

From the most ancient times, the artist has been expected to perpetuate the values of his contemporaries. The record is mainly one of frustration, sadism, superstition, and the will to power.



### **Clyfford Still**

What greatness of life crept into the story came from sources not yet fully understood, and the temples of art which burden the landscape of nearly every city are a tribute to the attempt to seize this elusive quality and stamp it out...



**Clyfford Still**

Demands for communication are both presumptuous and irrelevant. The observer usually will see what his hopes and fears and learning teach him to see. But if he can escape these demands that hold up a mirror to himself, then perhaps some of the implications of the work may be felt.

**Robert Motherwell**

Voyaging into the night, one knows not where, on an unknown vessel, an absolute struggle with the elements of the real.

The function of the artist is to make actual the spiritual so that it is there to be possessed.



