

MNUCHIN GALLERY

The New Criterion



"Church & Rothko: Sublime." The Mnuchin Gallery, installation view. Courtesy of Mnuchin Gallery, New York. Photograph by Tom Powel Imaging.

By Andrew Shea
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"Church & Rothko: Sublime," at the Mnuchin Gallery (through December 12): In last week's notebook I prefaced my review of a new monograph on the contemporary painter Stanley Whitney with a brief discussion of Mark Rothko, an obvious influence on Whitney's color-filled abstractions. By sheer coincidence, the next day, as I was walking to the Metropolitan Museum, I happened upon the Mnuchin Gallery on East Seventy-eighth Street, outside of which was a banner advertising its current exhibition, "Church & Rothko: Sublime." Putting the Ab-Ex Rothko into conversation with the nineteenth-century American landscapist Frederic Edwin Church, a leading member of the Hudson River School, the exhibition makes an altogether more provocative aesthetic comparison. But a step into the Mnuchin galleries and a look at the juxtaposition of Rothko's powerful Browns and Blacks and Reds (1957) and Church's *Marine Sunset (The Black Sea)* (1881–82), a dramatic picture whose seemingly impossible reds and blacks shock the retina, will convince any visitor that there's something there. To be sure, these are very different pictures, and very different artists, but having a chance to see and compare how both grasp in their own way towards some semblance of "the sublime" through the medium of paint is an instructive experience. An informative catalogue essay by John Wilmerding supplements this museum-quality presentation.