

MNUCHIN GALLERY



THE ART OF MARRIAGE

Helen Frankenthaler & Robert Motherwell

October 30 – December 14, 2019

Mnuchin Gallery is proud to present *The Art of Marriage*, an exhibition of works by Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) and Robert Motherwell (1915-1991). Opening October 30, the exhibition will be on view through December 14, 2019. A reception will be held Wednesday, October 30 from 5:30-7:30pm.

Helen Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell were married from 1958 to 1971. Both were formed, established artists, with highly individual ways of making art, at the time of their whirlwind courtship, which began at the end of 1957. They were almost certainly aware of each other's work, since even though they had never really connected, they had traveled in the same aesthetic circles. Motherwell, forty-two when their romance began, was the youngest of the First Generation Abstract Expressionists, but one of the most distinguished, connected with the Surrealists, a veteran of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery, known as a writer and translator, as well as a painter, and someone whose work Frankenthaler admired. Frankenthaler, who had just turned twenty-nine, was a rising star whose work was increasingly attracting attention and even beginning to influence older artists. Despite the obvious differences in their work – and

in the way they made their work – the two painters shared fundamental convictions: that their art sprang from internal imperatives, that the painter’s role was to reveal the unseen, not to report on the visible, that gesture and color were potent carriers of emotion, that the art of the present was seamlessly connected to the art of the past, and more.

During the years of their marriage, both Frankenthaler and Motherwell continued to pursue their individual paths, but at the same time, certain commonalities and sympathies emerged in their work. During their honeymoon in Spain and France, they first worked side by side in their hotel room, then occupied studios in close proximity, in a rented villa in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, making paintings that referred, obliquely, to places they visited together. Before her marriage, Frankenthaler had not explored the potential of collage, which Motherwell had made the basis of some of his most potent and inventive work. In the 1960s, Frankenthaler experimented, briefly, with the technique. Motherwell investigated the potential of staining, a technique Frankenthaler use extensively, in a series of works on Japanese paper, the Lyric Suite. And there are many other connections, some more subtle, some more obvious.

This exhibition concentrates primarily on work, in various media, made during the thirteen productive years that Frankenthaler and Motherwell spent together, in an effort to reveal both cross-fertilization and individuality. By also including a selection of works that postdate their marriage, the exhibition explores the persistent echoes, long after they parted, of the effect these remarkable artists had on one another. A substantial, fully illustrated catalogue, authored by Karen Wilkin, will discuss the couple’s relationship, their influence on each other’s work, and their independence, and present, as well, an idea of their life together.

The exhibition comprises important loans from private collections, including major canvases and works in other mediums by both painters spanning the earliest years of their relationship through the years following their marriage. The loans include some of Motherwell’s iconic collages along with some of the rare works in the medium that Frankenthaler made in response to his example; a group of Motherwell’s unique Lyric Suite series, ink on rice paper; and an unusually large, celebratory 1959 Frankenthaler oil on paper. In addition, significant works from the collections of the Whitney Museum and the Grey Art Gallery, New York University will be on view.

Image: Helen Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell at their wedding lunch, L’Armorique restaurant, Second Avenue and East 54th Street, New York, April 6, 1958. Photograph by Hans Namuth. Courtesy Helen Frankenthaler Foundation Archives, New York and Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona © 1991 Hans Namuth Estate.