

Abstract Landscapes: Exploring the Work of Robert Motherwell

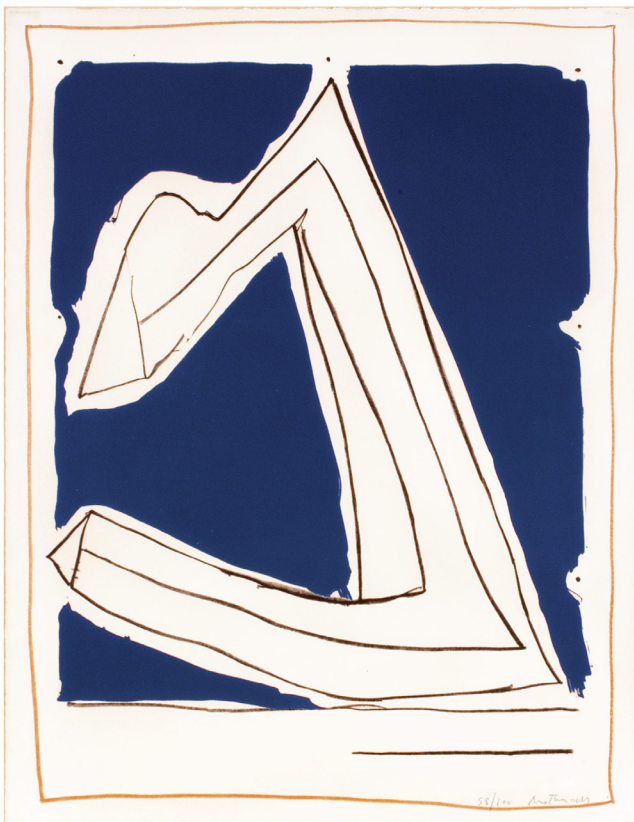
Inspiration: Robert Motherwell (American, 1915–1991). *Summertime in Italy (with Lines)* (below), 1966. Lithograph. Gift of Arthur Zankel, 1991 (91.3.1). © Dedalus Foundation/ Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY.

Ages: 5+ (through adult)

Duration: Open-ended

Materials needed: Paper and paints, markers, or crayons.

Introduction: Robert Motherwell was a founding member of the Abstract Expressionist group, an American art movement that is characterized by spontaneity, improvisation, and a focus on the process, or action, of artistic creation. Based largely in New York, the Abstract Expressionists established the U.S. as a center of the art world following World War II. Artists working within this movement often created works of sweeping colors and shapes, using new, unorthodox methods and modes of artistic production, such as paint splatters, spills, and non-traditional materials.



Look

Take a close look at Motherwell's *Summertime in Italy (with Lines)*.

- What's going on in this work?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Think

- What does this work remind you of?
- What colors and shapes led you to this response?
- How do you think this work was made?

Connect

Summertime in Italy (with Lines) was inspired by the artist's summer stay in Alassio, Italy, in 1960. Influenced by the nature around him—the ochre hills, white sand beaches, and blue skies of the Italian landscape—Motherwell abstracted the landscape, reducing representative shapes, colors, and textures and omitting formal qualities to focus on the essential elements of the scene. Throughout his career, Motherwell would spend long hours observing nature, specifically the coastal areas of his birthplace in the Pacific Northwest, and then, later, in New England and the coasts of France and Italy. He would turn these hours of observation into various series of works.

Do

1. Motherwell would often become fixated on a certain landscape and make a series of abstract paintings inspired by it. Take some time to choose a location in nature to be the focus of your project.
2. Once you have chosen your location, spend a few moments observing the space. Think about the colors you see, the shape of the landscape, what is moving and what is unchanging.
3. Using markers, crayons, or paint, create an abstract version of your chosen landscape.
4. Continue to revisit and remake abstract representations of your location. Return to your location at different times of day, under different weather conditions, and, if you can, during different seasons. Notice how the colors, shapes, and basic elements of your landscape change. Note these changes or similarities in your series.

Share

Take a photo of your work and post it to Instagram using the hashtags #RobertMotherwell and #MuseumFromHome, and tag @HudsonRiverMuseum.