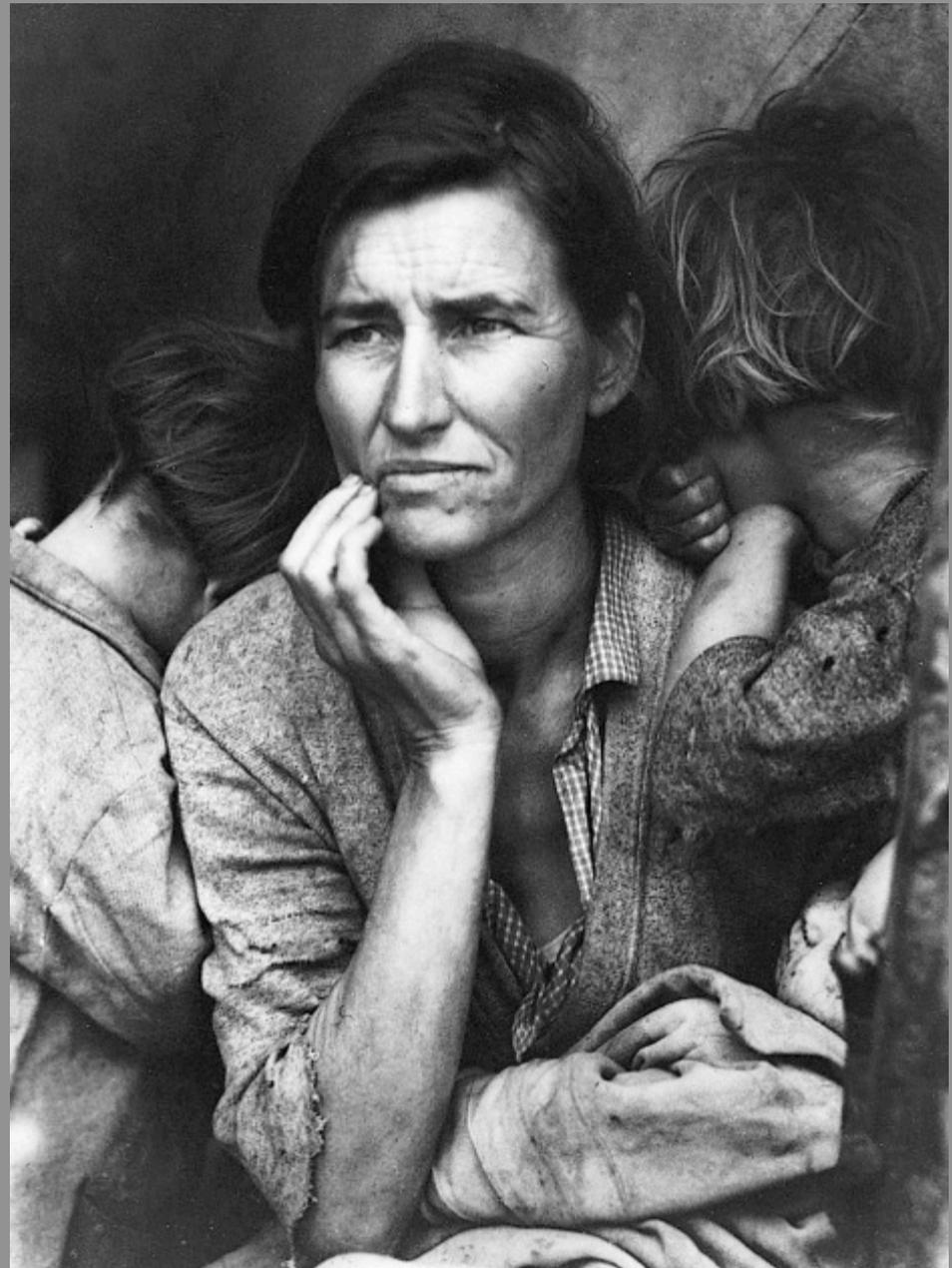


## New York in the 1940s

The Depression, the FAP, the war and America's pervasive Protestant ethic had instilled in young artists a commitment to social relevance--or usefulness.

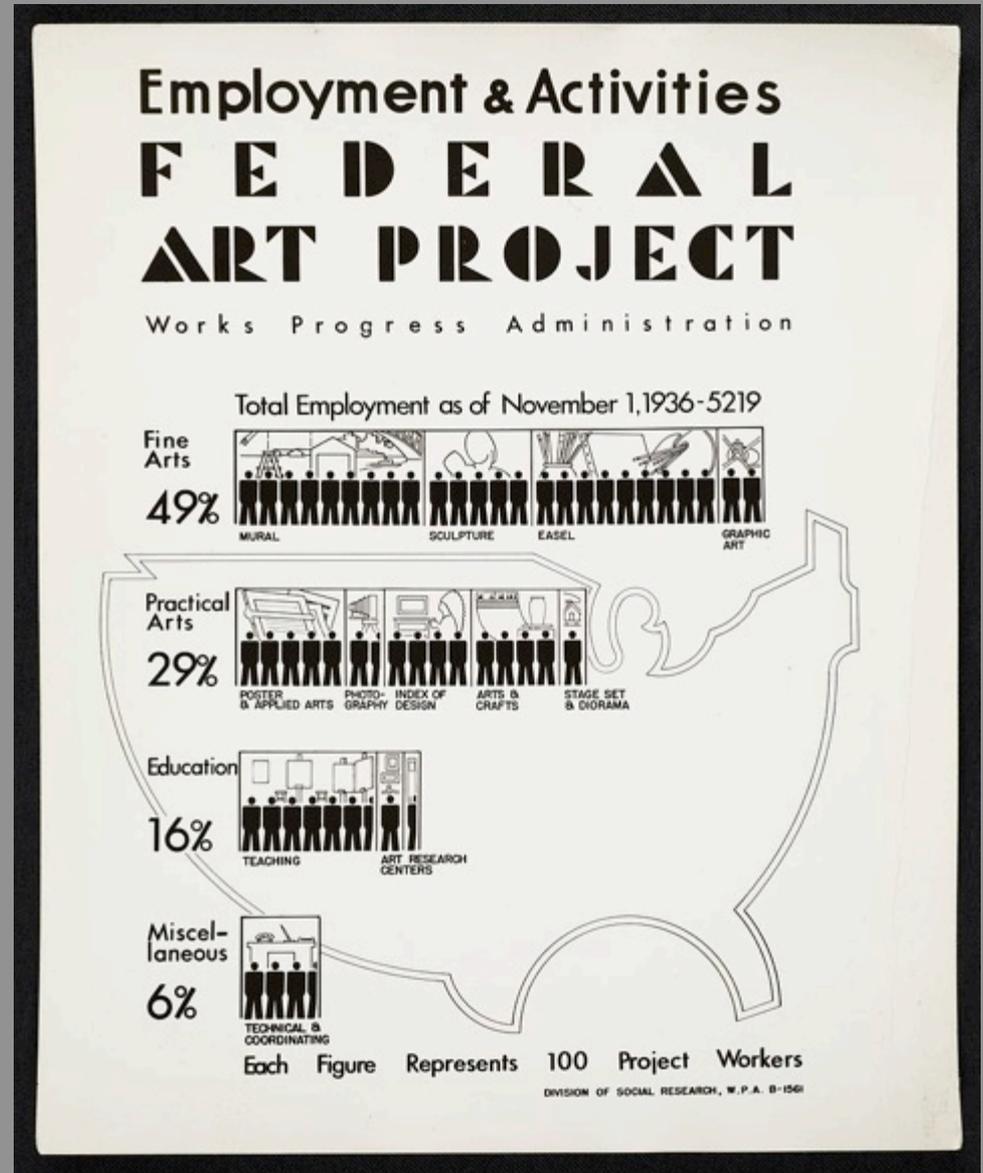
Trauma of the depression forced a reappraisal among American artists of their cultural identity.

DOROTHEA LANGE, Migrant Mother, Nipomo Valley, 1935. Gelatin silver print. Copyright © the Dorothea Lange Collection, The Oakland Museum of California, City of Oakland (gift of Paul S. Taylor).



# New York in the 1940s

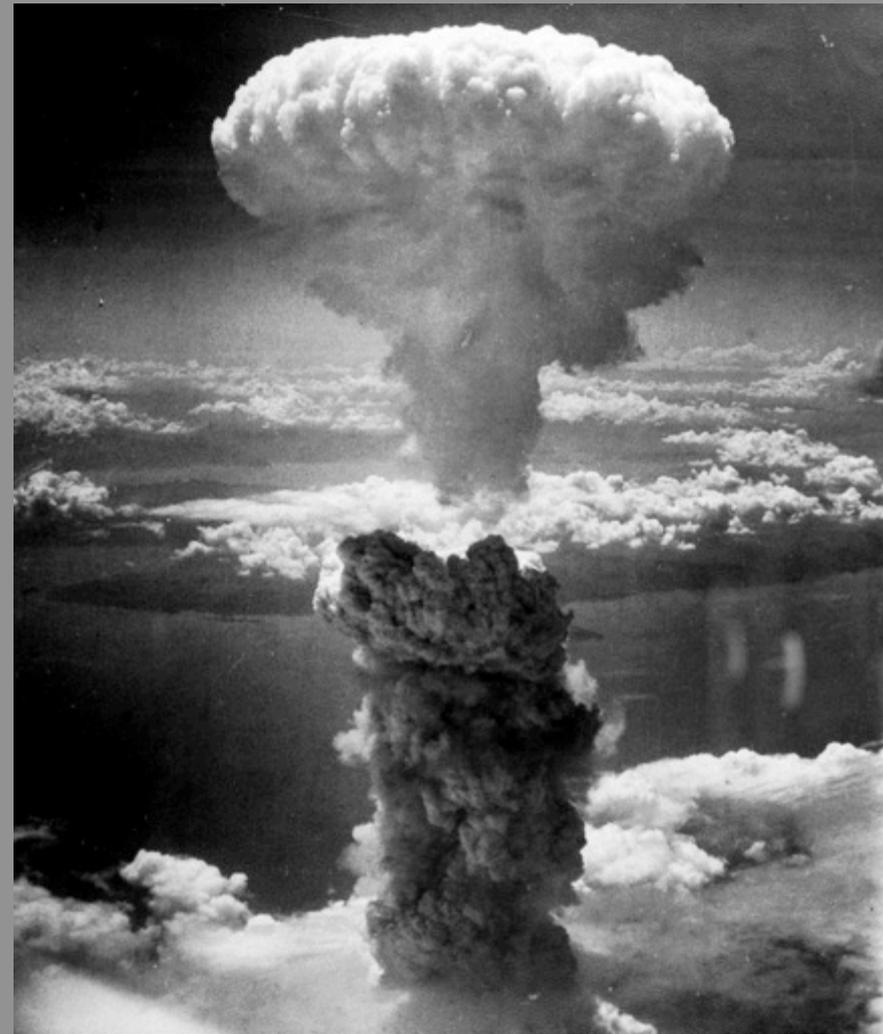
First through themes of Social Protest but then came the WPA and the Federal Art Project--**Work program developed to put artists to work--**gave an opportunity for Social Realism to flourish--and as we will see later, enabled the development of experiments with abstraction.



# Many things influenced the style we refer to as **Abstract Expressionism (or the New York School)**

The New York school is often considered the first truly 'American Movement'.

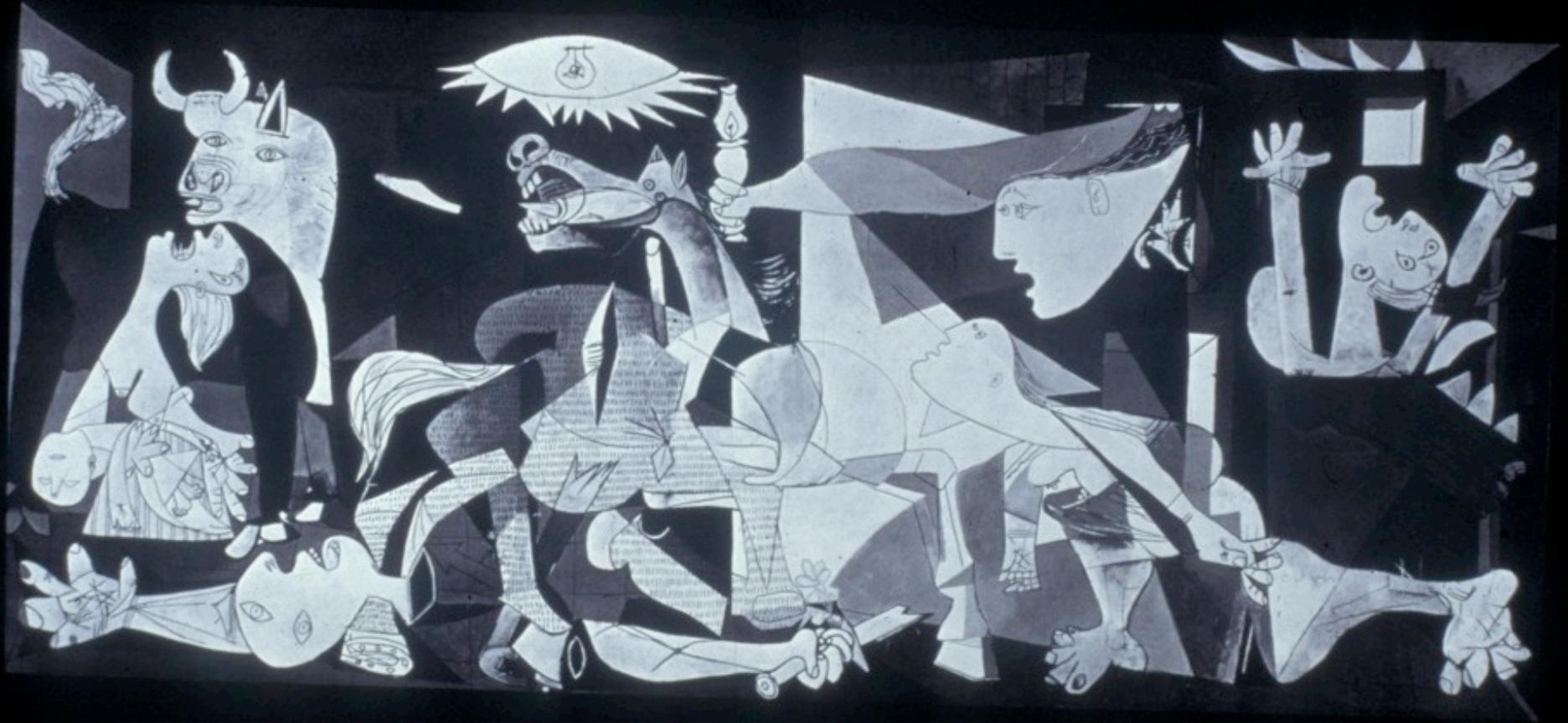
Birthered out of **the atrocities of the Second World War**, including **the atom bomb** and the horrors of the **Nazi Holocaust**, this movement was also influenced by **European avant-garde** ideas as they bumped up against the more pragmatic social and political ones in America of the 1940's.



# Many things influenced the style we refer to as Abstract Expressionism (or the New York School)

The seeds of the movement were sewn in the 1930's as **MOMA** began retrospectives of European Modernism from Post-Impressionism to Cubism; **DADA** and **Surrealism** and modernist works were shown also at NYU and at the Guggenheim in the 1930's.





1939 MoMA exhibited Picasso's *Guernica*, which was enormously influential. (it stayed there until around 79 on continuous display)

*Guernica*--was particularly important because it combined a powerful political statement with European formal sophistication.

## Other important influences:

**Mexican Social Realists** influenced young artists by stressing the importance of socialism, a political art for the masses and experimental techniques and materials. Their large public murals provided a model for scale.

**Surrealist interest in the subconscious** that could be accessed through automatic processes and Dada notions that art is not so much a visual experience but an intellectual one.

Interest in ideas of **Carl Jung concerning the power of myth** and the universal unconscious proliferated in popular media.



Andre Masson. Surrealist interest in the subconscious that could be accessed through automatic processes.



A political art for the masses and experimental techniques and materials. Their large public murals provided a model for scale.

Mexican Social Realists influenced young artists by stressing the importance of socialism, a political art for the masses and experimental techniques.





The American Regionalists, in particular **Thomas Hart Benton**, who was a mentor to Jackson Pollock focused, worked with styles, preferring nostalgic themes of the American mid-west and heroic ones of the growth and prosperity of American city life.



Arshile  
Gorky, *The  
Liver is the  
Cock's  
Comb*,  
1944  
Oil on  
canvas,  
73 1/3 x  
98”

Andre Breton declared the painting to be "one of the most important paintings made in America" and he stated that Gorky was a Surrealist. It's spontaneity influenced the next generation of Artists. Romanian Immigrant to US.



The New York School was comprised of many different artists but two main directions were taken: **Action Painting** and **Color Field Painting**.



Jackson Pollock, Number 1 (Lavender Mist)



Mark Rothko,  
Orange and Yellow, 1956



Jackson Pollock, Number 1 (Lavender Mist), 87x118"



Without a doubt, Jackson Pollock is the most well know of the artists of this time... he studied with Benton and was a Classic American success story.  
Students in front of *One: Number 31, 1950* at MoMA

At this time there was great interest in **myth** as a source of the universals of the human psyche.

Artists were looking to **Greek literature** and “primitive” cultures for more authentic connection with the underlying forces of nature.

The theories of **Carl Jung** postulated archetypes in the individual unconscious belonging to the collective unconscious...thus connecting all humans.

**Myths of rebirth and renewal** had particular attraction.

Also, the art market was growing with other things in U.S. economy.

Along with it, art critics, the gallery system, magazines, grew.

# Jackson Pollock

War, 1947

This is the only drawing Pollock ever titled.

A human figure and a bull are flung onto a raging pyre of human debris. To the right, the crucifixion of a hooded figure is suggested.



Even as Pollock's work references Guernica and offers a statement on the universal horrors of war, it also has a personal dimension, drawing on from the psychological language of Surrealism that fueled his early works.

## Artifacts from the Natural History Museum



## Painting by Jackson Pollock



In addition to studying Picasso, Native American Art also heavily influenced Pollock. He had grown up in Cody, Wyoming but also the Natural History Museum installed a new wing dedicated to arts of the ‘Americas’.



Pollock spent 10 years developing a semi-figurative symbolic vocabulary.

Preoccupied with totem motifs-- violent composition and crudely vigorous brushwork embody his private anxieties including themes of classical history and myth.



Pasaphe, 1943

He was interested in Jungian psychology, automatism, primitive myths (especially those that dealt with sexuality).

The Federal Art Project, provided him with a source of income for nearly eight years and enabled him to devote himself to artistic development.



In *Male and Female*, it is evident that he was influenced by both Jungian psychoanalysis and Southwest culture, such as Navajo rugs and Indian sand paintings. Other references like this Peruvian stele from 1000 BCE.

Male and Female, 1942



## Full Fathom Five

### The Tempest (I, II, 329)

by William Shakespeare

FERDINAND.

Where should this music be? i'the air or the earth?

It sounds no more: - and, sure, it waits upon  
Some god o'the island. Sitting on a bank,  
Weeping again the king my father's wrack,  
This music crept by me upon the waters,  
Allaying both their fury and my passion  
With its sweet air: thence I have follow'd it,  
Or hath it drawn me rather: - but 'tis gone.  
No, it begins again.

ARIEL, *sings*.

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade

...

*Full Fathom 5*. 1947

Oil on canvas with nails, tacks, buttons, coins, cigarettes, etc, (50 7/8 x 30 1/8 in) Purchased by MoMA in 1955.





His canvases became surfaces, which simply recorded his passage. Using fluid paint poured from the can, unconscious processes, as opposed to conscious ones, were accessed.

In the background, his wife, the artist Lee Krasner.



*Number One, 1950 (Lavender Mist) 1947 and 1950*

Painted in an old barn-turned-studio next to a small house on the East End of Long Island



*Detail--Number One, 1950 (Lavender Mist) 1947 and 1950*

The property led directly to Accabonac Creek, where eelgrass marshes and gorgeous, watery light were a source of inspiration for him.



# JACKSON POLLOCK

Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?



Recently an American magazine that has often called for the best of our time and a few months ago, "the greatest living painter in the United States." It was in New York that Jackson Pollock, perhaps the most original and most powerful of our artists, was born. He was born in 1912, and he died in 1956. He was a man of great talent and great energy. He was a man who was not afraid to experiment and to take risks. He was a man who was not afraid to be different. He was a man who was not afraid to be the greatest living painter in the United States.



In 1949, an article ran in Life Magazine asking the question, "Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?"



**In 1951 Pollock underwent a shift in emphasis as he abandoned non-objective imagery in favor of abstracted references to human and animal forms. "When you're working out of your unconscious," he explained, "figures are bound to emerge."**

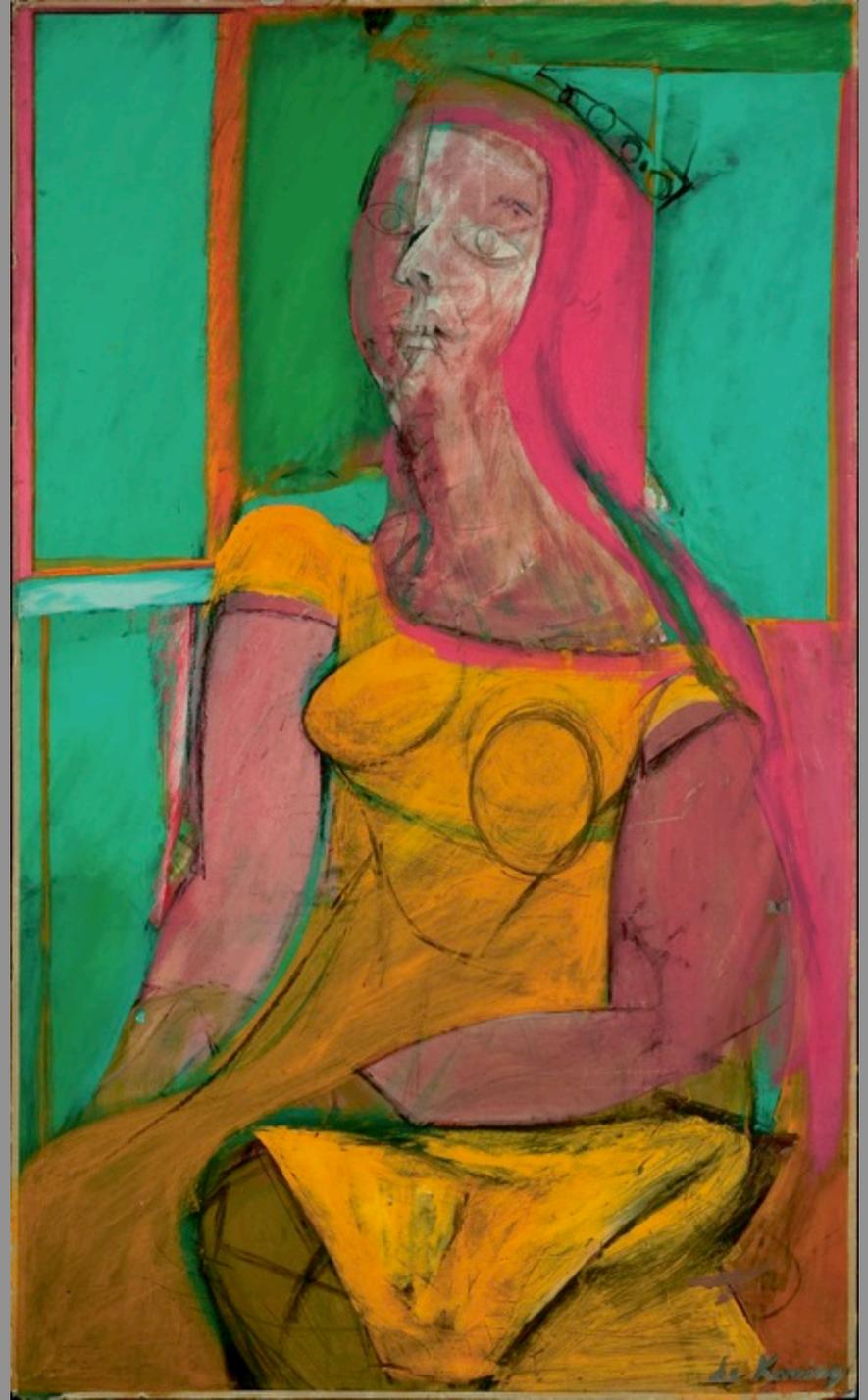
**By 1955 he stopped painting. The following year, was killed while driving drunk.**

*Portrait and a Dream*—1953, Oil and enamel on canvas, 58 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 134 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.

Unlike Pollock, Willem De Kooning never let go completely of the figure as a subject.

His work shows more evidence of Cubism.

He grew up in Northern Europe but worked with the FAP after moving to New York.



Queen of Hearts, 1943-6

De Kooning  
*Excavatio*,  
1950  
81x100 in



“There is a persistent urge, as persistent as it is largely unconscious, to go beyond the cabinet picture, which is designed to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall, like a mural, would spread over it and acknowledge its physical reality.” Cement Greenberg





Seated statuette of Urnanshe, from the Ishtar temple at Mari (modern Tell Hariri), Syria, ca. 2600–2500 BCE. Gypsum inlaid with shell and lapis lazuli, 10 1/4" high. National Museum, Damascus.



**Lee Krasner**, 1966, Oil on canvas, 69" x 10' 5 1/2"

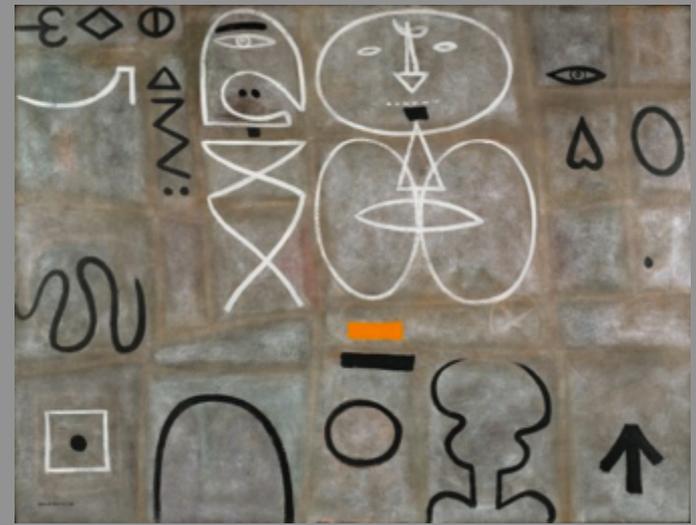
By the mid-1960s, however, she had worked out her grief and anger and began painting lushly colored, sharply focused, emblematic floral forms, taking a more lyrical and decorative Fauvist-inspired approach.

Little Image Paintings, 1946-50 express her fascination with Hebrew and other alphabets that she found 'calligraphic' in style.





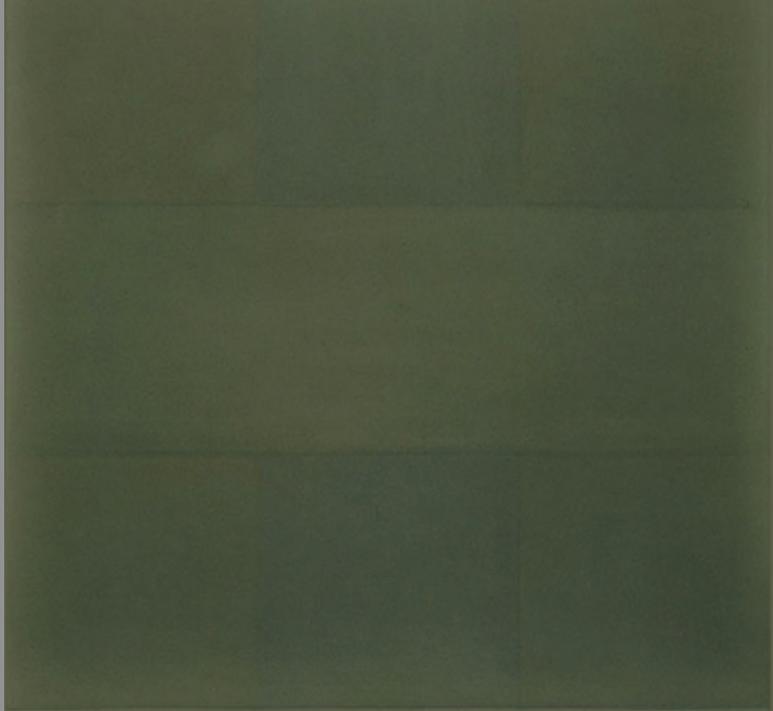
Elaine deKooning, in her studio.



Leo Krasner, *The Seasons*, 1957-58, Oil on canvas, 92 1/4 x 253 1/4", The Whitney Museum of American Art, © The Estate of Leo Krasner



*De Kooning, Pollock, Gotlib,  
Krasner, Still and Kline.*



The other direction is more minimal in color and brushwork.  
Newman, Reinhardt, Stella, Frankenthaler



# Mark Rothko

Rothko's soft, luminous colors are layered in thin washes, dark over light, then light over dark to create a contemplative surface.

His work indicates a preoccupation with death. For him all art deals with intimations or death.





Having worked for the FAP, his early work was socially motivated.

*Untitled Subway, 1937*

He was also interested in myths.

This style was influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche, especially the idea that mythology could address, "the growth of a child's mind and – to a mature man his life and struggles".



*Greek Tragedy, 1941-42*

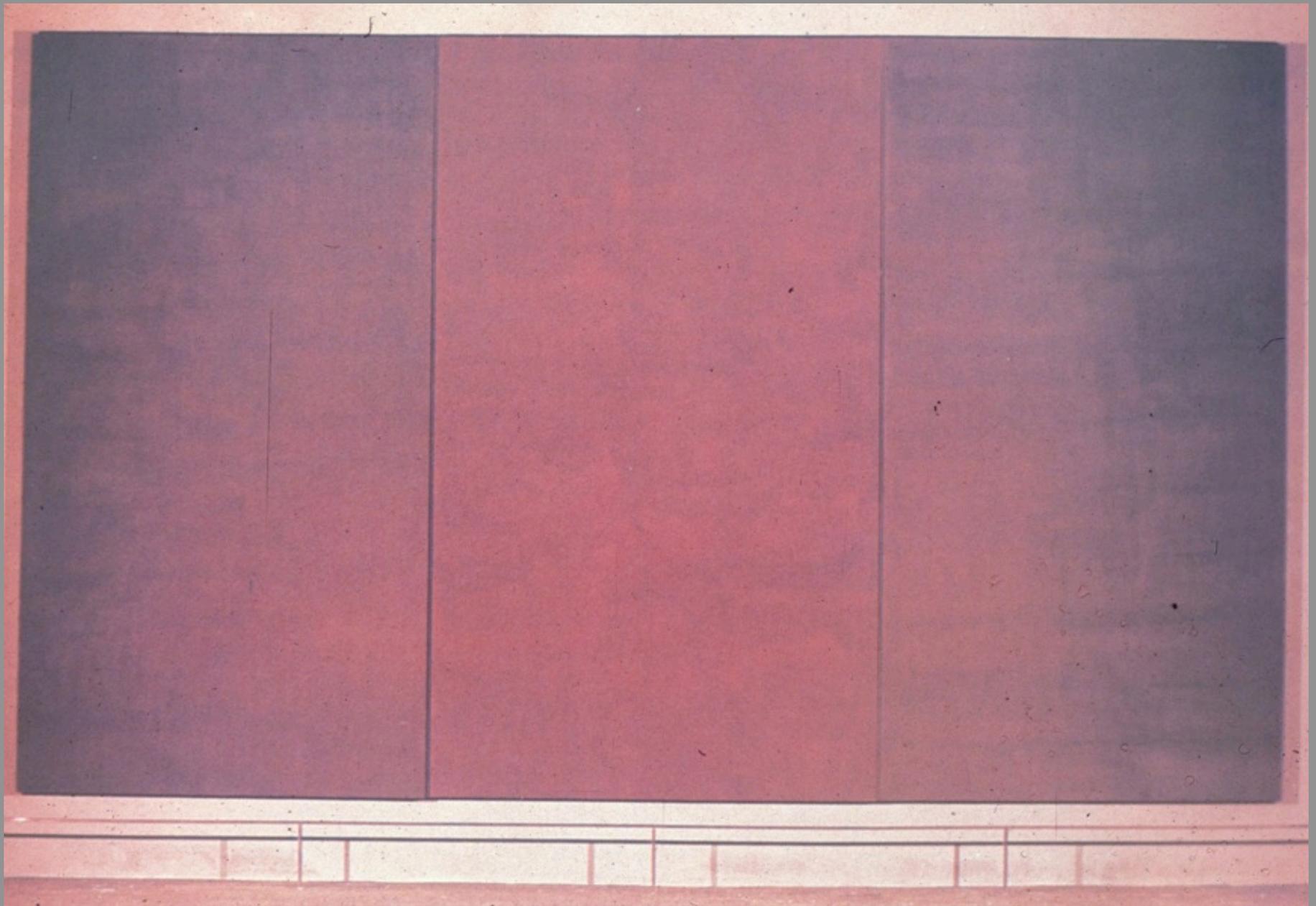


Less interested in expressing his own inner emotions, he wanted to create a transcendent, spiritual experience for the viewer.

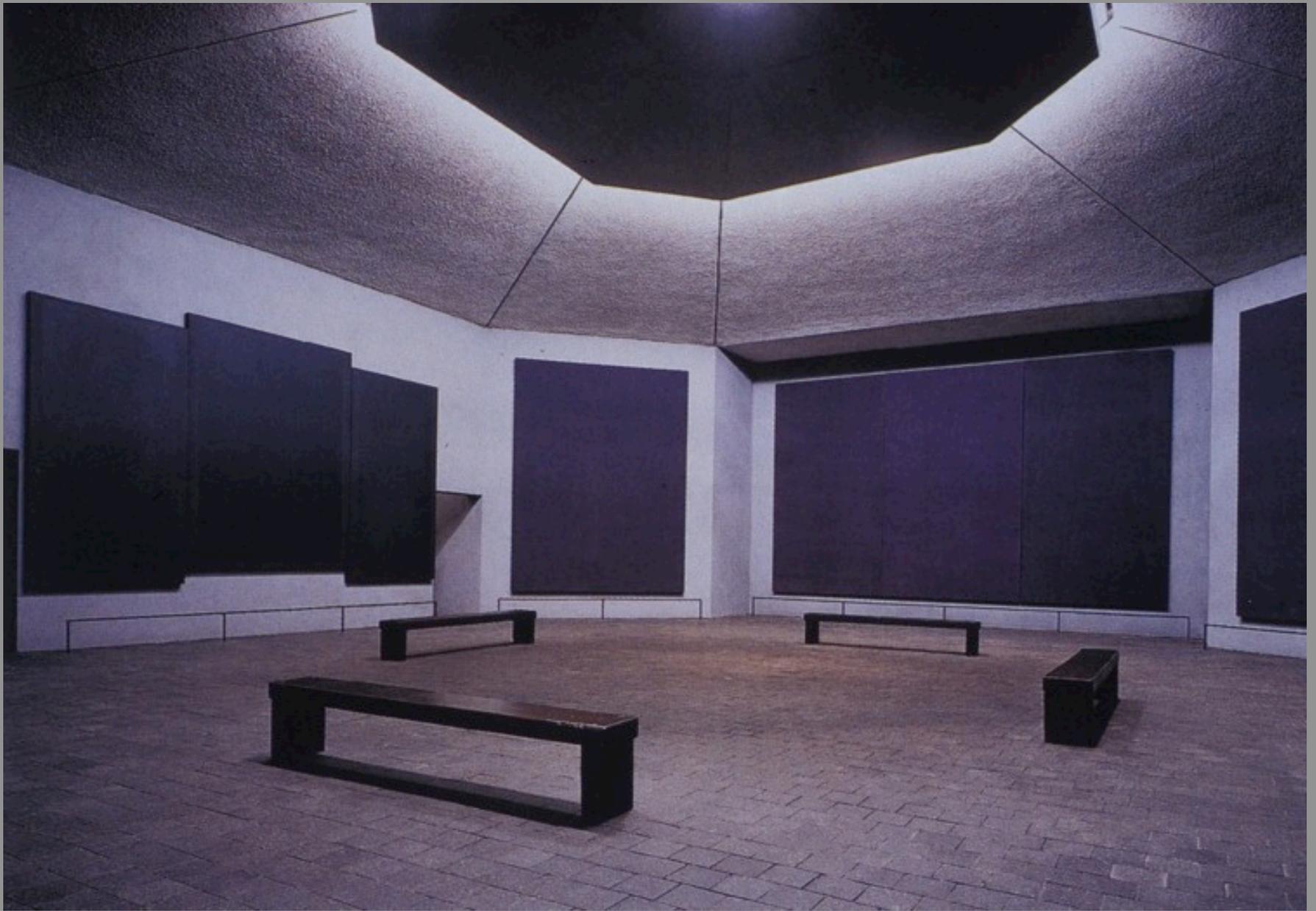
For seven years, Rothko painted in oil only on large canvases with vertical formats. Very large-scale designs were used in order to, in Rothko's words, make the viewer feel "enveloped within" the painting.

*ROrange and Yellow, 1956*





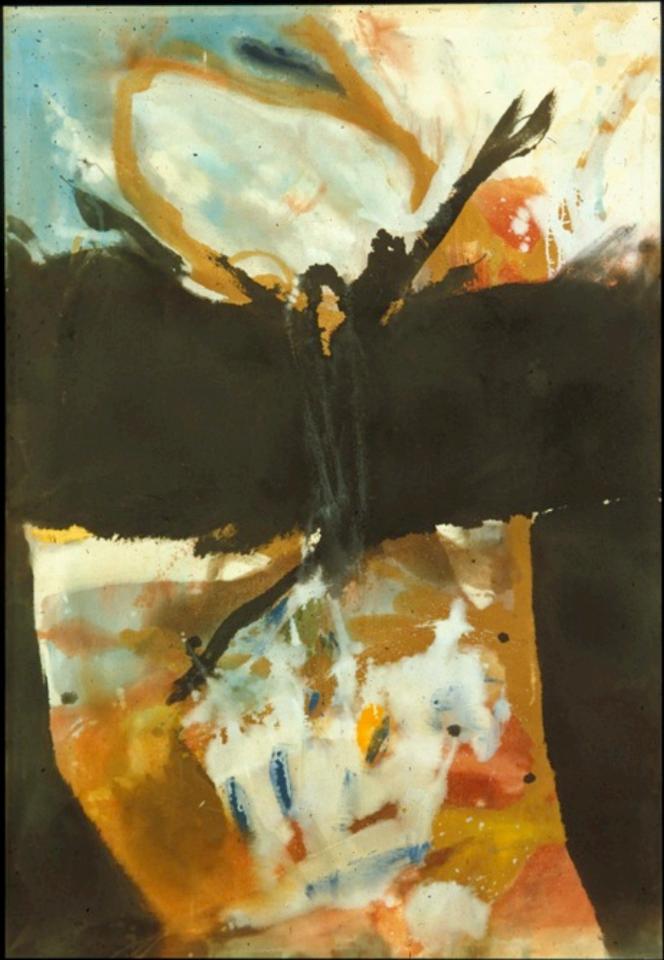
Not a picture of an experience...it is an experience. Meant to be an interaction with the viewer.



Rothko Chapel, 1971, Houston, Paintings began in 1964– open every day for all faiths.  
A place for quiet contemplation..

Helen Frankenthaler, color field painting





The general interest by artists and critics of the post war period in Existentialism made it meaningful to be meaningless and tragic. For the politically uncertain times of the cold war and nuclear power, Existentialism's emphasis on the development of the individual human being who was trying to live fully in an absurd world, fueled nationalistic ideals.

At the same time, the Modern Man subject which reinforced models of self as essentially autonomous, integral, rational, and effectual was actually faltering under pressure from political and social conflict and change.

Civil rights, the women's movement, and the war in Vietnam among other things, began to challenge these ideas creating an even more desperate attempt to hold on to them.