

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Robert Motherwell
Four Decades of Collage
October 12 – November 16, 2013

Opening Reception
Saturday, October 12, 2013 7-9 PM



"Regardless of the medium, whether it is in Eliot or Picasso or a TV thirty-second advertisement, I think collage is the twentieth century's greatest creative innovation"
-Robert Motherwell

October 3, 2013 --- McClain Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of Robert Motherwell's collage works spanning four decades from the 1960s to early 1990s. A catalogue accompanies the exhibition, containing an essay by Walter Robinson, New York-based art critic and artist.

Motherwell's work in collage has received a significant amount of attention as a substantial part of his oeuvre, as evidenced by the Solomon R. Guggenheim's exhibition mounted last month: *Robert Motherwell: Early Collages* (September 27, 2013 - January 5, 2014). The artist first turned to collage in 1943, when Peggy Guggenheim invited him to make something for a collage show at her new Art of This Century gallery. Early on Motherwell suggested that he thought collage might serve as a kind of still life for abstraction, and that it would necessarily include autobiographical elements. He would incorporate random detritus from his life in and out of the studio. In addition to sheet music and cigarette papers, the collages include paper bags, mailing wrappers, newsprint, postage stamps and handwritten notes. Over a long and prolific career, Motherwell made almost 900 collages, but his major innovation with collage is the torn paper edge - a technique that reflected his love of working with paper as much as his commitment to automatism. For Motherwell, the literal rips in pictorial space - he titled a 1957 work *The Tearingness of Collaging* - contributed another layer to the emotional density that he typically sought in his works.

Motherwell worked on a much larger scale than his European counterparts and Americanized the medium to reflect his views that "in Europe...people take it much more for granted that certain things are for certain people. But in America, people believe everything is for everyone, including abstract art." To this end, Motherwell believed collage to be "a

necessary invention", in which "one has the whole world and human history as subject matter, juxtaposition inconceivable before modern times."

Within the past few decades, several museum exhibitions have exclusively focused on Motherwell's engagement with collage including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's *The Collages of Robert Motherwell: A Retrospective Exhibition* in 1972-73. The aforementioned Guggenheim show focuses on his 1940s collages, while the exhibition at McClain Gallery presents 12 works from the 1960s up until 1991, the year of his death. In his 1960s and early 1970s collages, Motherwell incorporated "everyday" fragments, echoing Schwitters' merz technique developed 40 years earlier. Collages such as *Untitled (Wednesday October 1967)* (1967), which includes a torn sheet from a desk calendar atop a delicate pastel blue ground and *Cabaret No. 8* (1974) contains a wrapper from No. 5 Sigari Toscanelli, an Italian brand of cigars.

In the 1970s and 80s, Motherwell developed entire series of collages. The collage elements in these later works were often cut and torn fragments of proofs of his own prints that he embellished with gestural brushstrokes and painted compositions, and are demonstrative of his work with the torn edge. This technique of incorporating print fragments occurs in works such as *Collaged Wall, VI (For Arthur Berger)* (1986) and the haunting *Night Dream* (1988). *Collaged Wall* incorporates fragments of Motherwell's 1985 print *Perpetual Summer* along with fragments of sheet music from American composer Arthur Berger's (whom he met at Harvard in 1937) *Trio for Guitar, Violin, and Piano* (1972). *Night Dream*, includes fragments from the prints *Yellow Flight* (1986) and *Sirens II* (1988). An early version of the collage contained a sheet music fragment, which was subsequently painted over with black (as per an earlier studio photograph).

Other highlights from the exhibition include the earliest work from 1967 *Untitled (Wednesday October 1967)* and *M* (1991) from the year of the artist's death. For *M* Motherwell integrated sheet music from Mozart's *Rondo in D for Piano* (1782), and a fragment from the same red paper seen in the collage *Fantasia III* (1991). The title refers to the large black, gestural M-shaped form, and to Mozart. It was one of two maquettes Motherwell made for a poster to be used by the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Centre, New York during the summer of 1991. In the end, Motherwell chose another composition as the maquette for the poster.

Robert Motherwell continues the trajectory of modern European visionaries Picasso, Braque, Schwitters, and Matisse, and his advancements with American collage are unrivaled. As Robert Hughes suggests, in making collage Motherwell became "the only artist since Matisse in the fifties to alter significantly the syntax of this quintessentially modernist medium."

Image: Robert Motherwell, *Arches Cover*, 1976, Acrylic, paper, printed paper and packing tape collage on canvas board, 40 x 30 inches

McClain Gallery

2242 Richmond Avenue

Houston, Texas 77098

T: 713.520.9988, F: 713.520.0055

www.mcclaingallery.com

info@mcclaingallery.com

Tuesday- Friday 10 am to 5:30 pm, Saturday: 11 am to 5 pm

Press Inquiries: Erin Siudzinski, erins@mcclaingallery.com