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THE PLAY

Late 1950s, New York City: Mark Rothko is at the peak of his fame in the art world. His work is abstract, emotional and bold. His signature style has stunned critics, including the architects of a luxury restaurant, the Four Seasons on Park Avenue. Rothko has been hired to create three original murals – known as the Seagram Murals – for the highly anticipated restaurant.

Ken, an aspiring artist, has been hired to assist him.

But Mark Rothko yells. He smokes. He gets upset, demands hard work and is quick to argue with anyone that disagrees with him. He is especially emphatic about the new direction of art, one that he feels isn't real art at all.

As Ken's relationship with Rothko develops, his patience with the artist lessens. Their relationship grows tense as the changing art world challenges Rothko to examine himself and his art.

Will Rothko proceed with the Seagram Murals? If he does, is he leaving behind his artistic mission? In a time when art is on the verge of transition to a younger generation, will Rothko's fiery red passion be swallowed up by black?

RED

By John Logan

Directed by Robert Falls

Produced in association with Goodman Theatre

Now playing in the Kreeger

January 20 – March 11, 2012



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MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT:

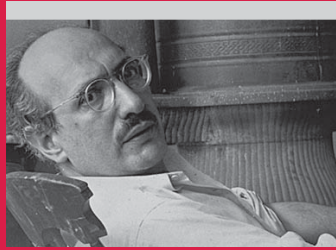


JOHN LOGAN

Born in San Diego in 1961, John Logan is an award-winning playwright, screenwriter and producer. His parents are from Northern Ireland but immigrated to the U.S. via Canada. Logan grew up in California and New Jersey, then earned his degree from Northwestern University in 1983.

An accomplished writer, Logan has received many of the highest awards for playwriting, including the Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle and Drama League awards for *Red*.

For Logan, *Red* marked a return to the stage after years of writing for movies and television. His original screenplays for the films *Gladiator* and *The Aviator* were nominated for Academy Awards. His screen adaptation of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* starring Johnny Depp won a Golden Globe Award. Next year, Logan's film *Bond 23*, another adventure for James Bond, will be released. ●



Mark Rothko

Mark Rothko was born Marcus Rothkowitz in what is now Latvia. Rothko's father moved his family to the U.S. in 1913. After his father died, Rothko started working in a factory at age 13.

He received a scholarship to Yale but left early in his second year. He moved to New York City and dove deep into exploring and creating art.

He changed his name to Mark Rothko in 1940 because of growing anti-Semitism (anti-Jewish feelings) in the world. His work was influenced by mythology, drawing connections between ancient tales of barbarism and tensions in his world due to the Great Depression and World War II. Eventually, he decided mythology was outdated and did not help him express emotion.



An example of Rothko's mythological images, *The Syrian Bull*, 1943, Allen Memorial Art Museum

MEET MARK ROTHKO

(1903-1970)

Later, after reading the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, Rothko began to explore art's ability to release the unconscious and explore complex emotion. He was having trouble using recognizable figures – like people and objects – to express the tragedy of the human condition. His work grew more abstract, representing subjects using symbols, shapes and colors.



Friedrich Nietzsche, 19th century German philosopher, challenged the foundations of Christian morality

(right and wrong) and traditional mortality (human life and death). He believed in focusing on the present, rather than on any sort of afterlife. He is one of the many influences Rothko credits.

In 1946, he pushed deeper into the abstract, using shape and color. At this point, his critical success and fame gave Rothko opportunities like painting the Seagram Murals seen in the play.



Rothko's Seagram Murals, National Gallery of Art,

His colors started to grow darker. A brain aneurism in 1968 weakened his health and drove him into depression. In 1970 his assistant found him dead in the studio kitchen. He had committed suicide. ●

FACT

Rothko had wanted to be an actor. Later he would say his paintings were plays, meant to be emotional conversations with the viewer, and that the color fields were the actors.



BECOMING ROTHKO
Activity: Edward Gero plays the role of Mark Rothko in *Red*. Read his blog, geroasrothko.wordpress.com, to see how he researched, rehearsed and transformed for the role.

A BRIEF ART TIMELINE



Pablo Picasso, *Three Musicians*, 1921, Museum of Modern Art



Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919, private collection

Artists are influenced by the artists that come before them and the world around them. Here are the major movements leading up to and including the work of Rothko and the next generation of artists.



Activity: View other examples of art from these “isms.” What changes from period to period? What influences do you see? What counter-revolutions? In what other art forms do you see such changes over time (e.g., music)?

Research by Kate Coughlin

Cubism (1908-1919)

Artists like Pablo Picasso

The multiple angles and disjointed, broken and reassembled objects reflected a world that was growing complicated.

Dadaism (1916-1920s)

Artists like Marcel Duchamp

Artists showed their dissatisfaction with a war-torn world and art by making random art that showed nothing and meant nothing. It was “anti-art.”



Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, Museum of Modern Art



Jackson Pollock, *Number 1*, 1950, National Gallery of Art

Surrealism (1920-1930s)

Artists like Salvador Dalí

The real world was harsh and controlling, so artists created a new world of dreams and strange comparisons.

Abstract Expressionism (1940-1960s)

Artists like Jackson Pollock & Mark Rothko

Art was non-representation – it was not meant to be something but meant to *mean* something. Shapes and colors were meant to ignite an emotional experience.



Andy Warhol, *Campbell Soup 1*, 1968, Kerry Stokes Collection

Pop Art (1950-1960s)

Artists like Andy Warhol
Artists challenged the elitism in fine art and used imagery from current culture, like advertisements, cartoons and celebrities.



Activity: Color is significant and symbolic, and humans respond to it emotionally. Make a list of colors and then discuss what the colors mean or evoke. Hypothesize: why is the play entitled *Red*?

Read more about color and other themes and information connected to *Red* at Sub/Text: Your Virtual Dramaturg at www.arenastage.org.



THE WORKING ARTIST

People often picture artists as people who live and work in their warehouse apartments, who create works of art, alone, at all hours of day, whenever inspiration strikes.

However, Mark Rothko, like many other artists, made his art like going to work each day. Rothko arrived at his studio around 8:45 a.m. and changed into his painting clothes (his assistant during the Seagram Murals, Dan Rice, said the clothes could practically stand up on their own). He left at the end of the day.

Though Ken is fictional, Rothko, like many other artists, had assistants. Artists' assistants' work varies based on the artist they work with. Tasks might include preparing materials, making food, research, installing and dismantling work, and running errands. Rothko's assistant helped stretch canvasses and applied base layers of treatment and paint.

Artist's assistants are often artists themselves, helping another artist until they establish their own body of work. ●

Photo by Liz Lauren.

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
- Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
- Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
- Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
- Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.

Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

Enjoy the show!

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

ONE. How is *Red* a story of generations, even of fathers and sons?

TWO. What makes something "art"?

THREE. *Red* explores opposites/dualities (e.g., red vs. black); how are they significant to the play?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

The Artist's Reality: Philosophies on Art by Mark Rothko, 2006.
The Essential Mark Rothko by Klaus Ottmann, 2003.

On the Web

Phillips Collection: "Mark Rothko: Ochre on Red on Red" www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/learning/rothko-learning.htm
Phillips Collection: "Audio Tour of Mark Rothko: Green and Maroon" www.phillipscollection.org/collection/audio-tour/
National Gallery of Art: "Mark Rothko" www.nga.gov/feature/rothko/rothkosplash.shtm
MoMA Learning: "What is Abstract Expressionism: Mark Rothko" education.moma.org/moma/learningresources/cms_page/view/366521

Film

The Power of Art: Rothko, a Documentary: BBC, 2006.

Museums

To see Rothko's work in Washington, D.C., consider visiting:
The National Gallery of Art
The Phillips Collection



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for more information on
Arena Stage productions
and educational opportunities.