

MILTON AVERY

T H R O U G H T I M E

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Milton Avery and *Bouquet*, 1946

MILTON AVERY (1885 – 1965)

Few artists have grasped the past, understood the present and anticipated the future like Milton Avery. Avery's work served as a bridge between American Modernism and Abstract Expressionism. While he counted Marsden Hartley and Stuart Davis as his contemporaries, Avery maintained life long friendships with Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Adolph Gottlieb. His enduring influence on this younger generation was summed up in the eulogy Rothko presented at Avery's funeral, "...the feeling that one was in the presence of great events was immediate on encountering his work. It was true for many of us who were younger, questioning and looking for an anchor..."

I was first introduced to Milton Avery's work at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the 1990s while working on the museum handbook. *Interlude* from 1960, a large vertical, yellow canvas depicting two women in conversation, their shapely forms locked together as if two pieces of a puzzle, is a true study in color. Essentially composed of differing hues of yellow with forms broken down into their most basic elements, *Interlude* reveals Avery's abiding interest in capturing the immediacy of a place and the emotion of a moment. This quest to distill nature to its very essence, to capture its beauty and mystery, led Avery to construct pictures in which shape, space and color coalesce in unique relationships evoking a powerful experience of time and place.

Detailed depictions of scenes from the natural world dominate Avery's work from the 1920s and the 1930s with moments of simplicity rendered with gestural washes of bright pigments. In the late 1940s, Avery began experimenting with monotypes, a process where paint on a smooth surface is transferred onto paper by pressing the two surfaces together. The directness of this medium led him to incorporate this printmaking technique into his later paintings, diluting pigment with turpentine to build transparency. With an astute understanding of shapes and pigments and avant-garde in his use of materials, Avery made ample use of sponges, paper towels and sticks to create moods, textures and movement in his paintings. Much has been said of Milton Avery as a colorist but his true genius was evident in his ability to condense complex compositions by assembling evocative shapes and forms in a concise manner. Avery's later works defied traditional ideas of depth and perspective rendering his compositions flat, simplifying the gesture, and pushing his painting to the very edge of abstraction.

Milton Avery's lasting legacy was to open the door to generations of artists for whom abstraction and gesture would become hallmarks of a completely American way of painting.

Waqas Wajahat, New York
Fall, 2010



Milton Avery, *Interlude*, 1960, oil on canvas, 68 x 58 inches
Philadelphia Museum of Art; Centennial gift of the
Woodward Foundation. 1975-81-1



Three Fish, 1951, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches



Fantastic Fish, 1948, oil on canvas, 28 x 36 inches



Two Goats, 1963, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches



Sheep in Meadow, 1961, oil on canvas board, 22 x 28 inches



Bird in Evening Sky, 1962, oil on canvas board, 22 x 28 inches



Soaring Gull, 1959, oil and charcoal on paper, 20 x 26 inches



Crossroads, 1943, watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches



Village at Sunset, 1938, watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches



Striped Umbrella by the Bay, c. 1935, watercolor on paper, 11 x 15 inches



Friends, 1961, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 inches



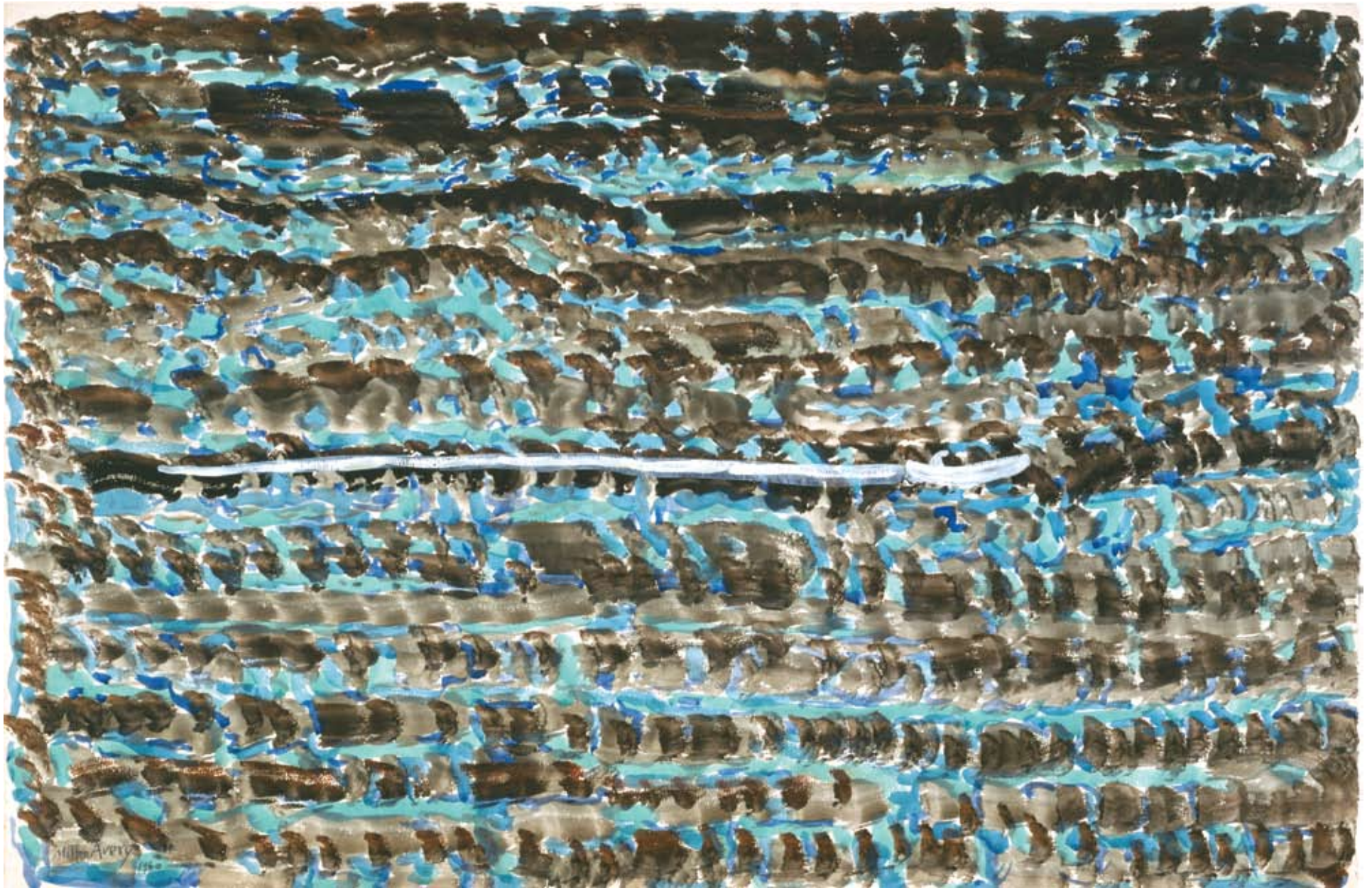
Mountain and Lake, 1962, oil on canvas, 42 x 50 inches



Bird by Lake, 1962, oil on canvas, 22 x 28 inches



Ancient Forest, 1938, watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches



Speedboat in Choppy Sea, 1960, watercolor on paper, 23 x 35 inches



Sunset Dunes, 1957, oil on canvas, 38 x 50 inches



Dark Pool, 1950, oil on canvas, 32 x 48 inches



Milton Avery, Peter Hunt House, Provincetown, MA, 1958. Photograph by Philip Cavanaugh

SELECTED CHRONOLOGY

- 1885 Born March 7 to Russell N. and Esther March Avery in Altamar, NY
- 1898 Family moves to Wilson Station, near East Hartford, CT
- 1905 Enrolls at the Connecticut League of Art Students, Hartford. Studies life drawing and remains there until 1918.
- 1915 Exhibits publicly for the first time at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT
- 1920 Visits Gloucester, MA, where he spends the next few summers.
- 1924 Meets Sally Michel in Gloucester and becomes a member of the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts.
- 1925-26 Moves to New York City with fellow artist Wallace Putnam. Marries Sally Michel.
- 1927 Included in his first New York City exhibition, *The 11th Annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists*.
- 1928 Included in a show at the Opportunity Gallery where he meets Mark Rothko and begins a lifelong friendship.
- 1929 The Phillips Collection becomes the first museum to acquire a painting. Meets Adolph Gottlieb through Rothko.
- 1930 *White Horse* wins the Frank G. Logan Prize at the Art Institute of Chicago's annual watercolor exhibition.
- 1932 Summers in Gloucester with Gottlieb, Rothko and Newman. Daughter, March, is born in October.
- 1935 Dr. Albert Barnes purchases *The Nursemaid* from first solo exhibition at the Valentine Gallery, NY
- 1935-40 Summers in Jamaica and Rawsonville, VT
- 1938 Summers in Gaspé Peninsula, Quebec, Canada
- 1941 Drives cross country to California stopping at Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks.
- 1943 Leaves Valentine Gallery and joins Paul Rosenberg & Company. Roy Neuberger buys 35 paintings.
Begins dating paintings on front of canvas.
- 1944 First solo museum exhibition at The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC
- 1945 Concurrent exhibitions at the Rosenfeld and Durand-Ruel Galleries, NY
- 1946 Travels to Mexico for 3 months.
- 1947 First retrospective, *My Daughter, March*, at the Durand-Ruel Galleries, NY
- 1948 Awarded first prize for watercolor *Sea and Rocks*, 1944 at the Baltimore Museum of Art.
Summers in Maine at Pemaquid Point.
- 1949 Suffers major heart attack. Has last exhibition with Paul Rosenberg. Winters near Orlando, FL
- 1950 Roy Neuberger purchases 50 paintings from Rosenberg. Summers in Woodstock, NY
- 1951 Joins Grace Borgenicht Gallery, NY. Summers in Woodstock, NY
- 1952 Travels to Europe for the first time, including London, Paris and the French Riviera.
A retrospective opens at the Baltimore Museum of Art.
- 1953 First residency at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, NH
- 1954 Daughter, March, graduates from Barnard College and marries Philip Cavanaugh.
- 1955 Residency at Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, NY
- 1957-60 Summers in Provincetown, MA along with Gottlieb and Rothko. Executes first large-scale paintings.
- 1959 Winters in Key West, FL
- 1960 Retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY. Suffers second heart attack.
- 1962 Hilton Kramer writes the first monograph on Avery, *Milton Avery: Paintings 1930-60*.
- 1964 Paints last painting in February.
- 1965 Dies January 3 in New York. Buried in the Artists' Cemetery, Woodstock, NY

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Art Institute of Chicago, IL
Baltimore Museum of Art, MD
Brooklyn Museum, NY
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum of Art, Madrid, Spain
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA
Cleveland Museum of Art, OH
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
Dallas Museum of Art, TX
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA
Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, MA
Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA
Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, CA
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY
Milwaukee Art Museum, WI
Minneapolis Institute of Arts, MN
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Museum of Modern Art, NY
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA
The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC
Tate Gallery, London, United Kingdom
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
Whitney Museum of American Art, NY
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT

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