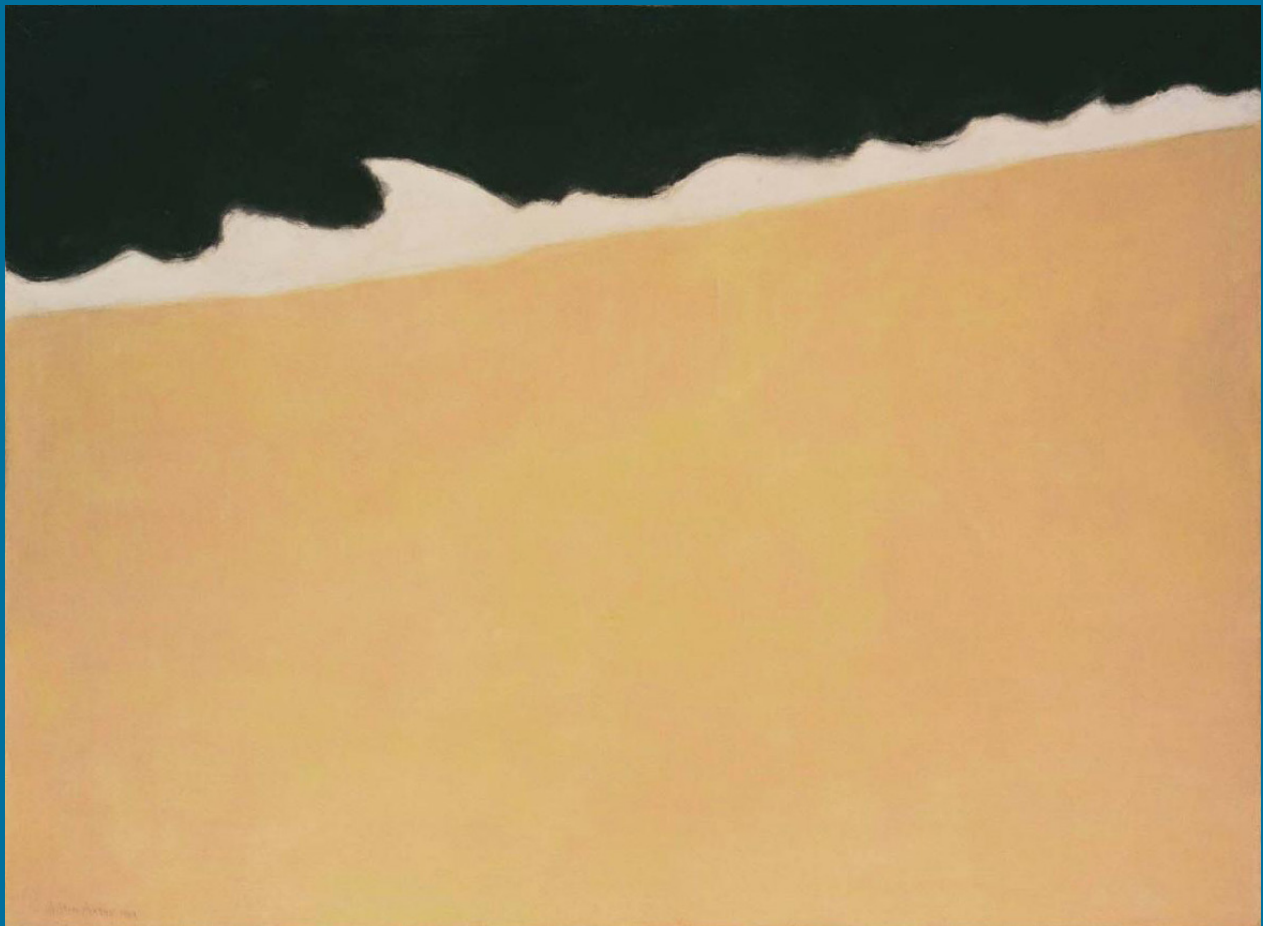


AVERY, GOTTlieb & ROTHKO BY THE SEA

OCTOBER 24, 2026–JANUARY 24, 2027

PHILLIPS
The Phillips Collection



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UPDATED RELEASE

October 21, 2026

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The Phillips Collection Presents *Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea*

Tracing the creative exchange and coastal summers that helped define three influential figures in 20th-century American art.



WASHINGTON, DC—The Phillips Collection presents [*Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea*](#), the first exhibition to examine in depth how the friendship, artistic exchange, and shared summers on Cape Ann in Gloucester, Massachusetts, shaped three of the most influential American artists of the 20th century: Milton Avery (1885–1965), Adolph Gottlieb (1903–1974), and Mark Rothko (1903–1970). On view from **October 24, 2026, through January 24, 2027**, the exhibition brings together approximately 90 paintings, watercolors, drawings, and sketches that reveal the personal and artistic connections that developed among the artists over four decades.

The artists, who met in New York City, were drawn to Gloucester by Avery, who first visited Cape Ann in the 1920s. As the oldest of the three, Avery introduced Gottlieb and Rothko to the region in the 1930s and mentored them. The summers they spent together painting, drawing, and exchanging ideas became a foundation for experimentation and discovery throughout their careers. The idea of Cape Ann as a place of artistic freedom is reflected in recollections from Sally Michel Avery, artist and Avery's wife, who described Gloucester as a place to “live like an artist,” capturing the creative spirit that drew the group to the rocky coast and sandy beaches. They found a creative community there and an escape from the pressures of New York.

Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea traces this important moment of development in American art, connecting Avery, an American modernist known for representational art, with Gottlieb and Rothko,

who would later become internationally recognized for abstract art and the New York School of the 1950s. The exhibition illuminates how a shared sense of place, an expressive use of color, and experimentation with scale became catalysts for each artist's individual development. These explorations, from representational imagery to increasingly abstract forms, are seen in Avery's harbor sketches and luminous coastal scenes, Rothko's figurative compositions and color-drenched canvases, and Gottlieb's beach box motifs, the source of his celebrated *Pictographs*.

"The Phillips has long been home to these three artists. Their work is not only central to the history of modern art but is also woven into the DNA of this museum," said **Jonathan P. Binstock, Vradenburg Director and CEO of The Phillips Collection**. "This exhibition reveals something we haven't fully seen before: how a shared sense of place and deep friendship gave rise to some of the most important art of the 20th century, and, perhaps surprisingly, an undercurrent of aesthetic affinities that continued to resonate throughout their mature, iconic work."

The Phillips Collection was the first museum in the United States to acquire work by Avery, to establish a permanent gallery for Rothko's paintings in 1960, and to hold significant paintings by Gottlieb in its collection. The exhibition builds on recent technical research conducted at The Phillips Collection, where conservators studied works by the artists using advanced imaging and analytical techniques, yielding new insights into their materials, working methods, and creative processes.

"Exploring the friendship and shared experiences of Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko during their summers on Cape Ann offers a fresh perspective on their artistic development. This story will be new to many of our guests, and several of the works have never been on public view. Bringing together the artists in this context has allowed us to look closely at the exchanges that shaped their work as they responded to influences and new directions in American modernism," said **Renée Maurer, Associate Curator at The Phillips Collection and coordinating curator of the exhibition**.

Numerous works will be loaned from the artists' family collections as well as from major museums and institutions across the country. The 16 lending museums include the National Gallery of Art—which is contributing ten works by Mark Rothko—the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the Rhode Island School of Design Museum (The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th-Century American Art), the Ackland Art Museum at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Herbert F. Johnson Museum at Cornell University, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, the Cape Ann Museum, and The Phillips Collection.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

This exhibition is organized by the Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts, in partnership with The Phillips Collection.

Curated by Eliza Rathbone, Guest Curator. The exhibition's coordinating curator at The Phillips Collection is Renée Maurer, Associate Curator.

Essential support for the Washington, DC, presentation of *Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea* is provided by Martha R. Johnston and the Linda Lichtenberg Kaplan Exhibition Fund.

This exhibition is also made possible by Chevy Chase Trust; Stephanie and Greg Guyett; Daniel W. Hamilton; Paul W. Killian and Carole Goodson; and Alexi and Jeff Whitaker.

Additional support is provided by Barbara and Bob Hall. With critical support from The Phillips Collection's Exhibitions Endowment Fund.

This exhibition and accompanying catalog have been generously supported by the Wyeth Foundation for American Art.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

EXHIBITION PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated volume of the same title, published by Rizzoli, and edited by Eliza Rathbone, exhibition curator, with contributions by March Avery Cavanaugh, daughter of Milton and Sally Avery; Sean Cavanaugh, Avery's grandson and Director of the Milton & Sally Avery Arts Foundation; Sanford Hirsch, Executive Director of the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation; Dr. Christopher Rothko, son of Mark Rothko and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Rothko Chapel in Houston; Kate Rothko Prizel, daughter of Mark Rothko and retired physician; Martha Oaks, the Cape Ann Museum's Henrietta Gates and Heaton Robertson Chief Curator; Dr. Adam Greenhalgh, Associate Curator at the National Gallery of Art; Reneé Maurer, Associate Curator at The Phillips Collection and coordinating curator for the museum's presentation; and Patricia Favero, Conservator at The Phillips Collection.

IMAGE GALLERY:

High-resolution press images are available upon request. Please contact Lauryn Cantrell, lcantrell@phillipscollection.org.

IMAGE: Milton Avery, *Black Sea*, 1959, Oil on canvas, 50 x 67 3/4 in., The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1965. © 2026 Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Mark Rothko, *Untitled (wharf, Gloucester, Massachusetts)*, 1934, Watercolor on construction paper, 12 1/4 x 15 in., Collection of Christopher Rothko, 1076.25-27. © 2026 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Adolph Gottlieb, *Blue at Night*, 1957, Oil on canvas, 42 x 60 in., Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. John Barton Payne Fund, 1958, 58.13.4. Photograph: Troy Wilkinson. © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

Founded in 1921, The Phillips Collection is a welcoming home for all where the vision and spirit of artists thrive in intimate settings. As the first museum of modern art in the United States, the Phillips houses one of the world's most celebrated Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and modern art collections, and continues to grow its permanent collection with the work of important living artists. Its distinctive domestically scaled architecture combines three structures built over more than 125 years, among them the former home of the founders, Duncan and Marjorie Phillips. The Phillips's impact extends nationally and internationally through its diverse, scholarly exhibitions; award-winning education programs for educators, students, and adults; and renowned Phillips Music series. Popular and impactful programs include those focused on art and wellness, its festive monthly Phillips after 5 events, and intimate Living Room talks. Through authentic programs and partnerships at Phillips@THEARC, the museum's satellite location in Southeast DC, the Phillips extends its reach into Wards 7 and 8 and Prince George's County,

Maryland. The Phillips Collection is a private, non-government museum, supported primarily by donations.

#

PRESS IMAGES

Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea

October 24, 2026–January 24, 2027

Milton Avery

Gorton's Dock

1931–34

Gouache on brown paper

18 x 24 in.

Private collection

Jeremy Lawson Photography. © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Milton Avery

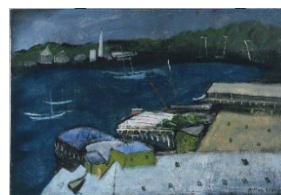
Harbor at Night

1932

Oil on canvas

32 x 48 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1942. © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Milton Avery

Eclipse Watchers

c. 1932

Watercolor on paper

15 x 22 in.

Private collection. Jeremy Lawson Photography. © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Milton Avery

Portrait of Mark Rothko

1933

Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

22 x 19 7/8 in.

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence. The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th Century American Art, (67.105). © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Milton Avery

George Constant Fishing

1945

Watercolor on paper

22 13/16 x 31 3/16 in.

Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill. Bequest of Charles and Isabel Eaton, 2009.31.6. © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Milton Avery

Lone Rock and Surf

1945

Watercolor and charcoal on paper

22 1/2 x 30 1/4 in.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase, with funds from S. Sidney Kahn and the Drawing Committee, (84.68). Digital image. © Whitney Museum of American Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY. © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Milton Avery

Sunset

1952

Oil on canvas

42 1/4 x 48 1/8 in.

Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York. Gift of Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation, Inc., (58.40). © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Milton Avery

Black Sea

1959

Oil on canvas

50 x 67 3/4 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1965. © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Milton Avery

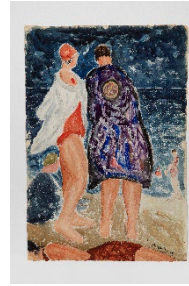
Untitled (Robed Bathers)

Not dated

Watercolor on paper

22 x 15 in.

Private collection. © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust
/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Mark Rothko with Mandolin)

c. 1932

Crayon on paper

12 x 8 1/2 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New
York, NY. © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb
Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights
Society (ARS), NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Gloucester Street

c. 1934

Oil on linen mounted on board

11 3/4 x 17 1/4 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New
York, NY. © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb
Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights
Society (ARS), NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Boxes on the Beach

c. 1938

Oil on canvas mounted on pasteboard

19 x 24 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New
York, NY. © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb
Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights
Society (ARS), NY



Adolph Gottlieb

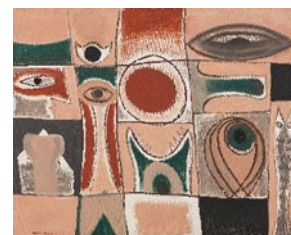
Forgotten Dream

1946

Oil on canvas

24 x 30 in.

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell
University, Ithaca, New York. Gift of Albert A. List,



MS 1958, PhD 1961 (55.057). © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Adolph Gottlieb

The Seer

1950

Oil on canvas

59 3/4 x 71 5/8 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1952. © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Blue at Night

1957

Oil on canvas

42 x 60 in.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, John Barton Payne Fund, 1958, 58.13.4.(58.13.4). Photograph: Troy Wilkinson. © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Under and Over

1959

Oil on canvas

96 x 48 in.

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, 1961.5. Photograph: Allen Phillips/Wadsworth Atheneum. © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Equinox

1963

Oil on canvas

90 x 84 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1963. © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Wharf, Gloucester, Massachusetts)

1934

Watercolor on construction paper

12 1/4 x 15 in.

Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Gift of Christopher Rothko, 2026, 2026.022.001.

© 2026 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko

/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Mark Rothko

Reclining Figures in a Landscape

1934

Watercolor and graphite on watercolor paper

11 2/5 x 15 1/4 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of

The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986

(1986.56.600.a) © 2026 Kate Rothko Prizel &

Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS),

New York



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Bathers on the Beach)

1934

Watercolor on construction paper

15 x 12 1/4 in.

Collection of Christopher Rothko, 1077.25-27. ©

2026 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko /

Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Wharf, Gloucester, Massachusetts)

1934

Transparent and opaque watercolor on
construction paper

12 1/4 x 15 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of

The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986.56.531.

© 2026 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko

/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Mark Rothko

No. 20

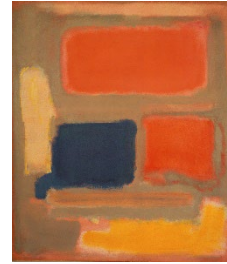
1949

Oil on canvas

56 x 48 in.

Collection of Christopher Rothko, 5096.49.

© 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko
/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Mark Rothko

Untitled

1949

Oil on canvas

56 x 30 15/16 in.

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel, 5158.49. © 1998
Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New York

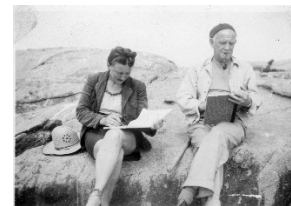


Installation image of the Rothko Room: The
Phillips Collection Rothko Room. Courtesy of The
Phillips Collection, Washington, DC. Photo:
Robert Lautman. © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel &
Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York



ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Sally and Milton Avery, Gloucester,
Massachusetts, 1945. Photograph. Private
collection



Adolph and Esther Gottlieb on the beach in
Gloucester, Massachusetts, c. 1943. Photograph.
The Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation
Archives, New York



Page 7—Press Images: Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea

Philip G. Cavanaugh (American, 1931–2022), Mark Rothko on the beach in Provincetown, Massachusetts, 1958. Photograph. The Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation. © Philip G. Cavanaugh Estate



Installation of Milton Avery's *Girl Writing* (1941) and *March on the Balcony* (1952), with *Interior with Egyptian Curtain* by Henri Matisse (1948), c. 1970. Photograph. The Phillips Collection © 2026 The Milton Avery Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; © 2026 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Installation of Adolph Gottlieb's *Equinox* (1963), Bradley Walker Tomlin's *No. 8* (1952), and Philip Guston's *Native's Return* (1957), c. 1960s. Photograph. The Phillips Collection © 2026 Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



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CHECKLIST

Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea

October 24, 2026–January 24, 2027

Milton Avery

Gloucester Dawn

c. 1921

Oil on artist board

20 1/8 x 24 in.

Francis Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College,

Gift of Susan and Steven Hirsch, class of 1971

(2000.37.1)



Milton Avery

Untitled (Harbor Scene)

1921–25

Oil on canvas

10 7/8 x 14 3/4 in.

Smithsonian American Art Museum,

Gift of Jeffrey R. Brown, (1984.128R-V)



Milton Avery

Winter Riders

1929

Oil on canvas

18 x 30 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1929



Milton Avery

Gorton's Dock

1931–34

Gouache on brown paper

18 x 24 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Eclipse Watchers

c. 1932

Watercolor on paper

15 x 22 in.

Private collection



Page 2—Checklist: Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea

Milton Avery

Harbor at Night

1932

Oil on canvas

32 x 48 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1942



Milton Avery

Study for Harbor at Night

1932

Mixed media on construction paper

12 x 17 3/4 in.

Collection of Kate Rothko Pritzel and Christopher Rothko



Adolph Gottlieb

Rockport

1932

Watercolor on paper

15 x 22 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Mark Rothko with Mandolin)

c. 1932

Crayon on paper

12 x 8 1/2 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Sketch of Milton Avery)

c. 1932

Conté crayon on paper

11 3/4 x 9 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Milton Avery

Portrait of Mark Rothko

1933

Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

22 x 19 7/8 in.

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design
Museum, Providence. The Albert Pilavin Memorial
Collection of 20th Century American Art, (67.105)



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Seated Woman and Child)

1933–34

Watercolor and gouache on construction paper

18 x 12 in.

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Ilya Prizel



Mark Rothko

Woman Seated on a Sofa with a Child on Her Lap

1933–34

Watercolor on construction paper

18 x 12 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of

The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986

(1986.56.556)



Milton Avery

Dock at Dawn

1934

Gouache and watercolor on paper

18 x 12 in.

Private collection



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (One Gloucester Sketch)

c. 1934

Ink on paper

9 x 11 3/4 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,

New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Four Gloucester Studies)

c. 1934

Crayon on paper

11 3/4 x 9 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,

New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Gloucester Studies)

c. 1934

Crayon on paper

11 3/4 x 8 3/4 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

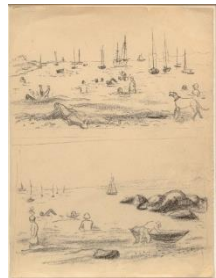
Untitled (Two Gloucester Sketches)

c. 1934

Pencil and crayon on paper

11 3/4 x 9 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Gloucester Street

c. 1934

Oil on linen mounted on board

11 3/4 x 17 1/4 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Harbor Scene (Gloucester?)

c. 1934

Translucent watercolor over graphite on paper
mounted on board

15 x 22 in.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Deborah Allen in
memory of Sylvia Israel (2015.2965)



Mark Rothko

Figures in a Seascape

1934

Watercolor and graphite on wove paper

22 1/2 x 15 1/4 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of
The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986 (1986.43.206.b)



Mark Rothko

Reclining Figures in a Landscape

1934

Watercolor and graphite on watercolor paper

11 3/8 x 15 1/4 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of
The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986 (1986.56.600.a)



Mark Rothko

Two Figures Near the Waterfront

1934

Watercolor on watercolor paper

15 1/4 x 11 3/4 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of
The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986
(1986.56.538.a)



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Bathers on the Beach)

1934

Watercolor on construction paper

15 x 12 1/4 in.

Collection of Christopher Rothko, 1077.25-27



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Bathers on the Beach)

1934

Watercolor and graphite on construction paper

11 1/4 x 15 1/4 in.

Collection of Christopher Rothko



Milton Avery

Untitled (Rothko and March)

1934

Watercolor on paper

15 x 22 in.

Private collection



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Wharf)

1934

Watercolor and graphite on watercolor paper

15 7/8 x 22 1/2 in.

Collection of Christopher Rothko



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Wharf, Gloucester, Massachusetts)

1934

Watercolor on construction paper

12 1/4 x 15 in.

Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Gift of Christopher Rothko, 2026, 2026.022.001



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Wharf, Gloucester, Massachusetts)

1934

Transparent and opaque watercolor on construction paper

12 1/4 x 15 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of The

Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986.56.531



Mark Rothko

View of a Pier

1934

Opaque watercolor on construction paper

12 1/4 x 15 in.

National Gallery of Art, Gift of the Mark Rothko

Foundation Inc., 1986 (1986.56.607)



Milton Avery

On the Beach (Gloucester)

1935

Pencil on paper

11 x 8 1/2 in.

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc.,

New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Rockport

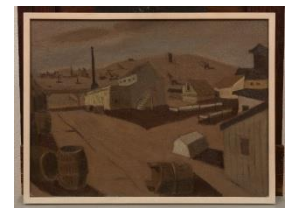
c. 1936

Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

18 x 24 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,

New York, NY



Milton Avery

Rothko with Pipe

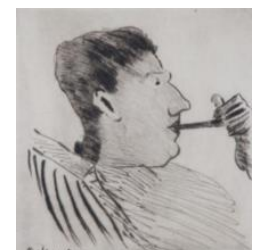
1936

Drypoint etching on paper

8 1/2 x 7 3/4 in.

Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Gift of the Estate of Robert L. French, 2009 (2009.051.018)



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled

c. 1936

Oil on Masonite

18 x 24 in.

Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Gift of the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation in
Honor of Sanford Hirsch



Adolph Gottlieb

Boxes on the Beach

c. 1938

Oil on canvas mounted on pasteboard

19 x 24 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Fish and Anchor)

c. 1938

Oil on canvas

23 7/8 x 18 7/8 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Milton Avery

Boardwalk and Yellow Umbrella

1930s

Watercolor on paper

15 x 22 1/2 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Harbor (Tarr's Wharf)

1930s

Oil on canvas

36 x 28 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Little Harbor

1930s

Gouache on paper

18 x 24 1/2 in.

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation,
Inc., New York, NY



Milton Avery's Sketchbook

1930s

Sketchbook

5 x 8 1/4 in.

Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Gift of Sally Michel Avery, 1991, (2753)



Milton Avery

The Naomi

1930s

Oil on canvas

24 x 36 in.

Avery Family Trust



Milton Avery

Untitled (Beach Trio, Gloucester)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

22 x 15 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Untitled (Blue Beret, Green Umbrella)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

22 x 15 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Untitled (Lazy Afternoon)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

22 x 15 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Untitled (Sally Sketching, Gloucester)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

22 x 15 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Untitled (Shore Sitters)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

15 x 22 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Untitled (Two by the Water)

1930s

Oil on canvas

34 x 25 in.

Private collection



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Box and Sea Objects)

c. 1940

Oil on linen

25 x 31 3/4 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Mark Rothko

Untitled

1940

Opaque watercolor on paper

29 x 21 1/8 in.

The Phillips Collection,

Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation Inc., 1985



Milton Avery

Girl Writing

1941

Oil on canvas

48 x 31 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1943



Adolph Gottlieb

The Sea Chest

1942

Oil on canvas

26 1/8 x 34 1/4 x 3/4 in.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Estate of Karl Nierendorf, by purchase, (48.1172.510)



Mark Rothko

Iphigenia and the Sea/Horizontal Phantasy

1943

Oil on canvas

35 3/4 x 48 in.

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Ilya Prizel



Mark Rothko

Abstract Composition

1944

Watercolor, ink, and graphite on watercolor paper

15 x 21 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington,

Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986

(1986.43.182.b)



Milton Avery

Bird and Breaking Wave

1944

Watercolor on paper

22 x 30 in.

The Phillips Collection,

Gift of Nora H. Lichtenberg, 1991



Milton Avery

Pink Rocks

1944

Transparent and opaque watercolor and black chalk on paper

22 x 30 in.

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Marion Goldin, 2016



Milton Avery

Porch Sitters

1944

Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper

22 1/2 x 30 3/4 in.

The James Collection. Promised gift of Janet and



Page 11—Checklist: Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea

William Ellery James to the Cape Ann Museum,
Gloucester, Massachusetts

Mark Rothko

Aubade

1944

Opaque watercolor on paper

25 1/4 x 19 in.

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Rebecca B. and
Julius W. Allen, initiated 1994, completed 2001



Mark Rothko

Birth of Cephalopods

1944

Oil on canvas

39 1/2 x 53 1/2 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.,

1986.43.22



Milton Avery

Female Artist

1945

Watercolor on paper

22 x 30 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

George Constant Fishing

1945

Watercolor on paper

22 3/4 x 31 1/4 in.

Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill. Bequest of Charles

and Isabel Eaton, 2009.31.6



Milton Avery

Lone Rock and Surf

1945

Watercolor and charcoal on paper

22 1/2 x 30 1/4 in.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Purchase, with funds from S. Sidney Kahn and
the Drawing Committee, (84.68).



Milton Avery

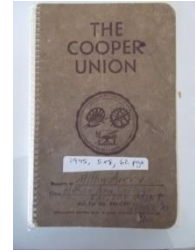
Sketchbook (Mother Ann Cottage, Eastern Point,
Gloucester, Mass.)

1945

Sketchbook

8 x 5 in.

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc.
New York, NY



Milton Avery

Sketchbook (Mother Ann Cottage, Summer/294
W. 11th, NY, NY, Winter)

1945

Sketchbook

8 x 5 in.

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc.
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

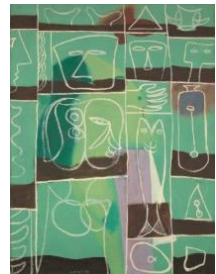
Mariner's Incantation

1945

Oil, gouache, tempera, and casein on canvas

39 7/8 x 29 3/4 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Forgotten Dream

1946

Oil on canvas

24 x 30 in.

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell
University, Ithaca, New York. Gift of Albert A. List,
MS 1958, PhD 1961 (55.057)



Milton Avery

Figures Against Orange Sky

1949

Oil on canvas

23 1/4 x 33 3/8 in.

Collection of Betsey and Arthur Selkowitz



Mark Rothko

No. 20

1949

Oil on canvas

56 x 48 in.

Collection of Christopher Rothko



Mark Rothko

Untitled

1949

Oil on canvas

56 x 30 1/4 in.

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel



Adolph Gottlieb

The Seer

1950

Oil on canvas

59 3/4 x 71 5/8 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1952



Milton Avery

March on the Balcony

1952

Oil on canvas

44 x 34 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1961



Milton Avery

Sunset

1952

Oil on canvas

42 1/4 x 48 1/4 in.

Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Gift of Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation, Inc., (58.40)



Adolph Gottlieb

Sea and Tide

1952

Oil on canvas

62 x 73 3/4 in.

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation,
New York, NY



Mark Rothko

Green and Maroon

1953

Oil on canvas

91 1/8 x 54 7/8 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1957



Mark Rothko

Ochre and Red on Red

1954

Oil on canvas

92 5/8 x 63 3/4 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1964



Mark Rothko

Untitled (Yellow, Pink, Yellow on Light Pink)

1955

Oil on canvas

79 3/4 x 67 3/4 in.

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel



Milton Avery

The White Wave

1956

Oil on canvas

30 x 42 in.

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 73.067. Gift of Helen Hooker Roelofs in memory of her father, Elon Huntington Hooker, Class of 1896 (73.067)



Mark Rothko

Green and Tangerine on Red

1956

Oil on canvas

93 5/8 x 69 1/4 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1960



Milton Avery

Birds Over Sea

1957

Oil on canvas

56 x 42 in.

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc.,
New York, New York



Adolph Gottlieb

Blue at Night

1957

Oil on canvas

42 x 60 in.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond,
John Barton Payne Fund, 1958, 58.13.4.(58.13.4)



Mark Rothko

Orange and Red on Red

1957

Oil on canvas

92 5/8 x 63 3/4 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1960



Milton Avery

Dunes and Sea I

1958

Oil on canvas

54 x 72 in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania. Purchase: Gift of Kaufmann's
Department Store, Women's Committee,
Edith H. Fisher Fund, Fellows Fund, James
A. Fisher, The Henry L. Hillman Fund, Mr.
and Mrs. Leon D. Black, Mr. and Mrs. Robert
H. Falk, Mrs. Grace Borgenicht Brandt, the
Jeanette and Samuel Lubell Foundation, and
the Morton Foundation



Milton Avery

Red Sky, Blue Sea

1958

Mixed media on paper

18 x 24 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Sea Grasses and Blue Sea

1958

Oil on canvas

60 1/8 x 72 1/8 in.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Gift of friends of the artist, 1958 (649.1959)



Milton Avery

Black Sea

1959

Oil on canvas

50 x 67 3/4 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1965



Milton Avery

Moonlit Sea

1959

Oil on paperboard

10 3/8 x 7 5/8 in.

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc.,
New York, NY



Adolph Gottlieb

Under and Over

1959

Oil on canvas

96 x 48 in.

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art,
Hartford, CT. Gift of Susan Morse Hilles,
1961.5.



Mark Rothko

No. 14 (Horizontal, White over Darks)

1961

Oil on canvas

56 1/2 x 7 7/8 in.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection,
1967 (647.1967)



Adolph Gottlieb

Equinox

1963

Oil on canvas

90 x 84 in.

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1963



Mark Rothko

Untitled

1968

Acrylic on paper mounted on hardboard

23 3/4 x 18 5/8 in.

The Phillips Collection, Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation Inc., 1985



Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled

1972

Color lithograph

28 1/4 in x 36 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Marion Golden, 2017



Milton Avery

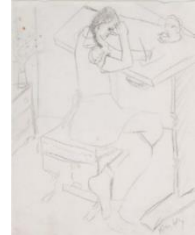
Drawing for Girl Writing

Not dated

Graphite on paper

10 15/16 x 8 1/2 in.

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Sally Avery, 1988



Milton Avery

Study for The Naomi

Not dated

Pencil on paper

11 x 8 1/2 in.

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, New York, NY



Milton Avery

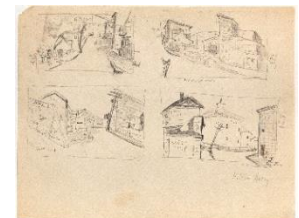
Untitled

Not dated

Pencil on paper

8 1/2 x 11 in.

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc. New York, NY



Milton Avery

Untitled (Man & Nets)

Not dated

Watercolor on paper

16 x 20 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Untitled (Mending Nets, Gloucester)

Not dated

Watercolor on paper

15 x 22 in.

Private collection



Milton Avery

Untitled (Robed Bathers)

Not dated

Watercolor on paper

22 x 15 in.

Private collection



Adolph Gottlieb

Wharf in Gloucester

Not dated

Watercolor on paper

15 x 21 in.

Private collection



To request access to images please contact Lauryn Cantrell at lcantrell@phillipscollection.org.

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WALL TEXT

Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea
October 24, 2026–January 24, 2027

Along the shores of Cape Ann in northern Massachusetts, American artists Milton Avery (1885–1965), Adolph Gottlieb (1903–1974), and Mark Rothko (1903–1970) found friendship and inspiration that fueled their artistic practices. Their time by the sea sparked creative discoveries, many of which are reflected in works on view together for the first time in this exhibition. Their exchanges also played an important role in the development of their mature styles.

The artists met in New York City around 1929. In 1932, Avery encouraged Gottlieb and Rothko to spend the first of several summers together on Cape Ann, an established arts community and a respite from the pressures of New York, where they all lived. They returned to Cape Ann throughout the 1930s and 1940s, then to Provincetown during the 1950s. These coastal retreats provided space for contemplation, experimentation, and renewal.

Avery's emphasis on rich color and simplified forms informed the art of Gottlieb and Rothko, whom he mentored. With time, the younger artists pursued different directions. In the 1950s, their artistic dialogue became reciprocal with Gottlieb and Rothko inspiring Avery. By then, the paintings of all three had achieved a universality no longer tied to a specific place, embracing a larger scale, abstract forms, and expressive color—key features of American modern art.

Across the arc of their friendship, Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko received significant support from Duncan and Marjorie Phillips. The Phillips Collection was the first museum to both purchase Avery's art in 1929 and present his first solo show in 1943. The museum acquired two key canvases by Gottlieb in the early 1950s and 1960s. In 1960, it created the first room permanently devoted to the display of Rothko's art. Today, all three artists are central to the collection.

Visit Gallery F (Phillips House Floor 2U) and the Rothko Room (Goh Annex Floor 2) to see conservation studies, archival materials, and works that show the Phillipses' advancement of the art of Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko.

This exhibition is organized by the Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts, in partnership with The Phillips Collection.

Curated by Eliza Rathbone, Guest Curator. The exhibition's coordinating curator at The Phillips Collection is Renée Maurer, Associate Curator.

Essential support for the Washington, DC, presentation of *Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea* is provided by Martha R. Johnston and the Linda Lichtenberg Kaplan Exhibition Fund.

This exhibition is also made possible by Chevy Chase Trust; Stephanie and Greg Guyett; Daniel W. Hamilton; Paul W. Killian and Carole Goodson; and Alexi and Jeff Whitaker.

Additional support is provided by Barbara and Bob Hall. With critical support from The Phillips Collection's Exhibitions Endowment Fund.

This exhibition and accompanying catalog have been generously supported by the Wyeth Foundation for American Art.



The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Milton Avery

b. 1885, Altmar, New York; d. 1965, New York, New York

Rothko with Pipe

1936

Drypoint etching on paper

**Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Gift of the Estate of Robert L. French, 2009
(2009.051.018)**

Mark Rothko

b. 1903, Daugavpils, Latvia; d. 1970, New York, New York

Woman Seated on a Sofa with a Child on Her Lap

1933–34

Watercolor on construction paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986 (1986.56.556)

Adolph Gottlieb

b. 1903, New York, New York; d. 1974, New York, New York

Untitled (Mark Rothko with Mandolin)

c. 1932

Crayon on paper

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Milton Avery

Untitled (Rothko and March)

1934

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Mark Rothko

Untitled (Seated Woman and Child)

1933–34

Watercolor and gouache on construction paper

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Ilya Prizel

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Sketch of Milton Avery)

c. 1932

Conté crayon on paper

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Milton Avery

Portrait of Mark Rothko

1933

Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence. The Albert Pilavin Memorial Collection of 20th Century American Art, (67.105)

In 1928 and 1929, Avery, Rothko, and Gottlieb exhibited paintings in group shows at the Opportunity Gallery in New York. The Averys and Rothko initially met through Louis Kaufman, a violinist. Rothko later introduced Gottlieb to Avery, who was 18 years older than the other two artists.

In New York City, the trio spent evenings together, drawing from a model and making sketches of one another, a practice they continued on Cape Ann. Sally Michel Avery explained: “We all went to Gloucester, I remember, and everybody would work during the daytime and the evenings would be spent looking over the work people had done that day . . . I remember we had a little house in Gloucester. I think we paid \$30 a month . . . You could live the whole summer for about \$150. Everything was very, very different.”

Harbor Scenes

Since the 1870s, Cape Ann’s summer art colony had been steadily growing, inspiring generations of painters including Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko to travel to the region. Located on the southern shore of the Cape Ann peninsula, Gloucester Harbor is America’s oldest operating fishing port. Its waterfront—bustling with boats, fishing gill nets, and flake yards of salted fish drying in the sun, all framed by the city’s distinctive skyline—became a frequent subject of their work.

During his earliest visits in the 1920s, Avery painted in oil outdoors in an Impressionist style, training his eye to Cape Ann’s unique light. Later, Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko created numerous studies related to the fishing industry around the city’s wharves and Inner Harbor. The artists would first sketch and later use watercolor and gouache to capture the setting. From Banner Hill and other areas, they rendered views overlooking East Gloucester. They revisited some ideas in oil upon their return to New York.

Milton Avery

Gorton’s Dock

1931–34

Gouache on brown paper

Private collection

The international company known today as Gorton’s Seafoods, founded in Gloucester in 1849, was originally established as John Pew & Sons. Pew merged with three other firms in March 1906 to become Gorton-Pew Fisheries, creating new markets for codfish. Avery’s *Gorton’s Dock* features one of Gorton-Pew’s wharves, perhaps the Reed & Gamage branch in East Gloucester. In the foreground is the Margaret D., a fishing vessel that worked out of East Gloucester during the early 1930s.

Milton Avery
Little Harbor
1930s
Gouache on paper
Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc., New York, NY

During his visits to Gloucester in the 1930s, Avery concentrated on interpreting the city's working waterfront. When he returned to New York, he used these summer sketches to inspire his oil paintings.

Adolph Gottlieb
Harbor Scene (Gloucester?)
c. 1934
Translucent watercolor over graphite on paper mounted on board
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Deborah Allen in memory of Sylvia Israel, (2015.2965)

Gottlieb divided his days between painting and sailing. He kept his boat moored off Reed's Wharf on Smith Cove. An avid sailor, Gottlieb would later admit to being at times "too busy patching up the old boat to paint, but ready to start now. Lots of activity here this summer, seeing the Averys among others."

Milton Avery
Untitled (Harbor Scene)
1921–25
Oil on canvas
Smithsonian American Art Museum. Gift of Jeffrey R. Brown, (1984.128R-V)

Milton Avery
Gloucester Dawn
c. 1921
Oil on artist board
Francis Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Gift of Susan and Steven Hirsch, class of 1971 (2000.37.1)

When Avery first arrived in Gloucester in the early 1920s, he found himself in a bustling summer art community, well known to artists, patrons, and art critics. He befriended members of the Gloucester Society of Artists and a cohort of others, many with connections to Hartford, Connecticut, and New York City.

Shaped by years of direct observation, Avery initially practiced Impressionism. Avery's wife, Sally, explained his morning routine in Gloucester: "He strapped his easel and his canvas on his back, and he'd walk out on the rocky shore of Gloucester and painted two pictures, then he'd come home and after lunch, he'd do the same thing."

Mark Rothko
Untitled (Wharf, Gloucester, Massachusetts)
1934
Watercolor on construction paper

Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Gift of Christopher Rothko, 2026, 2026.022.001

Mark Rothko

Untitled (Wharf, Gloucester, Massachusetts)

1934

Transparent and opaque watercolor on construction paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986.56.531

Using watercolor on toned paper, Rothko painted scenes of Gloucester's Inner Harbor. In the top image, Smith Cove is in the foreground, and Gloucester's distinctive skyline is in the distance. Its resemblance to watercolors and drawings made by Avery suggests that the two artists may have worked side by side, though their works often focused on different details.

In the bottom image, Rothko depicts the Reed & Gamage wharfs from Banner Hill, not far from his rented house on Calder Street. The shed processed salted fish. The rows of drying racks (called "fish flakes") are covered with white cloths to protect the filets from the sun. Gottlieb also recorded this subject.

Milton Avery

Study for Harbor at Night

1932

Mixed media on construction paper

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko

Milton Avery

Harbor at Night

1932

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1942

In the smaller study, gifted to Rothko, Avery worked on toned construction paper, evoking moonlight over the water. For the painting, Avery scraped, sanded down, and reused an existing canvas, incorporating earth tones and a high vantage point to add a sense of depth. Fragments of the scraped-down painting remain visible and enhance the weather-beaten appearance of the buildings in the foreground. This scene captures the incline above East Main Street in East Gloucester, where Avery often worked with Gottlieb and Rothko. The Booth Fisheries branch of Gorton-Pew Fisheries is shown in the foreground of the painting, together with flake yards, the Inner Harbor at center, and Gloucester's central district in the distance.

This work was lent to a group exhibition at the Phillips in 1942. Duncan Phillips immediately purchased the canvas and soon after began promoting Avery's art. He presented Avery's first solo museum exhibition, which featured this painting and several later purchases, at the Phillips from January 17 to February 15, 1943.

Adolph Gottlieb

Wharf in Gloucester

Not dated

Watercolor on paper
Private collection

Adolph Gottlieb
Rockport
1932

Watercolor on paper
Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

In June of 1932, Adolph Gottlieb and Esther Dick married and spent time in the popular summer artist retreat of Rockport, just northeast of Gloucester.

Mark Rothko
Untitled (Wharf)
1934
Watercolor and graphite on watercolor paper
Collection of Christopher Rothko

Milton Avery
Untitled (Mending Nets, Gloucester)
Not dated
Watercolor on paper
Private collection

Milton Avery
Harbor (Tarr's Wharf)
1930s
Oil on canvas
Private collection

Adolph Gottlieb
Gloucester Street
c. 1934
Oil on linen mounted on board
Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Gottlieb described his surroundings: “Everything is very quiet here—places are empty and very few people from out of town—but it’s still Gloucester and we like it.”

Milton Avery
Study for The Naomi
Not dated
Pencil on paper
Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc., New York, NY

The Naomi
1930s

Oil on canvas
Avery Family Trust

Avery renders the Naomi Bruce fishing boat, first as a pencil sketch and then painted in oil when he returned to his New York studio.

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled

c. 1936

Oil on Masonite

Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Gift of the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation in honor of Sanford Hirsch

Many in Gloucester were out of work during the Great Depression. Gottlieb's muted scene of a solitary figure on a wharf has an eerie stillness reminiscent of the Surrealist artworks Gottlieb would have seen in New York at the time.

Adolph Gottlieb

Rockport

c. 1936

Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Beach Scenes

"We were followers of the sea....[W]e braved the surf and rocky shore spending endless hours contemplating [it]...Always the sea beckoned."—Sally Avery

By the early 20th century, Cape Ann was a popular vacation destination. Some of the prime attractions included Good Harbor Beach, with its view of the Atlantic, and the smaller Niles Beach on Gloucester Harbor. Avery made countless drawings and watercolors of bathers lounging on the sand or under colorful umbrellas. Some show recognizable landmarks like the twin lighthouses on Thacher Island. On August 31, 1932, Avery recorded beachgoers watching the solar eclipse. Gottlieb also drew scenes of summertime enjoyment, and Rothko made watercolor studies of bathers.

Milton Avery

On the Beach (Gloucester)

1935

Pencil on paper

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc. New York, NY

Avery often completed two or more drawings per sheet, sometimes adding notes about colors. These sketches may have later been translated into gouaches and watercolors.

Mark Rothko

Two Figures Near the Waterfront

1934

Watercolor on watercolor paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986

(1986.56.538.a)

The artists and their families met on the beach every day to go swimming, play handball (the activity depicted here), and have “a lot of good, nice wholesome times.” On the verso of this watercolor, Rothko painted a docked vessel.

Milton Avery

Untitled (Blue Beret, Green Umbrella)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Milton Avery

Eclipse Watchers

c. 1932

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

On the afternoon of August 31, 1932, a total solar eclipse occurred in the northeastern part of North America with Cape Ann being in the path of totality. In this watercolor, Avery captures revelers enjoying the event, using smoked glasses and colored film to protect their eyes.

Milton Avery

Untitled (Lazy Afternoon)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Milton Avery

Untitled (Beach Trio, Gloucester)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Milton Avery

Untitled (Robed Bathers)

Not dated

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Milton Avery

Untitled (Shore Sitters)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Milton Avery

Untitled (Two by the Water)

1930s

Oil on canvas

Private collection

In the deep distance behind these two beachgoers are the twin lighthouses of Thacher Island, near Good Harbor Beach.

Milton Avery

Boardwalk and Yellow Umbrella

1930s

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Avery made countless drawings and watercolors of people at Good Harbor Beach, including figures walking in groups or clustered in the shade. His compositions are enlivened by colorful, patterned details.

Milton Avery

Untitled (Sally Sketching, Gloucester)

1930s

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Here, Sally Michel Avery sketches in East Gloucester, silhouetted against the waters of the Inner Harbor and the Gloucester skyline. The twin steeples of Our Lady of Good Voyage Church are visible to the left. Sally first visited Gloucester to paint during the summer of 1924, staying in the Rocky Neck neighborhood where she met Milton. The couple married in the spring of 1926 in New York City, and they spent their honeymoon in Gloucester where they became involved in the Gloucester Society of Artists. Sally worked as a fashion illustrator.

Mark Rothko

Reclining Figures in a Landscape

1934

Watercolor and graphite on watercolor paper

**National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986
(1986.56.600.a)**

Rothko made numerous watercolors of bathers, reflecting an interest in French modernist Paul Cezanne. Rothko was not concerned with accurately portraying individual traits. Instead, he conveyed with minimal means figural groups set against the bright sunlight and the coastline. Here, broad, colorful tones offset the sandy beach and gray sky.

Mark Rothko

Untitled (Bathers on the Beach)

1934

Watercolor and graphite on construction paper

Collection of Christopher Rothko

Rothko recalled of his time with Avery: “The instruction, the example, the nearness...all this was a significant fact one which I will never forget.... Avery was a great poet-inventor...We have learned much and will learn more for a long time to come.”

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Two Gloucester Sketches)

c. 1934

Pencil and crayon on paper

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Gottlieb found interesting subjects on the working waterfront and along the chilly Atlantic. To save paper, Gottlieb made several images on a single sheet that he divided up with pencil or ink lines. The grid he created foreshadows the compositional framework of his later *Pictograph* series.

The 1940s

The effects of the Great Depression and the impending involvement of the United States in World War II led many artists to question if representational art could address broader social concerns. They turned to abstraction to express their individual psyches and more universal ideas. Inspired by the European artists in exile living in New York during WWII, Gottlieb and Rothko drew upon Surrealism, Greek mythology, the art of other cultures, and studies of the unconscious mind. They sought timeless, direct imagery to visualize modern fears. Rothko experimented with biomorphic forms, while Gottlieb explored boxed shapes that later influenced his *Pictographs*. As they moved toward abstraction, Gottlieb acknowledged, “Different times require different images.” Rothko explained: “The artist is no longer constrained....Freed from the need of describing a particular person, the possibilities are endless.”

Rothko and Gottlieb’s new painting approach would culminate in the Abstract Expressionism of the 1950s. Having gained recognition, Avery continued to focus on depicting his surroundings with a heightened palette and through increasingly simplified compositions, as seen in the next gallery. He explained: “I eliminate...leaving apparently nothing but color and pattern....If I capture some of the beauty, mystery, and timelessness of nature I am happy.” While Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko saw less of each other in the later 1940s, they continued to follow each other’s work.

Mark Rothko

Untitled (Bathers on the Beach)

1934

Watercolor on construction paper

Collection of Christopher Rothko, 1077.25-27

This work, featuring two figures dwarfed by a dune, was exhibited at the *Eighth Biennial Exhibition of Water Colors, Pastels and Drawings by American and Foreign Artists* at the Brooklyn Museum in 1935.

Mark Rothko

Aubade

1944

Opaque watercolor on paper

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Rebecca B. and Julius W. Allen, initiated 1994, completed 2001

Rothko painted many works on paper that evoke the depths and reflections of water. Here, the stratified composition, organic forms, and color palette recall the work of the Surrealists as well as his earlier seascapes. An “aubade” is a song or poem about lovers separating at dawn. Rothko noted in the early 1940s that art can be the “expression in concrete form of...the verities of time and space, life and death, and the heights of exaltation as well as the depths of despair.”

Mark Rothko

Abstract Composition

1944

Watercolor, ink, and graphite on watercolor paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986 (1986.43.182.b)

Adolph Gottlieb

Mariner's Incantation

1945

Oil, gouache, tempera, and casein on canvas

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Gottlieb began his *Pictograph* series when the Great Depression had not yet ended and WWII was approaching the United States. These works reflect Gottlieb's early efforts to reconcile elements of abstraction with an exploration of the subconscious. The artist laid down a grid as an organizing structure. Using a process of free association and the Surrealist technique of automatic drawing, he filled the grid with symbols, creating a pictorial language that aimed to convey universal ideas.

Adolph Gottlieb

The Seer

1950

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1952

Gottlieb explained of his *Pictographs*: “One can say that my paintings are like a house, in which each occupant has a room of his own.” *The Seer* references the human body: a figure in the upper right corner, four-finger motifs along the bottom and right side, and a repeated eye motif. Gottlieb developed the composition directly on the canvas, making adjustments as he painted.

Duncan Phillips acquired *The Seer* through Samuel Kootz's gallery and displayed it as a special feature in his office when it arrived: “I can see the big Gottlieb *The Seer* from my desk and I am enjoying it every day.” The work was part of *Painters of Expressionistic Abstractions* on view from March 16 to April 29,

1952. Presenting both American and European Abstract Expressionist artists, it was the first exhibition of its kind for a Washington, DC, museum.

Adolph Gottlieb

Forgotten Dream

1946

Oil on canvas

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Gift of Albert A. List, MS 1958, PhD 1961 (55.057)

While he was with his wife in Tucson for nine months in 1937, Gottlieb began experimenting with different colors, materials, and techniques. He explained: “I was away from the New York scene and started using the material that was at hand. I didn’t have any money. Art supplies were expensive. I started using paint from cans that I got from paint stores. I painted the objects that I picked up from the desert, dry pieces of cactus and other things, pieces of bone. Everybody seemed to think that my colors were influenced by the desert because I use tans and browns and grays and soft colors. It’s possible. It may be also that I just limited myself to that sort of a palette.”

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Fish and Anchor)

c. 1938

Oil on canvas

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

An enthusiastic boatsman, Gottlieb rendered in oil, graphite, and pen and ink various anchors, as seen in this painting and its related sketch below.

Adolph Gottlieb

Boxes on the Beach

c. 1938

Oil on canvas mounted on pasteboard

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Adolph Gottlieb

The Sea Chest

1942

Oil on canvas

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Estate of Karl Nierendorf, by purchase, (48.1172.510)

“To my mind certain so-called abstraction is not abstraction at all. On the contrary it is the realism of our time.”—Adolph Gottlieb

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Box and Sea Objects)

c. 1940

Oil on linen

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

In the fall of 1937, after Esther Gottlieb was advised by her doctor to move to a drier climate, the Gottliebs spent nine months in Tucson, Arizona. There, Gottlieb created 57 paintings, 16 sketches, and 25 gouaches on construction paper. Most reflect Gottlieb's interest in Cubism and Surrealism. Among the group was this painting of a crate of objects. While in Gloucester, Gottlieb found crates on the beach that were divided into compartments. He began arranging objects within the divisions to create compositions that he initially sketched and later turned into paintings. These works, and the Surrealist practice of juxtaposing unrelated objects, influenced the development of Gottlieb's *Pictographs*, a series of paintings created between 1941 and 1951; some examples are on view in this gallery.

Mark Rothko

Birth of Cephalopods

1944

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986.43.22

From 1939 to 1940, Rothko stepped back from painting to immerse himself in reading philosophy and mythology, writing his manuscript *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art* (published decades later). His painting style then shifted to incorporate abstract imagery, including biomorphic forms. He explained: "I [had] belonged to a generation that was preoccupied with the human figure...I found that it did not meet my needs....I used mythology for a while substituting various creatures...I began to use morphological forms in order to paint gestures I could not make people do." Here, Rothko uses amoeba-like shapes and cellular structures to express the mysteries of the human unconscious.

Mark Rothko

Iphigenia and the Sea/Horizontal Phantasy

1943

Oil on canvas

Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel and Ilya Prizel

This painting references a classic Greek myth in which Artemis demands that King Agamemnon sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. Rothko situates the sprawled body of Iphigenia in the lower portion of the painting on a sandy expanse. Many of Rothko's works from this period repeat a striated composition and earth-toned palette, recalling earlier works created in Gloucester.

Late Works

In the late 1950s, Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko were together again, this time in the progressive art community of Provincetown, Massachusetts, at the tip of Cape Cod. While there, all three practiced new approaches, making large-scale paintings that expressed universal truths. The emotionally charged, abstract canvases of Gottlieb and Rothko compelled viewers to engage with their work. As Gottlieb explained: "Paint quality is meaningless if it does not express quality of feeling." Rothko likewise described the desire for his work to feel intimate and human. "To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience....However you paint the larger picture, you are in it. Saturating the room with the feeling of the work, the walls are defeated."

While the starting point for Gottlieb and Rothko's works became increasingly conceptual, Avery's paintings remained rooted in the visible world, even as they appeared further simplified. Whether on his own or inspired by the artists he had once mentored, Avery made a significant shift in scale while in Provincetown, painting on six-foot canvases Building on the valuable foundation Avery had provided, all three artists explored the essence of space, flatness, and dimensionality, while creating works that invite the exploration of shared experiences in new ways.

Milton Avery

Birds Over Sea

1957

Oil on canvas

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc., New York, NY

From 1957 to 1960, Avery spent summers in Provincetown with Rothko and Gottlieb. Moving into his monumental late style, he created paintings, often inspired by sketches, that were simplified, large, and abstract. Avery turned his observations of nature into a reduced composition of three registers representing land, sea, and sky, capturing the color and luminosity of his surroundings.

Milton Avery

Female Artist

1945

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

This watercolor shows Sally Avery painting an ocean view from Mother Ann Cottage. It is a later, finished version of a pen drawing from Milton Avery's sketchbook.

Milton Avery

Bird and Breaking Wave

1944

Watercolor on paper

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Nora H. Lichtenberg, 1991

In this watercolor, Avery focuses more closely on the sea and the small bird. The related painting uses a more vivid palette and shows the scene from a distance to include a horizon line.

Milton Avery

The White Wave

1956

Oil on canvas

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 73.067. Gift of Helen Hooker Roelofs in memory of her father, Elon Huntington Hooker, Class of 1896 (73.067)

Milton Avery

George Constant Fishing

1945

Watercolor on paper

Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill. Bequest of Charles and Isabel Eaton, 2009.31.6

Here, Avery removes the horizon line, allowing an expanse of sea to frame the artist George Constant as he fishes. Related studies for this watercolor can be found in Avery's sketchbook.

Milton Avery

Porch Sitters

1944

Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper

The James Collection. Promised gift of Janet and William Ellery James to the Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts

During the summers of 1944 and 1945, Milton and Sally Avery and their young daughter, March, stayed at Mother Ann Cottage in Gloucester. From there, Avery recorded the rocky shoreline, Eastern Point Lighthouse, and uninterrupted views of the Atlantic. His sketchbooks contain drawings made both inside and outside the cottage, including one that corresponds to this painting. In the distance looms an observation tower erected by the US government at the outbreak of World War II.

Milton Avery

Lone Rock and Surf

1945

Watercolor and charcoal on paper

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase, with funds from S. Sidney Kahn and the Drawing Committee, (84.68).

In the 1940s, Avery returned to the subject of rocks and sea, capturing them in bold, simplified compositions with broad areas of rich color. He continued to strive for new levels of abstraction as he moved further away from representation. Below is a related work from his sketchbook.

Adolph Gottlieb

Under and Over

1959

Oil on canvas

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. Gift of Susan Morse Hilles, 1961.5.

"The very nature of abstract thought is to reduce the complexity of all life and to bring it down to something very simple which embodies all this complexity."—Adolph Gottlieb

Developed in 1956, Gottlieb's *Burst* series, characterized by two contrasting visual zones, expansive negative space, and the exploration of universal polarities, reflects his most pared-down form of expression.

Milton Avery

Sea Grasses and Blue Sea

1958

Oil on canvas

Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of friends of the artist, 1958 (649.1959)

During their shared summers in Provincetown from 1957 to 1960, Avery created numerous paintings measuring as large as six feet, a scale perhaps inspired by the work of his younger artist friends and the encouragement of his wife, Sally. Renting at 445 Commercial Street, next door to an art store, Sally remembered: “They stretched the canvases for him...and then we pulled them up on a rope. We were on the third floor...in through the window. That’s when he first began doing those big seascapes.”

Milton Avery

Dunes and Sea I

1958

Oil on canvas

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Purchase: Gift of Kaufmann’s Department Store, Women’s Committee, Edith H. Fisher Fund, Fellows Fund, James A. Fisher, The Henry L. Hillman Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Leon D. Black, Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Falk, Mrs. Grace Borgenicht Brandt, the Jeanette and Samuel Lubell Foundation, and the Morton Foundation

“I began to paint very thin. I painted so thinly a tube of paint lasted a long time....Today, I design a canvas very carefully before I begin to paint it. The two dimensional design is important but not so important as the design in depth. I do not use linear perspective but achieve depth by color the function of one color with another. I strip the design to essentials, the facts do not interest me as much as the essence of nature.”—Milton Avery

Adolph Gottlieb

Equinox

1963

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1963

“I’ve tried every possible thing...I’ve used rollers, I’ve used squeegees, I’ve used rags and knives and sticks...you have to find your own way of doing it...find something that fits what you are trying to express.”—Adolph Gottlieb

Simplifying his forms even further, by the 1960s, Gottlieb created paintings like this example, in which an implied horizontal division separates the image into two halves. Within each half, circles and calligraphic gestures float against a color field.

Duncan Phillips acquired this painting—his final Gottlieb—from Sidney Janis’s exhibition *11 Abstract Expressionist Painters*, on view from October 7 to November 2, 1963.

Adolph Gottlieb

Sea and Tide

1952

Oil on canvas

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

In Provincetown, Gottlieb divided his days between mornings in the studio and afternoons on the water. In 1951, Gottlieb developed completely abstract images he called “Imaginary Landscapes” painted in a horizontal format, divided into upper and lower registers along a horizon line. He later explained: “I was interested in finding something else to say, to express. So it was necessary to find other forms, a different, changed concept....I hit on dividing the canvas into two parts, which then became like an imaginary landscape....I’m interested in certain opposing images.”

Mark Rothko

Untitled

1968

Acrylic on paper mounted on hardboard

The Phillips Collection, Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation Inc., 1985

Milton Avery

Sunset

1952

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York. Gift of Roy R. and Marie S. Neuberger Foundation, Inc., (58.40)

In hues of yellow and gold, Avery captures the vibrance of Cape Ann’s distinctive light at the end of a summer day. He explained: “I like to seize one sharp instant in nature, imprison it by means of ordered shapes and space relationships to convey the ecstasy of the moment.”

Mark Rothko

No. 20

1949

Oil on canvas

Collection of Christopher Rothko

“I’m not interested in relations of color or form or anything else....I’m interested only in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on.”—Mark Rothko

In the late 1940s, Rothko explored pure abstraction in works he called “Multiforms.” Painted without recognizable imagery or compositional perspective, these works mark a transitional phase that led to his mature paintings featuring horizontal bands of color.

Milton Avery

Figures Against Orange Sky

1949

Oil on canvas

Collection of Betsey and Arthur Selkowitz

Based on a 1948 watercolor depicting a group standing before a pale yellow sky, Avery heightens the palette of the later painting, creating a vibrant orange sky that frames the three figures.

Milton Avery
Red Sky, Blue Sea
1958
Mixed media on paper
Private collection

Mark Rothko
No. 14 (Horizontal, White over Darks)
1961
Oil on canvas
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection, 1967 (647.1967)

Milton Avery
Black Sea
1959
Oil on canvas
The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1965

While in Provincetown, Avery reduced and simplified his compositions to contrasting color masses corresponding to ocean, surf, and sand. Sketched pencil lines, visible to the naked eye, divide this canvas. Through the thin paint layers, the weave of the canvas remains a distinct feature of the surface. Based on a watercolor, it shows how Avery adapted these techniques to painting in oil.

Black Sea captivated Duncan Phillips, who purchased it from the 1965 Avery retrospective organized by the Museum of Modern Art that was also presented at The Phillips Collection. The painting left the tour early and after its purchase Phillips thanked Sally for her assistance: "This was a very gracious and generous act as it enables me to enjoy the new acquisition so much sooner....I thank you with all my heart. It is good to know you." *Black Sea* was the eleventh and final work by Avery purchased by the Phillipses.

Adolph Gottlieb
Blue at Night
1957
Oil on canvas
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, John Barton Payne Fund, 1958, 58.13.4.(58.13.4)

Mark Rothko
Untitled (Yellow, Pink, Yellow on Light Pink)
1955
Oil on canvas
Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel

Mark Rothko
Untitled
1949
Oil on canvas
Collection of Kate Rothko Prizel

“The progression of a painter’s work, as it travels from point to point, will be toward clarity toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer.”—Mark Rothko

Shared Technique

While together on Cape Ann, the three artists occasionally sketched outdoors side by side. They experimented with various inexpensive, portable materials including pencil, ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper. At the end of a day filled with art making, they came together to discuss each other’s work, inspired by Avery’s guidance.

Avery trained in Connecticut and New York and was an established artist by the time he met Gottlieb and Rothko. They all took classes at the Art Students League and began exhibiting in group shows at the Opportunity Gallery in New York. Before coming to Cape Ann, the trio spent time together first at Avery’s studio in Lincoln Square, then at 72nd Street in 1930. Rothko later remembered: “I cannot tell you what it meant for us during those early years to be made welcome in those memorable studios....The walls always covered with...poetry and light.”

Milton Avery

Moonlit Sea

1959

Oil on paperboard

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc., New York, NY

Mark Rothko

Figures in a Seascape

1934

Watercolor and graphite on wove paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of The Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc., 1986
(1986.43.206.b)

Milton Avery

Untitled (Man & Nets)

Not dated

Watercolor on paper

Private collection

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Gloucester Studies)

c. 1934

Crayon on paper

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Milton Avery

Three Gloucester Scenes

1930s

Pen and ink on paper

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc., New York, NY

Milton Avery

Untitled

Not dated

Pencil on paper

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc., New York, NY

Milton Avery

Dock at Dawn

1934

Gouache and watercolor on paper

Private collection

“I can’t keep up with my ideas for pictures...I get up at six and do a watercolor before breakfast and three or four more during the day.”—Milton Avery

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (Four Gloucester Studies)

c. 1934

Crayon on paper

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled (One Gloucester Sketch)

c. 1934

Ink on paper

Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, New York, NY

Mark Rothko

View of a Pier

1934

Opaque watercolor on construction paper

National Gallery of Art, Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation Inc., 1986 (1986.56.607)

Drawn to the color effects, Rothko applied watercolor on construction paper, including this rendering of a waterfront building precariously overhanging the water. It was made during the summer of 1934 when Rothko and Edith Sachar vacationed in Gloucester with the Averys and the Gottliebs. Rothko rented a house on Calder Street, about a half mile from the working wharfs of Smith Cove in Gloucester Harbor.

IN THE CASE

Milton Avery

Sketchbook (Mother Ann Cottage, Summer/294 W. 11th, NY, NY, Winter)

1945

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc. New York, NY

Milton Avery

Sketchbook (Mother Ann Cottage, Eastern Point, Gloucester, Mass.)

1945

Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation, Inc. New York, NY

Milton Avery's Sketchbook

1930s

Cape Ann Museum, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Gift of Sally Michel Avery, 1991, (2753)

Many of the drawings in these sketchbooks are related to works in the exhibition.

Behind the Scenes: How Do We Know What We Know?

Our understanding of an artist, a painting, or a collection is built from many kinds of evidence: the artworks themselves, scientific examinations, letters, photographs, exhibition records, invoices, and other materials representing the work of artists, collectors, and museum staff. This gallery invites you behind the scenes of art history and museum practice.

Conservation helps us understand how works of art were made and how they have changed over time. Through scientific analysis and close observation, conservators can uncover earlier compositions, revisions, and techniques hidden beneath a painting's surface. Technical studies of paintings by Milton Avery reveal how the artist revised and refined his compositions as he worked.

Archives illuminate the relationships, decisions, and exchanges that shape a collection over time. Correspondence and photographs trace the histories of works by Milton Avery, Adolph Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko, documenting how these works became part of The Phillips Collection.

Together, the work of careful looking, scientific investigation, and historical preservation can lead to a deeper understanding of how artists created their work and how museums come to know, interpret, and share that knowledge.

Milton Avery

Winter Riders

1929

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1929

Phillips purchased *Winter Riders* from Morton Gallery in 1929, the year Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko began their friendship. This scene of two riders on horseback in New York's Central Park was the first example by Avery to enter a museum collection. Phillips's support of Avery was noted in newspapers, though he initially had reservations. He explained in a letter to Morton Gallery that Avery had a "distinguished vision for design....Unfortunately his colors seem...in need of clarification...when compared with the fine colorists in my collection."

By the 1930s, Avery had lighted and brightened his palette, influenced by Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse, and others. Impressed with these changes, Phillips went on to acquire a “unit” of 10 Avery paintings.

Milton Avery

March on the Balcony

1952

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1961

Milton Avery’s Process

Milton Avery painted on a variety of supports, including cardboard, illustration board, canvas, and canvas board. He sometimes reused a canvas by scraping down and painting over a discarded composition.

When painting in his studio, Avery often worked from a small drawing or watercolor made from life. He would translate the composition to the canvas with a light sketch to define contours or block in forms.

He typically painted thinly and adapted many watercolor techniques to painting in oil. He diluted his paint so much that his wife, Sally, joked about how long it would take him to use a tube of paint. He sometimes used rags or sponges instead of brushes to apply paint over a large area, and also used a variety of other tools—“whatever was at hand”—to manipulate his paint and create textural variety.

March on the Balcony is an example of Avery’s mastery of color and textures. This picture is painted on a stretched linen canvas commercially prepared with a smooth, white ground layer. Infrared imaging reveals Avery used diluted paint and a brush to sketch the hills, horizon line, boat, outlines of March’s figure, and balcony railing. Close examination shows he built up thin, translucent layers of paint and in some areas wiped, scraped, or sanded the surface to create nuanced, textural fields of color within each flat shape.

These effects are seen in scumbling (thinly painted over with a dry brush) of light blue paint over warm pink in the sail (left) and in the scraped surfaces of the purple lilac sky (middle) and March’s blonde hair (right), where underlying colors and even canvas threads are exposed. Finally, with the end of a brush or other sharp tool, Avery incised lines into wet paint to define details in March’s face and even scratched his signature into the wet paint.

Milton Avery

Girl Writing

1941

Oil on canvas

The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1943

Milton Avery

Drawing for Girl Writing

Not dated

Graphite on paper

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Sally Avery, 1988

Milton Avery's *Girl Writing*

Girl Writing is inspired by a pencil drawing of the artist's daughter, March, seated at a desk, legs crossed, with a pencil in hand and a concentrated expression on her face. On the verso, a pencil inscription reads "March Drawing." Smudges at the edges of the paper and dots of red paint in the upper left corner suggest the drawing was close at hand when Avery was working on the painting.

Compared with the drawing, the composition of *Girl Writing* is greatly simplified. There are no legs to support the desk, the desktop is smaller, and the girl's hair and dress are different.

Originally, however, the painting followed the drawing more closely. An infrared image reveals that Avery initially sketched the desktop and desk legs as they appear in the drawing. Faint lines of the sketched desk leg remain visible near the right edge of the picture.

Differences of texture in the girl's hair, most visible in raking light, suggest that Avery also at first followed the drawing and painted a braid, but later simplified the hairstyle. The braid is not visible in the infrared image because black paint is not transparent to infrared light. In regular light, it can be seen that the girl's longer hairstyle also covers a painted white collar.

It is unclear whether the simple, smooth surface of the girl's dress, made using a palette knife, is a later adjustment, but the stark contrast with the stiffly textured brushstrokes of the girl's arms and legs adds interest to the picture.

These kinds of significant alterations to a composition have not been found in Avery's other paintings at The Phillips Collection, making *Girl Writing* a unique and intriguing example of the artist's process.

Milton Avery

Pink Rocks

1944

Transparent and opaque watercolor and black chalk on paper

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Marion Golden, 2016

This watercolor is a later, more resolved version of the ink drawing in Avery's sketchbook.

Adolph Gottlieb

Untitled

1972

Color lithograph

The Phillips Collection, Gift of Marion Golden, 2017

This recent acquisition helps grow the museum's "units" of works by Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko.

IN THE CASE

Phillips and Valentine Gallery collaborated on several shows, including the museum's 1942 exhibition *Cross Section Number One of a Series of Specially Invited American Paintings and Water Colors*, featuring works by Milton Avery, Max Weber, Karl Knaths, and Morris Graves, among others. After praising the paintings lent by the gallery, Phillips wrote, "We will buy the night scene...entitled 'Gloucester' [*Harbor at Night*, 1932, on view third floor]," securing the picture for \$450.

Inspired by an exhibition of Avery's work at Valentine Gallery in November 1942, Phillips organized the artist's first solo museum exhibition. It opened in early 1943 and featured *Harbor at Night*, as well as landscapes, still lifes, and family scenes that spanned Avery's career. Phillips, who saw promise in Avery, bought four paintings from this exhibition including *Girl Writing* (1941), on view in this gallery.

These two letters reveal the warm exchanges between Phillips and Sally Avery. To show her gratitude for Phillips's support, she assisted with the acquisition of *Black Sea* (1959, third floor) and later gave the museum *Drawing for Girl Writing* (in this gallery).

Letter to Sally Avery from Duncan Phillips (1965), Milton Avery papers, Subject Files, 1950-1981, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This installation photograph from c. 1970 shows Avery's *Girl Writing* (1941) and *March on the Balcony* (1952), both on view in this gallery, with *Interior with Egyptian Curtain* by Henri Matisse (1948).

Installation photograph from March 1957 showing Augustus Vincent Tack's *Night Amargosa Desert* (1935), Mark Rothko's *Green and Maroon* (1953), and Kenzo Okada's *Footsteps* (1954).

Installation photograph from the 1960s showing Gottlieb's *Equinox* (1963, third floor), Bradley Walker Tomlin's *No. 8* (1952), and Philip Guston's *Native's Return* (1957).

In this letter from 1960, Mark Rothko expresses admiration for his mentor Milton Avery. Letter to Milton Avery from Mark Rothko (1960), Milton Avery papers, Correspondence, 1935-1981, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Phillips was initially sent three paintings by Gottlieb and chose *The Seer* (1950, third floor), confirmed in this invoice.

Phillips initially envisioned a solo show of Gottlieb's work, then broadened the concept to include expressionist work by both American and European artists, a first for a Washington, DC, museum.

In this letter Phillips recognizes that his intimate galleries cannot accommodate the scale of the canvases being produced by Abstract Expressionist painters. He wishes he had more room for works by Rothko.

Installation photograph from c. 1965 showing Rothko's *Ochre and Red on Red* (1954), Morris Louis's *Number 182* (1961), and Sam Francis's *Blue* (1958).

Phillips reminisces over the times he and Rothko talked together.

The Rothko Room

“[Rothko’s paintings are] a vibrant life-enhancing experience...They not only pervade our consciousness but inspire contemplation.”—Duncan Phillips

Duncan Phillips first considered buying paintings by Mark Rothko in the 1950s, when he was traveling to New York to organize a show of Abstract Expressionist art. Many artists were working on a large scale, so Phillips wrote to dealer Sidney Janis that he hoped Rothko could send “his best small” pictures. At the time, the museum’s footprint was much smaller, encompassing only the intimate house galleries. Rothko lent several canvases to Phillips’s 1957 exhibition *Paintings by Mark Rothko, Bradley Tomlin, Kenzo Okada*. Soon after, the museum acquired *Green and Maroon* (1953).

Phillips’s practice of building “units,” or groups of works by an artist, aligned with Rothko’s preference for installing his pictures together. Phillips wrote to Janis in January 1958: “[Rothko] is definitely an artist after my own heart. For such a man I would make room.” In May 1960, the Phillips organized a solo show of seven paintings; at the close of the exhibition, Phillips bought *Green and Tangerine on Red* (1956) and *Orange and Red on Red* (1957).

These experiences reinforced Phillips’s desire for a permanent room devoted to the artist. With the museum expansion in the fall of 1960 was the creation of the Rothko Room, featuring the collection’s three paintings. In 1964, Phillips thanked Rothko: “In a very generous moment you asked me whether I would like to receive [*Ochre and Red on Red*] and enjoy it right away. Because of my advanced age that is really an inducement....I cannot tell you how much we enjoyed your visit and our talks.” Shortly before Phillips died in 1966, he saw the installation of four paintings in the Rothko Room, adding *Ochre and Red on Red* to the original trio.

Mark Rothko’s Process

Recent conservation examination of paintings in the Rothko Room highlights the importance the artist placed both on color and on balance and proportion—what he referred to as “measures”—in his compositions.

Rothko prepared his canvases with a colored priming—typically a mixture of rabbit-skin glue and dry pigments—and achieved luminous fields of color with multiple thin applications of paint. In addition to oils, Rothko mixed pigments with modern synthetic resins, dammar varnish, and eggs. By using different mediums, he could apply veils of color without disturbing the layers beneath. He carefully considered each new layer, often making small adjustments in tone or hue until he achieved his desired result.

While painting, Rothko might turn a canvas upside down to consider a different perspective; this often resulted in paint drips flowing in the opposite direction of the picture’s final hanging orientation. Drips along the top edge of *Ochre and Red on Red* and in the large orange field of *Orange and Red on Red* suggest he took this approach with these paintings.

Investigations with an infrared camera found that Rothko might also adjust the proportions of his color fields. An infrared image reveals that the lower portion of *Green and Maroon* was at first divided into two fields, possibly a narrow band of orange over bright red.

The infrared image of *Green and Tangerine on Red* shows the upper green field was originally smaller before Rothko enlarged it to be closer in size to the tangerine field below. Marjorie Phillips recalled Rothko saying, “The striking tangerine tone of the lower section of the canvas could symbolize the normal, happier side of living; and in proportion, the dark, blue-green, rectangular measure above it would stand for the black clouds or worries that always hang over us.”

Mark Rothko

Untitled

1940

Opaque watercolor on paper

The Phillips Collection, Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation Inc., 1985

In the 1940s, Rothko experimented with watercolor, creating compositions featuring biomorphic forms. This exploration marked a turning point in his artistic development as he sought to convey basic emotions through abstract forms.

In 1943, Rothko met Clyfford Still, a fellow New York School painter who also saw abstraction as a means of addressing the human condition. In 1946, Rothko wrote the catalogue introduction for Still’s exhibition at the Art of This Century gallery. Still’s work is on view in this gallery.

IN THE CASE

This unpublished text by Duncan Phillips discusses how Mark Rothko’s art encourages personal reflection.

In this letter, Marjorie Phillips considers Mark Rothko’s suggestion of an additional room devoted to paintings of his work in the museum. Unfortunately, she is unable to pursue his request.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea
October 24, 2026–January 24, 2027

The information below was updated October 2026 and is subject to change.
Please visit PhillipsCollection.org/events for the most up-to-date programming information.

PROGRAMS

[Living Room: Duncan Phillips's Support of Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko](#)

[October 30, 2026, 12–1 pm](#)

Associate Curator Renée Maurer discusses how the exhibition brings to life the friendship and creative dialogue of the three artists and Duncan Phillips's encouragement of their work. *Included with general admission, reservations required.*

[Phillips after 5: Deep Sea Disco](#)

[November 5, 2026, 5–8:30 pm](#)

Set sail for a nautical night of art, music, and fun. Groove to disco beats, snap a photo with a real mermaid, relax to a sea-inspired sound bath, join a knot making workshop, and more. *\$20, free for members.*

[The Phillips Plays: Artist Process: Mark Rothko](#)

[November 14, 2026, 10 am–1 pm](#)

Kids and caregivers are invited to experience Mark Rothko's work up close. We will discuss how Rothko's color choices make us feel during tours at 11 am and 12 pm, then select colors to form our own compositions. *Included with general admission; free for members.*

[Performance: Alchemy Ballet](#)

[November 19, 2026, 6:30–7:30 pm](#)

Alchemy Ballet in partnership with The Phillips Collection presents a new ballet. The dancers respond to the exhibition through movement, music, and poetry, offering a new way to experience the artists and their relationship to the sea. This event takes place during Third Thursdays—explore the galleries with free admission from 5–8 pm. *Free, reservation required.*

[Living Room: Conservation Insights of Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko](#)

[December 11, 2026, 12–1 pm](#)

Conservator Patricia Favero gives a behind-the-scenes talk about conservation studies of Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko's work and what it reveals about their materials and methods. *Included with general admission, reservations required.*

[The Phillips Plays: Making Friends](#)

[January 9, 2027, 10 am–1 pm](#)

How do artists express friendship through their art? Learn more about the friendship between Avery, Gottlieb, and Rothko during tours at 11 am and 12 pm. Then we'll explore how we can celebrate our friends through art. *Included with general admission; free for members.*

Page 2—Public Programs: *Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea*

Living Room: Mark Rothko and Place

January 15, 2027, 12–1 pm

Christopher Rothko gives a special talk exploring his father's enduring relationship with The Phillips Collection, home to the renowned Rothko Room. *Included with general admission, reservations required.*

Keynote Conversation: *Avery, Gottlieb & Rothko: By the Sea*

January 21, 2027, 6:30 pm

Offering personal and institutional perspectives, Sean Cavanaugh, Director of the Milton & Sally Avery Arts Foundation; Dr. Kate Rothko Prizel, daughter of Mark Rothko; and Sanford Hirsch, Executive Director Emeritus of the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation, discuss the enduring friendship and creative exchange among the three artists. Moderated by Renée Maurer, Associate Curator at The Phillips Collection. This event takes place during Third Thursdays—explore the galleries with free admission from 5–8 pm. *Free, reservation required.*

Spotlight Talks

Thursday–Sunday, 1 pm

15–20-minute talks with a Phillips Educator. *Included with general admission; free for members.*

Phillips Music

November 1, 2026, 4 pm: [Nikolaj Hess Trio](#)

November 8, 2026, 4 pm: [Prism Piano Trio](#)

Sold out; rush and standby tickets may be available.

Member Exclusives

Member Mornings

[December 15, 2026](#), 10 am (virtual)

[January 12, 2027](#), 10 am (in-person)

Presentation by Associate Curator Renée Maurer

Free, reservation required.

Member Tours

[November 8, 2026](#), and [January 10, 2027](#), 10 am

Tour with a Phillips Educator

Free, reservation required.

See the exhibition during **Phillips after 5** with music, art-making, drinks, and more (November 5 and December 3, 2026, 5–8:30 pm; \$20, free for members) and **Third Thursdays** (November 20 and December 17, 2026, and January 21, 2027, 5–8 pm; free admission).

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

The information below was updated in October 2026 and is subject to change.

[Beauford Delaney: So Much Love and Beauty](#)

February 27–May 23, 2027

Beauford Delaney's work is singular to his humanist vision, his spirituality, and his ability to harness the expressive powers of color. *So Much Love and Beauty* situates the artist (1901–1979) and his work in relation to critical moments of modernist abstraction from 1940s New York City to 1960s Paris and explores the meaningful relationships that nourished his career. The exhibition features the artist's early New York street scenes, insightful portraiture, and radiant abstractions, as well as works by Delaney's inspirations such as Claude Monet and Stuart Davis, and friends and contemporaries such as Lawrence Calcagno, Sam Francis, and Ed Clark.

This exhibition is organized by The Phillips Collection.

Curated by Adrienne L. Childs, Senior Consulting Curator, The Phillips Collection.

Charles Rumph: Where We Are

April 28–August 1, 2027

This focused exhibition on DC-based photographer Charles Rumph (1932–2019) features a selection of his black-and-white and never-before-seen color photographs. Timed nearly 50 years after Rumph's first museum show at the Phillips, this installation explores the photographer's interest in capturing the play of geometry and light on distinct forms. Rumph's photographs will be further explored within the context of the American modernists in the collection.

This installation is organized by The Phillips Collection through a major gift from the Shirley Z. Johnson Trust and The Charles Rumph Collection and Photography Fund.

Curated by Renée Maurer, Associate Curator, The Phillips Collection, with Kelly Richman-Abdou, Rumph Fellow, The Phillips Collection.

Feast for the Eyes: Celebrating Renoir at the Phillips

June 28–October 3, 2027

This focused exhibition will bring together Pierre-Auguste Renoir's most ambitious multifigural paintings, *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1880–81), a cornerstone of The Phillips Collection, and *Bal du moulin de la Galette* (1876), on loan from the Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Never before seen together in the United States, this exceptional reunion of two Impressionist masterworks invites us to explore a defining period in the artist's development, as he created a sumptuous visual language of color and light that captured the vitality of modern life.

This exhibition is organized by The Phillips Collection.

Curated by Elsa Smithgall, Chief Curator, The Phillips Collection, and Clarisse Fava-Piz, Curator of Modern Art, The Phillips Collection.

Juan Sánchez: States of Liberation

June 26–September 12, 2027

This survey will be the first traveling retrospective of Juan Sánchez (b. 1954, New York, New York), one of the founding figures of Latinx art in the United States. For over four decades, Sánchez has engaged with the socio-political struggles of the working class and Afro-Puerto Rican communities that shaped his upbringing, infusing his art with a profound and introspective spirituality. Organized around four narrative pillars—Autobiography, Community, Nation, and Utopia—the exhibition will feature 75 works including paintings, works on paper, photography, and video, offering a comprehensive look at Sánchez’s powerful and thought-provoking art.

This exhibition is co-organized by The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in collaboration with the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico.

Curated by Tie Jojima, Curator of Global Contemporary Art, The Phillips Collection; Marcela Guerrero, DeMartini Family Curator, Whitney Museum of American Art; and Alejandro Anreus, PhD, Guest Curator, with Carina Martinez, Rubio Butterfield Family Fellow, Whitney Museum of American Art.

Vuillard and the Theater

October 16, 2027–January 23, 2028

Vuillard and the Theater is the first exhibition devoted exclusively to the deep and abiding ties between the art of Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940)—a central figure in the Nabi movement—and the diverse world of theater in Paris. As a spectator, director, and scenographer, Vuillard drew on all the possibilities that theater offered his painting, choreographing works as scenes and often casting his close relatives as protagonists. Comprising approximately 70 paintings and 30 works on paper, as well as theater programs and ephemera from the 1890s to the 1930s, this exhibition offers a fresh re-examination of Vuillard’s entire artistic oeuvre, demonstrating how theater influenced his unique form of modernism.

This exhibition is co-organized by The Phillips Collection and the Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

Curated by Elsa Smithgall, Chief Curator, The Phillips Collection, Anne Robbins, Curator of Paintings, Musée d’Orsay, and Mathias Chivot, Guest Curator.

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