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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.

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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; © 2025 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. © 1998 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.

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