

Mark Tobey

32 East 57th Street, New York
October 25, 2018 – January 12, 2019

Opening Reception:
Wednesday, October 24, 6 – 8 PM



New York—Pace Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of abstract works by the American artist Mark Tobey (1890 – 1976), the first show dedicated to the artist in New York in over twenty years. Bringing together approximately 35 paintings and works on paper from private collections as well as major international museums, such as the Fondation Beyeler, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among others, the exhibition spans three decades of Tobey’s evolving approach to abstraction. The exhibition will be on view at 32 East 57th Street from October 25, 2018 through January 12, 2019, with an opening reception held on Wednesday, October 24, from 6 – 8 p.m. Pace will publish a full-color catalogue for the exhibition, which will include a new essay on Tobey by art critic Robert C. Morgan. The exhibition will also include the film *Mark Tobey* (1952) directed Robert Gardner and written by Gardner and Tobey. Filmed when the artist lived in Seattle, the film also features piano and flute compositions by Tobey and presents an experimental portrait of him as both performer and subject.

While a contemporary of the Abstract Expressionists, Tobey developed a unique and often calligraphic style, grounded in a place of mindfulness rather than the physical action of his contemporaries. A spiritual and artistic turning point for Tobey occurred in 1918 when he was introduced to the ecumenical Baha’i Faith, which promotes universal consciousness. Working largely in water-based media, such as tempera and gouache, on modestly-scaled canvases and paper, Tobey began a painting by emptying his mind of extraneous thoughts in order to focus exclusively on the meticulous placement of abstract gestures and shapes. Within his tablet-size paintings, suffused with masses of lines and overlaid with fragmentary forms, Tobey captured universes of possibilities and energy. In discussing his practice, Tobey said: “I believe that painting should come through the avenues of meditation rather than the canals of action. Only then can one have a conversation with a painting. If I find no content, there’s no communication.”

Tobey's all-over compositions, symbol-like marks, and calligraphic renderings emerged from a combination of Eastern and Western visual histories and points of inspiration, from Chinese scroll painting to European cubism. The artist led a largely nomadic life, spending early time in New York and Seattle and traveling to Hong Kong, Shanghai, Kyoto, and across Europe. Removed from any particular geographic or stylistic "school", Tobey maintained a relentless focus on working on a small scale and discovered highly personalized ways to integrate the intricate rhythms and ideographic gestures he found in Eastern calligraphy with his practice of observing the world in rapt attention, and in doing so developed his all-over abstractions. As demonstrated in the three decades of work presented in the exhibition, these broad influences all contributed to the distinct visual language that Tobey evolved throughout his career.

One of the best known and internationally respected American artists of the 1950s and 60s, Tobey's contributions to abstraction and midcentury modernism have only recently begun to be fully recognized. In 2017, the Addison Gallery of American Art organized the first retrospective of Tobey in the U.S. in 40 years, which was also presented at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice during the 2017 Venice Biennale. Pace's exhibition, the first comprehensive show of the artist's work in New York in over two decades, continues to shine a light on Tobey's groundbreaking style and lasting impact on international modern and contemporary art.

Mark Tobey (b. 1890, Centerville, Wisconsin; d. 1976, Basel, Switzerland) created a body of work central to defining midcentury American modernism. Frequently traveling throughout his career, Tobey resided primarily in New York from 1911 through 1922 before basing himself in Seattle through 1962, when he relocated to Basel. His first one-artist exhibition was held at M. Knoedler & Co, New York, in 1917, with his first museum exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum in 1934. Retrospectives of his work have been organized by the Seattle Art Museum (1942, 1959, 1970); California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco (1951); Institute of Contemporary Art, London (1955); Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany (1960); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1962); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1962); Cleveland Museum of Art (1963); Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas (1968); National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (1974); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (1997); and the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts (2017).

In 1958, Tobey became the first American artist to win the Painting Prize at the Venice Biennale since James Abbott McNeill Whistler in 1895. He was the first non-French painter to be given a monographic exhibition at the Musée des Art Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Paris, held in 1961—the same year he won first prize at the Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture at the Carnegie Institute. The French government awarded Tobey the *Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* medallion in 1968 and he received the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Award in 1971.

Mark Tobey's work is held in major public collections worldwide, including the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts; The Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Detroit Institute of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Kunstmuseum Basel; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Seattle Art Museum; Tate, London; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Pace is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Under the leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace is a vital force within the art world and plays a critical role in shaping the history, creation, and engagement with modern and contemporary art. Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy for vibrant and dedicated relationships with renowned artists. As the gallery approaches the start of its seventh decade, Pace's mission continues to be inspired by our drive to support the world's most influential and innovative artists and to share their visionary work with people around the world.

Pace advances this mission through its dynamic global program, comprising ambitious exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, and curatorial research and writing. Today, Pace has ten locations worldwide: three galleries in New York; one in London; one in Geneva; one in Palo Alto, California; one in Beijing; two in Hong Kong; and one in Seoul. Pace will open a new **flagship** gallery in New York, anticipated for completion in fall 2019. In 2016, Pace joined with Futurecity to launch Future\ Pace—an international cultural partnership innovating multidisciplinary projects for art in the public realm.

Images: Mark Tobey, *Cosmic Tensions III*, 1959 © 2018 Mark Tobey / Seattle Art Museum, Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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