



Royal Academy of Arts

Milton Avery

American Colourist

Press Release

Milton Avery: American Colourist
The Gabrielle Jungels-Winkler Galleries
15 July – 16 October 2022

Supported by

Milton & Sally Avery
Arts Foundation

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Milton Avery (1885 – 1965) has long been recognised in the United States as one of the most important and influential twentieth-century American artists. Avery's compositions, taken from daily life and which include portraits and landscapes, are imbued with a colour sensibility, harmony and balance, which was to have a major influence on the next artistic generation. Avery played a vital role in the development of Abstract Expressionism through his close association with some of the younger exponents of the movement, such as Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Adolph Gottlieb. His work defies distinct categorisation; stretching between American Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism, both of which had a significant impact on his oeuvre, although he was not formally associated with either movement.

Milton Avery: American Colourist at the Royal Academy covers the full development of Avery's career. He was famously prolific, and this survey features a careful selection of around 70 works, including many of his celebrated paintings from 1910 to the 1960s. The last retrospective of his work was held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1982 and this is the first solo exhibition of Milton Avery in Europe in a public institution.

The first section, *Early Work*, features work from 1910 up until the late 1930s, covering his main themes; the landscape, the city and the domestic. A number of these works have never been publicly exhibited before. The influence of the American Impressionists and Avery's early appreciation of the landscape is revealed. Paintings include *Blossoming*, 1918 (New York, Milton Avery Trust) through to *Fishing Village*, 1939 (New York, The Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation).

In the second section, *Portraits*, there are paintings of his family, friends and self-portraits. Featured here is a portrait of his friends in *The Dessert*, 1939 (New York, Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)) and *Self-Portrait*, 1941 (Purchase, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College,

State University of New York). From the early 1940s he ceased formal portraiture but retained the figure in his work.

A section entitled *Innovation in Colour and Form* charts the period of innovation from the mid-1940s when Avery developed a system of flattening the compositional forms of his paintings into abstracted tonal planes. It was this development which established him as a major American colourist. His mid-career subjects include scenes of the quotidian; taking from the European Modernist painters the tendency to depict the ordinariness of the subject, and in doing so highlighting the work's composition. Key works in this section include two portraits of his daughter March, *Seated Girl with Dog*, 1944 (Purchase, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York), and *March in Brown*, 1954 (Private Collection), as well as *Husband and Wife*, 1945 (Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art).

And finally in *Late Work*, paintings from the 1950s to the early 1960s reveal a continuing influence of European Modernism, particularly Henri Matisse, as Avery increasingly employed non-associative colours in his compositions. There is a strong focus on the landscape and a further paring down of the detail of the subject. These works show the extent to which Avery perfected his unique ability to balance colour and form in increasingly abstracted compositions, as seen in *Black Sea*, 1959 (Washington, Phillips Collection), and *Boathouse by the Sea*, 1959 (New York, Milton Avery Trust).

Having exerted such a profound influence on the young emerging colour field Abstract Expressionist painters, Avery also took much from them – with his scale increasing and these late works becoming less dependent on the figurative content. Mark Rothko said of Avery in his memorial address in 1965, 'There have been several others in our generation who have celebrated the world around them, but none with that inevitability where the poetry penetrated every pore of the canvas to the very last touch of the brush.'

Organisation

Exhibition organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London in collaboration with The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. It is curated by Edith Devaney, Managing Director and Curator, David Hockney Foundation.

Accompanying Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication written by Edith Devaney, Erin Monroe and Maria Price.

Dates and Opening Hours

Open to public: Friday 15 July – Sunday 16 October 2022
 10am – 6pm Tuesday to Sunday (last admission 5.30pm)

Admission

From £17; concessions available; under 16s go free (T&Cs apply); Friends of the RA go free.

Tickets

Advance booking with pre-booked timed tickets is recommended for everyone, including Friends of the RA. Tickets can be booked in advance online (royalacademy.org.uk) or over the phone (0207 300 8090).

Images

Publicity images for *Milton Avery: American Colourist* can be downloaded via this [link](#). By downloading the images, you acknowledge and accept the terms and conditions. These images can only be reproduced to illustrate a review or criticism of a work or report as defined by section 30 (i) and (ii) of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Event

Curator talk – *Milton Avery: American Colourist*

Wednesday 7 September 2022, 7-8pm, £8 (£5 concession), Online conversation.

royalacademy.org.uk/event/curator-talk-milton-avery

Safety measures

The health and safety of visitors and staff is paramount. Safety measures for visitors can be found on the RA website: <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/plan-your-visit>

Social Media

Join the discussion about the exhibition online at:

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#RAMiltonAvery

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The Royal Academy is an independent charity. It does not receive revenue funding from the government so is reliant upon the support of its visitors, donors, sponsors, patrons and loyal Friends.

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