

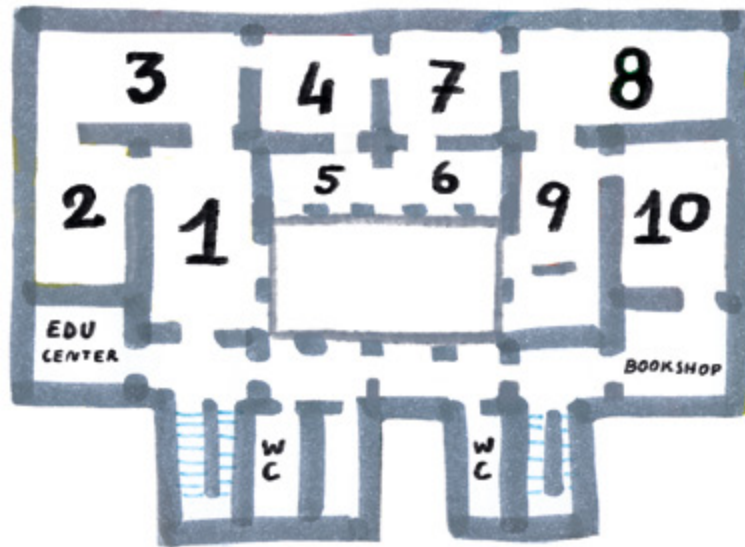


**VISIT
KIT**

FOR TEENAGERS
OF ALL AGES

A TOOL TO EXPLORE
"ROTHKO in FLORENCE"

WHO IS MARK ROTHKO



Mark Rothko was born in 1903 with the name Marcus Rotkovitch in Dvinsk in the Russian Empire (today Daugavpils in Latvia). At the age of 10 he emigrated to the United States with his family, moving to Portland, Oregon. He attended Yale University in Connecticut, but in 1923 he left his studies and moved to New York. Around the age of 25 he became interested in art after attending a life drawing class. After this experience he began painting as a self-taught artist and continued to paint throughout his life until his death in 1970.

WHAT IS THE KIT?

The Visit Kit is a tool to explore the exhibition "Rothko in Florence", created for teenagers of all ages. Discover the life and work of Mark Rothko through insights and reflections on his art.

HOW DO YOU USE IT?

As you explore the exhibition, use the map to find your way. Please keep a safe distance from the paintings. You can sit on the steps under the windows.



His way of painting was deeply influenced by architecture and by the art of the past that he admired during three important trips to Europe. The exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi presents Mark Rothko's artistic research: from figurative painting to the development of the large rectangular fields of color that made him famous around the world. The exhibition is curated by his son Christopher Rothko and Elena Geuna.

Room 1

Rothko began painting in the 1920s, initially adopting a figurative style. He painted scenes of New York, portraits of people in subway stations or in domestic settings, and in 1936 he created the only self-portrait of his life.

His images do not simply represent reality: the colors he uses and the way he paints reveal a strong attention to emotional experience.

In the mid-1940s his painting changed. He began painting biomorphic figures: organisms somewhere between human and animal, without recognizable features. These new subjects seem like memories reappearing or dreams coming to life. During this period Rothko visited exhibitions dedicated to Surrealism at the MoMA in New York (Museum of Modern Art) and was deeply struck by the idea that a painting could contain an inner, dreamlike world made of symbols and mysterious figures.

SURREALISM

an ARTISTIC MOVEMENT THAT DEVELOPED IN EUROPE STARTING IN THE MID-1920S.

SURREALIST ARTISTS EXPLORED THE UNCONSCIOUS,

DREAMS, AND HUMAN PSYCHE. TO "FREE"

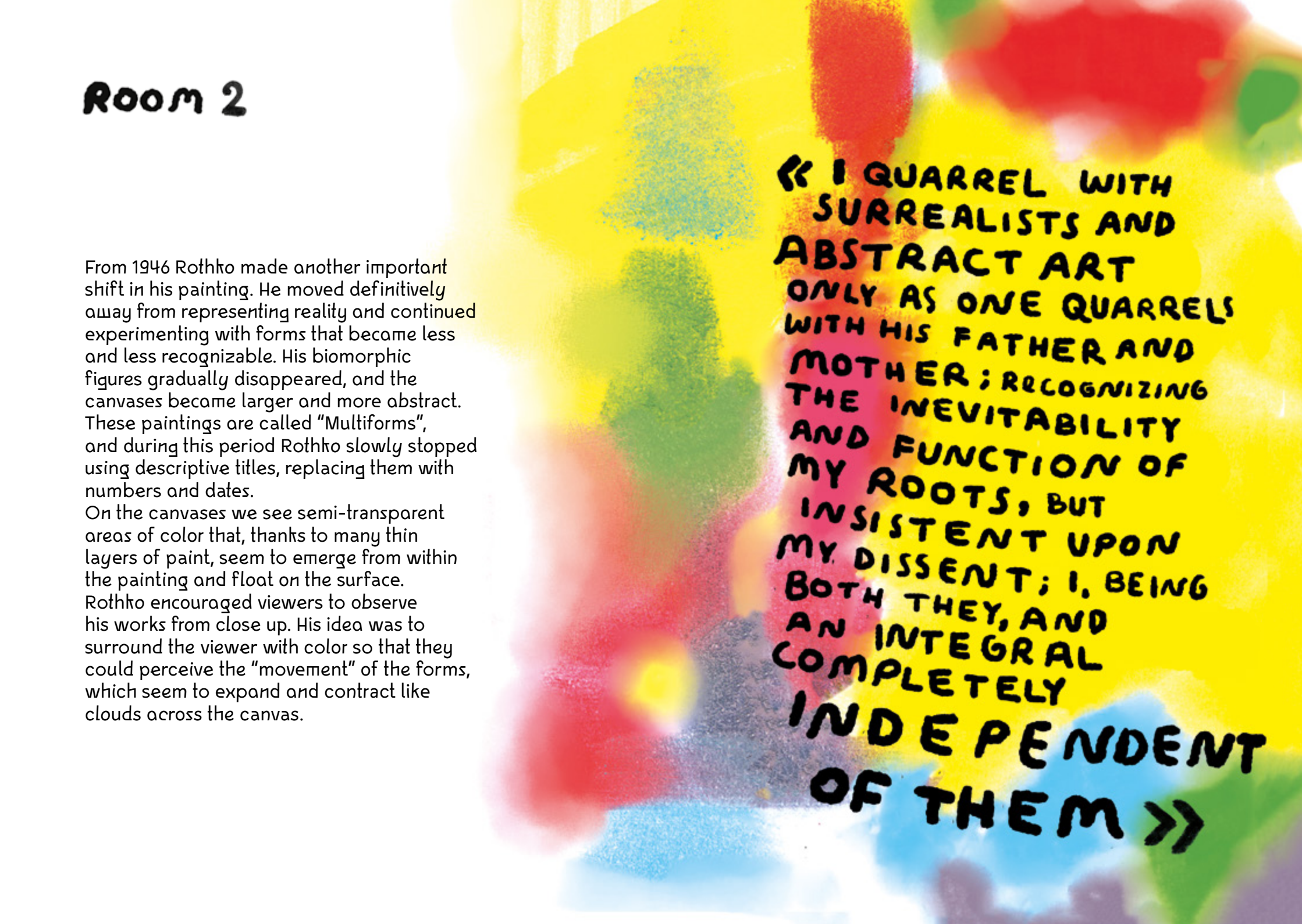
THE IMAGINATION, THEY LET CHANCE GUIDE THEM AND COMBINED VERY DIFFERENT IMAGES TO CREATE UNEXPECTED MEANINGS.

Room 2

From 1946 Rothko made another important shift in his painting. He moved definitively away from representing reality and continued experimenting with forms that became less and less recognizable. His biomorphic figures gradually disappeared, and the canvases became larger and more abstract. These paintings are called "Multiforms", and during this period Rothko slowly stopped using descriptive titles, replacing them with numbers and dates.

On the canvases we see semi-transparent areas of color that, thanks to many thin layers of paint, seem to emerge from within the painting and float on the surface.

Rothko encouraged viewers to observe his works from close up. His idea was to surround the viewer with color so that they could perceive the "movement" of the forms, which seem to expand and contract like clouds across the canvas.



« I QUARREL WITH
SURREALISTS AND
ABSTRACT ART
ONLY AS ONE QUARRELS
WITH HIS FATHER AND
MOTHER; RECOGNIZING
THE INEVITABILITY
AND FUNCTION OF
MY ROOTS, BUT
INSISTENT UPON
MY DISSENT; I, BEING
BOTH THEY, AND
AN INTEGRAL
COMPLETELY
INDEPENDENT
OF THEM »

Room 3 and 4

Starting in 1950 Rothko developed the "mature" visual language that would make him known around the world. This style, often called "classical" — visible in the works in these two rooms — is characterized by rectangular color fields through which Rothko experimented with different color combinations, alternating harmony and contrast. The painting becomes more "atmospheric", and the thin layers of overlapping color no longer reveal brushstrokes, which were still visible in the "Multiforms".

Until the mid-1950s he used intense yellows and reds. Later, as in the works in the next room, he began using deeper tones such as blues and dark greens. In these paintings the surfaces have no reference to the external world. Instead, the artist explores how light and color can generate an emotional experience for the viewer. According to Rothko «when you turn your back to a painting, you feel its presence as you feel the sun on your back».

EXPLORE THE TWO
ROOMS AND MOVE
CLOSER TO THE
ARTWORK THAT
ATTRACTS YOU
THE MOST.

LOOK AT IT FOR
AS LONG AS POSSIBLE
AND IMMERSE YOURSELF
IN THE COLOR.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN
YOU LOOK AT A ROTHKO
PAINTING FOR A
LONG TIME?

DO YOU START TO SEE THE
PAINTING DIFFERENTLY?

1913

Mark Rothko moves to Portland, Oregon, leaving Dvinsk, his hometown in the Russian Empire

1923

He moves to New York, where he takes various jobs before dedicating himself completely to art

1940

He begins calling himself Mark Rothko, although this name becomes official in his documents only in 1959

1950

First trip to Europe: he visits the Laurentian Library and the frescoes by Fra Angelico in the San Marco Museum in Florence, as well as other cities in Italy, France, and England

1959

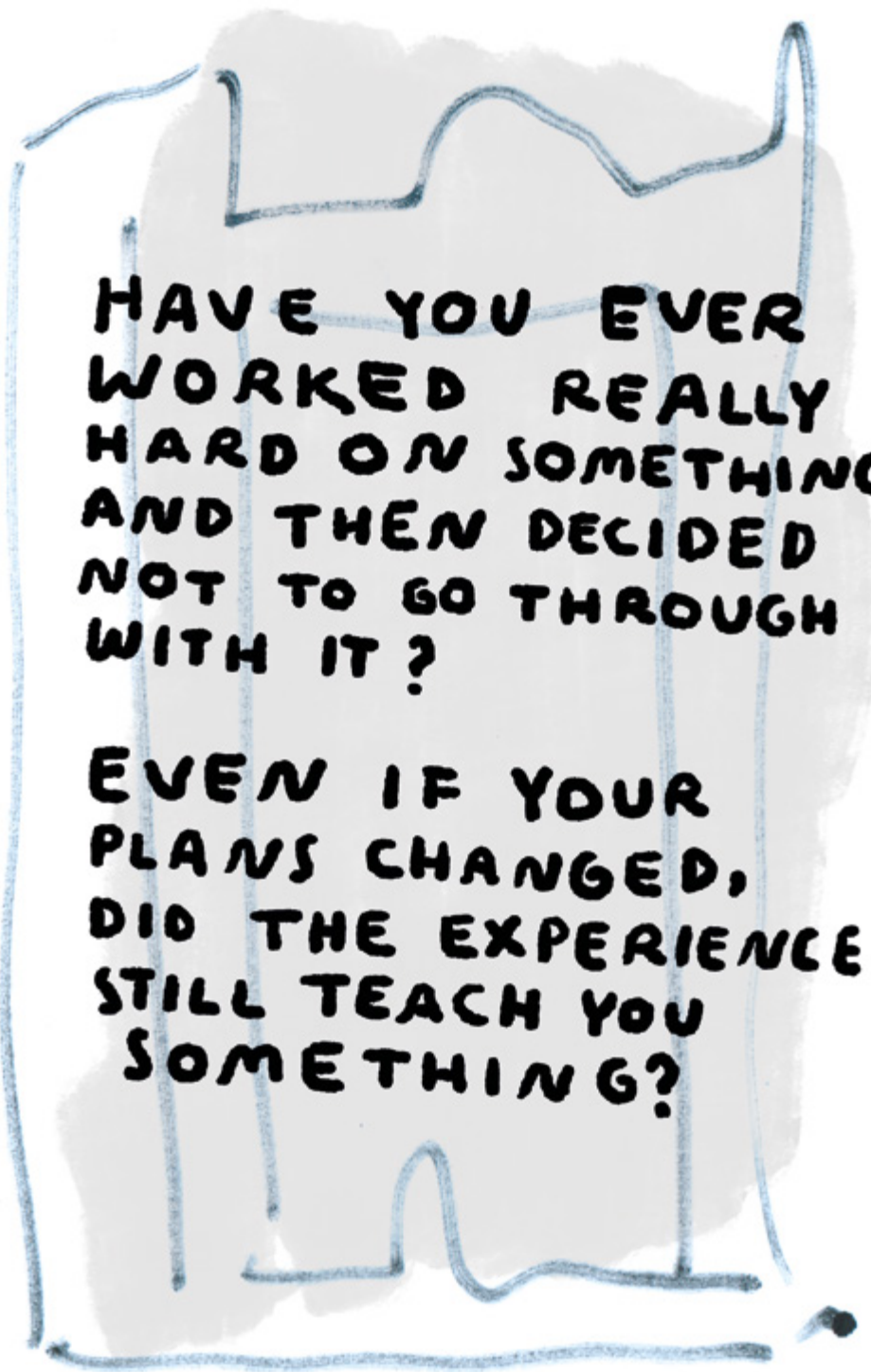
Second trip to Europe: he visits the temples of Paestum, the frescoes of Pompeii, the Sistine Chapel in Rome, Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, and cities such as Amsterdam and Brussels

1966

Third trip to Europe: he returns to Florence, goes to Assisi to see Giotto's frescoes, to Arezzo to see those by Piero della Francesca, and continues his journey to Paris and London

Room 5

In 1958 Rothko was asked to decorate a room in the Four Seasons restaurant inside the Seagram Building, a large steel-and-glass skyscraper in New York. On display here are preparatory sketches made in watercolor, oil, and ink for this project. Rothko accepted the commission and began working on around forty paintings in dark red and brown tones to achieve his greatest dream: creating a space entirely covered with his works. However, the artist never felt completely comfortable making paintings for a luxury restaurant. In fact, he hoped to «paint something that would ruin the appetite of anyone who might eat in that space». During a dinner at the Four Seasons he clearly realized that the environment was not suitable for his art. Against all expectations, he returned the advance payment and abandoned the project.



**HAVE YOU EVER
WORKED REALLY
HARD ON SOMETHING
AND THEN DECIDED
NOT TO GO THROUGH
WITH IT?**

**EVEN IF YOUR
PLANS CHANGED,
DID THE EXPERIENCE
STILL TEACH YOU
SOMETHING?**

Room 7 and 8

While working on the paintings for the Seagram Building, Rothko reflected on the relationships between color fields and experimented with how areas of color could create a space capable of surrounding and involving the viewer. In the works in this room and the next, created between the late 1950s and early 1960s, the artist developed compositions inspired by the volumes and proportions of Florentine architecture that he had observed during his travels. In particular, he was struck by Michelangelo's vestibule of the Laurentian Library because it recreated the feeling of «being trapped in a room where the doors and windows are bricked up and where the only thing left to do is bang your head against the wall for eternity». In this phase the palette becomes darker: he uses brown, black, and deep reds, and the color fields seem to hold the light beneath the surface.

**«MY PAINTINGS
ARE FAÇADES.
SOMETIMES I OPEN A
DOOR OR A WINDOW,
SOMETIMES TWO DOORS
OR TWO WINDOWS»**



FOR ROTHKO PAINTING IS:

BREATH

He never defined himself as an abstract painter; he always considered his art something that "lives and breathes"

SOLITUDE

He always painted alone because of a "need for intimacy" with his work

IMMERSION

He loved painting large canvases in order to place himself "inside his own experience"

CONTEMPLATION

He spent a great deal of time in front of his works not painting them, but contemplating them

SILENCE

He refused to talk about his paintings so as not to influence those who observe them

EXPERIENCE

He did not see the painting as the image of an experience, but as an experience in itself

Room 9 and 10

The final rooms of the exhibition are dedicated to works from the late 1960s, when Rothko introduced several changes to his work. In 1968, due to health problems, doctors suggested that he stop painting. Rather than giving up painting, Rothko decided to change his working surface: instead of the large canvases typical of his "classical" style, he began working on smaller, lighter sheets of paper that were easier to handle. He also experimented with new colors and replaced oil paint with acrylics. In 1969 he returned to working on canvas and created a series of paintings called "Black and Gray", characterized by a recurring composition of three colors: a black rectangle at the top, a gray one below, and a thin white border around the painting, almost like a painted frame. The only variation lies in the proportions between black and gray. These canvases show Rothko's interest in further reduction, as if he were searching for the deepest possible essence.

Someone once said that Rothko's painting is like music that gradually moves from many chords to a single note. Some musicians such as Morton Feldman and Max Richter have composed pieces inspired by his paintings.

**WHAT MUSIC WOULD YOU
ASSOCIATE WITH HIS
PAINTING?
HEAD INTO THE
FINAL ROOM AND
LISTEN WITH
HEADPHONES TO THE
PIECE YOU HAVE CHOSEN!**

TEENAGERS AT PALAZZO STROZZI

Teenagers can visit the exhibition "Rothko in Florence" using the Visit Kit, or they can take part in the project No Grown-Ups: a series of visits organized by teenagers for teenagers, offering a direct experience with art without the mediation of teachers or museum educators.

The projects that Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi dedicates to teenagers are developed in collaboration with students from the Liceo Artistico di Porta Romana (Florence) and Sesto Fiorentino, who participate in the School-Work Training Program (FSL).

Discover all the activities for teenagers at palazzostrozzi.org/en/education/



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The Visit Kit is a project
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Concept and texts:
Martino Margheri and Azzurra Simoncini
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in the School-Work Training Program (FSL) of Fondazione
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