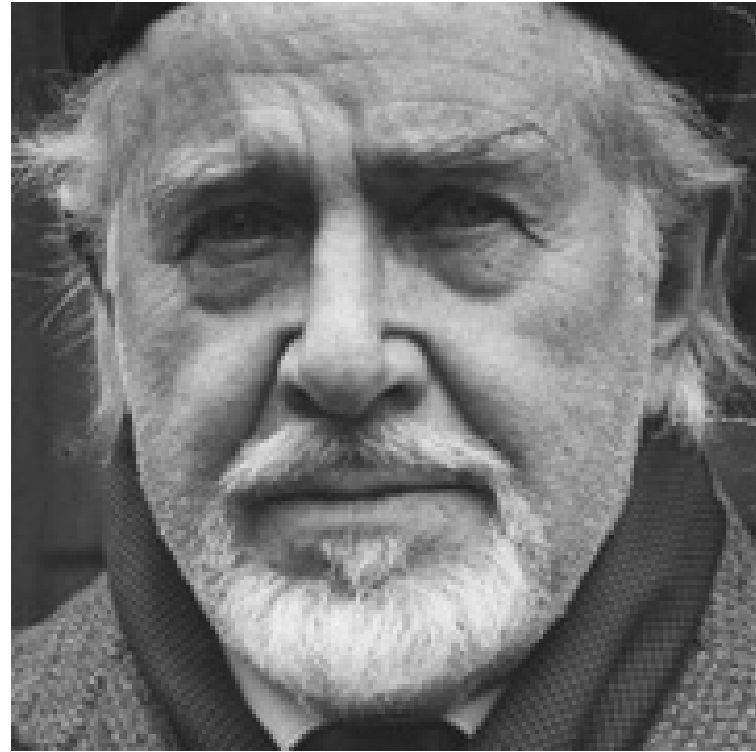


DIANE DE POLIGNAC

**MARK TOBEY**  
**(1890-1976)**

Mark Tobey was an American painter greatly influenced by Asian philosophies and calligraphy. He developed a unique visual language consisting of a whirling mass of calligraphic marks. A pioneer of all-over painting, Tobey had a profound impact on Jackson Pollock's work.



## BIOGRAPHY

### MARK TOBEY'S DISCOVERY OF EASTERN PHILOSOPHIES AND CALLIGRAPHY

Mark Tobey was born in Centerville, Wisconsin, on 11 December 1890. The Tobey family moved to Chicago in 1893. Mark Tobey studied at the Chicago Art Institute from 1906 to 1908. In 1911, Tobey then moved to New York, where he worked for a time as a portrait painter and fashion designer.

The Knoedler Gallery in New York presented Tobey's first exhibition in 1917. The following year, the artist converted to the Bahá'í faith, an Abrahamic and monotheistic religion teaching the spiritual unity of humanity. Tobey's spirituality was inextricably linked to his artistic practice. Writing about Tobey, the painter William Chapin Seitz explained: "Like Kandinsky, Klee, and Mondrian, Tobey sees the highest reality as spiritual rather than physical."

Tobey began teaching at the Cornish School in Seattle, Washington, in 1922. It was around that time that he met the Chinese student Teng Kuei, who taught him calligraphy. The meeting between the two marked a crucial juncture in Tobey's development as an artist. The exhibition *Paintings, Watercolours and Drawings by Mark Tobey* was presented at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1928, followed by a second exhibition at Romany Marie's Café Gallery in New York in the same year.

The American art historian Alfred Hamilton Barr Jr.—also the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York—then invited Tobey to participate in the exhibition *Painting and Sculpture by Living Americans*, which was presented to the public in 1930. The Contemporary Arts Gallery in New York and the Harry Hartman Gallery in Seattle both organised exhibitions for the artist in 1931. Between 1931 and 1937, Tobey was artist-in-residence at Dartington Hall in Devon, United Kingdom, where he met the artists Pearl S. Buck, Aldous Huxley, Bernard Leach, Rabindranath Tagore and Rudi Shankar who, like him, had been strongly influenced by Eastern philosophies.

In 1934, Tobey travelled to Europe and Asia. Spending a month at a monastery near Kyoto, in Japan, Tobey studied Zen painting, meditated and studied calligraphy. It was there that Tobey found the "defining calligraphic impulse" that would lead him to what he termed his "white writing": layers of white paint superimposed over calligraphic writings. This artistic development made Tobey a pioneer of what would become known as all-over painting.

Tobey's first institutional solo exhibition was presented at the Seattle Art Museum in 1934. His works were also exhibited at the Fine Arts Gallery in London and the Paul Elder Gallery in San Francisco.

### THE EMERGENCE OF MARK TOBEY'S WHITE WRITING

Returning to Dartington Hall in 1935, Tobey painted the works *Broadway* and *Welcome Hero*, in which he used "white writing" for the first time. *Broadway* was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1941 at the *Artists for Victory* exhibition.

In 1944, Tobey's work was exhibited for the first time by the Willard Gallery in New York, which would go on to present his work on a regular basis. This was the breakthrough moment for Tobey, who won national recognition during this period. Between 1945 and 1946, four major solo exhibitions of Tobey's work were held at the Portland Art Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Arts Club of Chicago and the Detroit Institute of Arts' Alger House. In 1948, Tobey took part in the Venice Biennale for the first time. He was represented at the Biennale again in 1956, 1958—when he won the International Grand Prize for Painting—and 1964.

A succession of gallery exhibitions followed, as well as a number of solo exhibitions in American museums, including the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Tobey took part in the São Paulo Biennale for the first time in 1951 and was presented there again in 1955.

In 1954, Tobey began work on his *Meditative* series. The Otto Seligman Gallery in Seattle represented Tobey's works on the West Coast, under contract with the artist.

### THE PAINTER MARK TOBEY'S INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Mark Tobey went on to win recognition in Europe, where art exhibitions dedicated to his work were held on a regular basis from 1955 onwards. His first European exhibition was presented by the Galerie Jeanne Bucher in Paris. A retrospective of Tobey's work was also organised at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.

In 1956, Tobey took part in the *American Painting* exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London, exhibiting alongside Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still. In the same year, Tobey became a permanent member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in the United States. Tobey also began work on his *Above the Earth* series at around this time. He received the Guggenheim International Award and the American Institute of Architects' Fine Arts Medal the following year. Tobey painted his *Sumi ink* works in 1957.

In 1958, Tobey took part in the exhibition *50 ans d'art moderne* in Brussels. A touring retrospective exhibition of the artist's work travelled between the Seattle Art

Museum, the Portland Art Museum, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, the Pasadena Art Museum and the M. H. De Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco during the period from 1959 to 1960. Tobey was also featured at *Documenta II* in Kassel in 1959 and then at *Documenta III* in 1964.

In 1960, Tobey was selected to become a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, but he refused the nomination, moving to Switzerland in the same year, where he settled in Basel. A retrospective exhibition of Tobey's work was organised at the Kunsthalle Mannheim in Mannheim, Germany. The following year, Tobey was awarded first prize at the *International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture* at the Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. He also had his first exhibition at the Galerie Beyeler in Basel, where he was subsequently exhibited on a regular basis. A retrospective exhibition of Tobey's work was presented at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1961, then at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Phillips Collection in Washington, the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London and the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

In 1966, a touring retrospective exhibition of the artist's work travelled to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Kunsthalle in Bern, the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hanover and the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen in Düsseldorf.

Tobey was made a Commander of the French Order of Arts and Letters in Paris in 1968 and went on to receive the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Award in 1970. On Tobey's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, the artist was honoured with retrospective exhibitions at the Seattle Art Museum and the Galerie Beyeler in Basel.

The painter Mark Tobey died on 24 April 1976 in Basel. Numerous exhibitions were organised in tributes to his life, including *Mark Tobey 1890 – 1976* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Writing about Tobey, the art critic Michel Ragon noted: "His art, though unassuming, is nonetheless a continual dialogue with the spirit. There are the Tablets of the Law whose indecipherable writing often moves us like messages from another world."

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## SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Basel, Kunstmuseum  
Basel, Fondation Beyeler  
Baltimore, MD, The Baltimore Museum of Art  
Bremen, Kunsthalle  
Brussels, Musée des Beaux-Arts  
Buffalo, NY, Albright-Knox Art Gallery  
Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts  
Chicago, IL, Art Institute  
Cleveland, OH, Cleveland Museum of Art  
Dallas, TX, Dallas Museum of Art  
Davenport, IA, Figge Art Museum  
Detroit, MI, The Detroit Institute of Arts  
Devon, Dartington Hall Trust  
Düsseldorf, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen  
Essen, Museum Folkwang  
Greensburg, PA, Westmoreland Museum of American Art  
Houston, TX, Museum of Fine Arts  
Houston, TX, The Menil Collection  
Indianapolis, IN, Indianapolis Museum of Art  
Lakeland, FL, Polk Museum of Art, Lakeland  
Lisbon, Museu Berardo  
London, Tate Modern  
Los Angeles, CA, Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
Los Angeles, CA, Museum of Contemporary Art  
Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía  
Madrid, Museo de Arte Thyssen-Bornemisza  
Mönchengladbach (Germany), Museum Abteiberg  
New York, NY, The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York, NY, The Museum of Modern Art  
New York, NY, Whitney Museum of American Art  
New York, NY, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation  
Palm Beach, FL, Norton Museum of Art  
Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne – Centre Georges Pompidou  
Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris  
Philadelphia, PA, Philadelphia Museum of Art  
Portland, OR, Portland Art Museum  
Raleigh, NC, North Carolina Museum of Art  
Rome, National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van-Beuningen  
San Francisco, CA, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art  
Seattle, WA, Seattle Art Museum  
Seattle, WA, Frye Art Museum  
Saint Louis, MI, Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum  
Stockholm, Moderna Museet  
Tehran, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art  
Venice, Peggy Guggenheim Collection  
Vienna, MUMOK  
Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art  
Washington, D.C., National Museum of American Art  
Washington, D.C., Smithsonian American Art Museum  
Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution

Washington, D.C., The Phillips Collection, Washington  
Wilmington, NC, Delaware Art Museum  
Winterthur, Kunstmuseum  
Zurich, Kunsthaus

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

M. Knoedler & Co, Inc., New York, 1917, 1960, 1976  
The Arts Club, Chicago, 1928, 1940  
*Paintings and Drawings by Mark Tobey*, Romany Marie's Café Gallery, New York, 1928  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1921, 1930, 1942, 1943, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1955, 1960, 1970, 1976, 1978, 1990, 2007, 2013  
*Drawings and Watercolours by Mark Tobey*, Harry Hartman Bookstore and Gallery, Seattle, 1931  
Seattle Art Museum, 1934, 1940, 1942, 1945, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1963, 1968, 1970, 1978, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2014  
*Paintings and Drawings by Mark Tobey*, Beaux-Arts Gallery, London, 1934  
Art Institute, Chicago, 1940, 1946, 1948, 1951, 1954, 1955, 1959, 1961  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1942, 1944, 1950, 1993  
Willard Gallery, New York, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1957, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974  
Annual group exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, from 1945-1967 ; 1971, 1977, 1990, 2012  
Touring solo exhibition, Portland Art Museum ; San Francisco Museum of Art ; The Arts Club of Chicago ; Alger House, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1945-1946  
Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1945, 1951  
Tate Gallery, London, 1946, 1956, 1964  
Samuel Kootz Gallery, New York, 1948, 1949, 1950  
Venice Biennale, 1948, 1956, 1958, 1964  
Margaret Brown Gallery, Boston, 1949, 1951, 1954, 1956  
Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, 1950, 1951, 1954, 1967  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1950, 1956, 1960  
*Mark Tobey Retrospective*, touring solo exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York ; the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco ; the University of Washington ; the Henry Gallery, Seattle et le Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1951  
São Paulo Biennale, 1951, 1955  
Otto Seligman Gallery, Seattle, 1954, 1957, 1962, 1965  
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, 1955  
Galerie Stadler, Paris, 1955, 1956, 1958  
Galerie Jeanne Bucher, Paris, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1968, 2006, 2007, 2016, 2018  
*Retrospective*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1955, 1995  
*Cinquante ans d'art aux États-Unis*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1955  
*Peintres contemporains américains*, Musée Galliera, Paris, 1957  
*50 ans d'Art Moderne*, touring exhibition, Brussels, 1958  
*Orient - Occident. Rencontres et Influences durant 50 siècles d'Art*, Musée Cernuschi, Paris, 1958

*Mark Tobey. A Retrospective exhibition from Northwest Collections*, Seattle Art Museum ; Portland Art Museum ; Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center ; Pasadena Art Museum ; M.H. De Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, 1959-1960

*Documenta II*, Kassel, 1959, *Documenta III*, 1964

*Tobey Retrospektive*, Kunsthalle Mannheim, 1960-1961

*Art Contemporain*, Galerie Nationale du Grand Palais, Paris, 1963

*International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, Carnegie Institute, Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 1961

Galerie Beyeler, Basel, 1961, 1963, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1976, 1980, 1989, 1990, 1993, 2002

Musée des Arts décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Paris, 1960, 1961

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1961, 1964, 1976, 2009

*Retrospective*, Museum of Modern Art, New York & Phillips Collection, Washington, 1962

*Mark Tobey. Retrospective: Paintings and Drawings 1925-1961*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London ; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1962

*Retrospective*, Cleveland Museum of Art & Art Institute, Chicago, 1962

Göteborgs Konstmuseum (Sweden), 1962

National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1963, 1973, 1984

Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1970

Galerie Alice Pauli, Lausanne, 1965, 1971, 1990, 2005

*Mark Tobey: Works 1933-1966*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam ; Kunsthalle, Bern ; Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover ; Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 1966

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1966, 1968, 1973

*U.S.A. Art Vivant*, Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, 1966

Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, 1967, 1972, 1973

*Retrospective*, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, 1968

*Works of Art of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Collected by Louise and Joseph Pulitzer Jr.*, City Art Museum, St. Louis, 1968

*Betty Parsons' Private Collection*, Finch College Museum of Art, New York, 1968

*L'Espace lyrique - L'action painting, l'abstraction lyrique et leurs environs : le signe, la tâche, le nuage ... des années cinquante à nos jours*, Centre d'Art Contemporain de l'Abbaye de Beaulieu, Ginals-Lexos (France), 1973

*Tribute to Mark Tobey*, Smithsonian Institution, National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington ; Seattle Art Museum ; City Art Museum, St. Louis, 1974-75

*Tobey. Rückblick auf harmonische Weltbilder, Retrospective*, Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 1975

*Paris - New York, 1908-1968*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1977

*Mark Tobey. Graphics*, Museum of Art, Indianapolis, 1979

The Contemporary Art Gallery, Seibu, Tokyo, 1985

*Cinquante ans de dessins américains 1930 - 1980*, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1985

*Mark Tobey. Between worlds. Opere 1935-1975, Retrospective*, Museo d'Arte, Mendrisio (Switzerland) & Museum Folkwang, Essen, 1989

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 1989, 1997

*Mark Tobey. Works on Paper from Northern California and Seattle Collections. Celebrating the centenary of the artist's birth*, Stanford University Museum of Art, Stanford Art Gallery, 1990

*Jahrgang 1890. Mark Tobey*, Kunstmuseum, Basel, 1990

*Die großen Sammlungen - The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Von Cézanne bis Pollock*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 1992

*Les Nymphéas avant et après*, Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, 1992

Fundação Arpad Szenes - Vieira da Silva, Lisbon, 1995

*The Exhibition of Swiss Private Collections*, Hokkaido Museum of Art, Sapporo ; Huis ten Bosch Museum of Art and Municipal Museum of Art, Kyoto ; Mitsukoshi Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1995

Kurt Lidtke Galleries, Seattle, 1998, 1999, 2000

*Die Nähe des Entfernten - Mark Tobey*, curated by H. Hachmeister, Linden-Museum, Stuttgart, 1999

Achim Moeller Fine Art, Berlin, 2000, 2011, 2013

*Master drawings from the Smith College Museum of Art*, The Frick Collection, New York, 2001

National Museum of Art Osaka, Osaka, 2001, 2006

Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles, 2003, 2016

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 2009, 2017

Fondation de l'Hermitage, Lausanne, 2009, 2013

*Monet and Abstraction*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid ; Marmottan Monet Museum, Paris, 2010

*Contemporary Art and Calligraphy - At the Nexus of Painting and Writing*, Seoul Calligraphy Museum. Seoul Arts Center, 2013

*Approaching Infinity*, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento (CA), 2013

*In progress, Works from the MUMOK collection*, MUMOK Vienna, 2013

*Contemplating East Asia : Mark Tobey and Sam Francis*, Ackland Art Museum (NC), 2014

*American painters in Paris*, Galerie Diane de Polignac, Paris, 2015

*Abstract Expressionism*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2016

*Nymphéas. L'abstraction américaine et le dernier Monet*, Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, 2018

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*Fourteen Americans*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1946

*Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1951

*Mark Tobey Retrospective*, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 1951

*Mark Tobey. Retrospective Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1951

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*Mark Tobey*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1955

*Contemporary Calligraphers - John Marin, Mark Tobey, Morris Graves*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1956

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*Mark Tobey. Retrospective*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Paris, 1961

*Tobey*, Konstsalongen Samlaren, Stockholm/Göteborgs Konstmuseum 1962/63

*American Drawings*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1964

*Mark Tobey*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1966

*Mark Tobey. Werke 1933-1966*, Kunsthalle Bern, 1966

*Mark Tobey*, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 1966

*Mark Tobey*, Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover, 1966

*Mark Tobey Retrospective*, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1968

*Tobey's 80. A Retrospective*, Seattle Art Museum, 1970/71

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*Mark Tobey. Prints*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1971

*Mark Tobey. A Decade of Printmaking*, The Cincinnati Art Museum, 1972

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