

Robert Ryman 1961–1964

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537 West 20th Street, New York



Robert Ryman, *Untitled*, c. 1961. © 2023 Robert Ryman/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of early paintings by Robert Ryman (1930–2019) at the gallery's 537 West 20th Street location in New York. Curated by Dieter Schwarz and organized in collaboration with the artist's family, the exhibition will focus on the years 1961–1964. Composed primarily of significant loans from museums and private collections in the United States and Europe, this will be one of the most extensive looks at this formative moment in Ryman's career.

Ryman gained initial recognition for the work he made in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a result, his paintings created prior to this period remain less well known to this day. Yet it was during the early 1960s that Ryman began to firmly establish the broad parameters of his radical and inventive practice. His paintings from these years reflect how, even at this early point, Ryman was already looking to interrogate and reinterpret the fundamental precepts of painting by experimenting with different supports and materials; deconstructing the relationship between frame and wall; and more broadly, investigating the visual, material, and experiential qualities that define the conditions in which a work of art is encountered. It was also at this time that the artist settled on the square as the primary format for his art and began experimenting with scale, a consequence, in part, of his move around 1961 to a studio space that afforded him the ability to work in larger formats.

The exhibition includes representative works of all facets of Ryman's painterly practice during this time, including his use of thick impasto brushstrokes on both stretched and unstretched canvas; heavily or sparsely worked paintings in both small and large formats; and a group of rarely seen works on raw linen, each featuring one or several seemingly complete, independent compositions. This expansive presentation of paintings from a critical moment in Ryman's development will further elucidate many of the fundamental ideas that he would continue to explore throughout his prolific sixty-year career.

Color is a notable throughline in these works, as it in fact was throughout Ryman's career. Several of the paintings feature subtle suggestions of colorful underpainting that leave an outsized effect on the viewing experience, while in other works Ryman's assertive use of green, red, and blue intensifies the visual presence of the various white tones. Many of the paintings were done on untreated canvas, and the beige and brown supports create color contrasts with the paint on their surfaces. A major 1964 painting, which has not been exhibited since the year after its creation, contains a number of square and square-like forms which seem to both protrude from and dissolve into the tan linen support. In the upper register, a solid red square is situated next to a similarly sized gray one, flanked on the other side by a field of white whose borders diffuse into increasingly loose hashes. Beneath these forms lies a self-contained square, surrounded by a strong red border, composed of Ryman's distinctive brushwork from this time: evenly rendered and curled strokes of impasto.

This will be one of the most extensive exhibitions of Ryman's paintings from the early 1960s and the first show in New York to take an in-depth look at this period since his celebrated 1993–1994 retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art, curated by Robert Storr and Nicholas Serota.

This exhibition follows *Robert Ryman: The Last Paintings* in 2022, the gallery's first presentation of works by the artist since announcing representation of the Estate of Robert Ryman in spring 2021. A complementary exhibition exploring Ryman's drawings will be held concurrently at David Zwirner London. In 2024, David Zwirner Books will also publish a major catalogue on Ryman, which will include new scholarship by Schwarz and Lucy Lippard, among others.

Robert Ryman (1930–2019) was born in Nashville, Tennessee. Ryman moved to New York in 1953 to pursue a career as a professional jazz musician. That same year, he took a job as a security guard at The Museum of Modern Art, where he would work for seven years. His time working at the museum in part inspired Ryman to devote his life toward painting.

Ryman had his first solo exhibition at Paul Bianchini Gallery, New York, in 1967, followed by several solo shows at influential galleries in Europe and the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich and Cologne (1968, 1969, 1971, 1972); Galerie Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf (1968, 1969, 1973); Ace Gallery, Los Angeles (1969); Fischbach Gallery, New York (1969, 1970, 1971); Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris (1969); Dwan Gallery, New York (1971); and Lisson Gallery, London (1972).

His first institutional solo exhibition was at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1972. Subsequent solo presentations at museums include those held at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1974); Kunsthalle Basel (1975); P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York (1977); Halle für Internationale neue Kunst, Zürich (1978, 1979, 1980); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (1986); Art Institute of Chicago (traveled to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; 1987–1988); Tate Gallery, London (traveled to Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; 1993–1994); Haus der Kunst, Munich (traveled to Kunstmuseum Bonn; 2000–2001); Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, Sakura, Japan (2004); Dallas Museum of Art (2005–2006); The Menil Collection, Houston (2007–2008); and The

Phillips Collection, Washington, DC (2010). In 2015–2016, Dia: Chelsea, New York, presented a retrospective spanning six decades of Ryman's career, featuring works from the 1950s through the 2000s. The exhibition traveled to Museo Jumex, Mexico City, in 2017.

Ryman's work can be found in prominent institutional collections worldwide, including the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Art Institute of Chicago; Baltimore Museum of Art; Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, the Netherlands; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, New York; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Dallas Museum of Art; Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; Dia Art Foundation, New York; Fundació "la Caixa," Barcelona; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Ho-Am Art Museum, Seoul; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, Sakura, Japan; Kunsthaus Zürich; Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; The Menil Collection, Houston; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; Philadelphia Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Seattle Art Museum; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, United Kingdom; Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

For all press inquiries, contact
Julia Lukacher jlukacher@davidzwirner.com
Erin Pinover epinover@davidzwirner.com