



Mark Rothko: Toward the Light in the Chapel (Jewish Lives)

Annie Cohen-Solal

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Mark Rothko, one of the greatest painters of the twentieth century, was born in the Jewish Pale of Settlement in 1903. He immigrated to the United States at age ten, taking with him his Talmudic education and his memories of pogroms and persecutions in Russia. His integration into American society began with a series of painful experiences, especially as a student at Yale, where he felt marginalized for his origins and ultimately left the school. The decision to become an artist led him to a new phase in his life. Early in his career, Annie Cohen-Solal writes, “he became a major player in the social struggle of American artists, and his own metamorphosis benefited from the unique transformation of the U.S. art world during this time.” Within a few decades, he had forged his definitive artistic signature, and most critics hailed him as a pioneer. The numerous museum shows that followed in major U.S. and European institutions ensured his celebrity. But this was not enough for Rothko, who continued to innovate. Ever faithful to his habit of confronting the establishment, he devoted the last decade of his life to cultivating his new conception of *art as an experience*, thanks to the commission of a radical project, the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas.

Cohen-Solal’s fascinating biography, based on considerable archival research, tells the unlikely story of how a young immigrant from Dvinsk became a crucial transforming agent of the art world—one whose legacy prevails to this day.

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