

Detail of *Untitled (East)*

# COARSE REFINEMENT: THE COLLAGES OF HENRY ROTHMAN, PROVINCETOWN AND NEW YORK

June 2–July 23 2023

Curated by Samuel Tager and Paul Resika



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# HENRY ROTHMAN



Detail from *Opening Night* (Private collection)

## FROM THE CURATORS

Rothman was the best, the best collage artist I ever knew. Boghosian was the best for ideas, but Rothman was the best for aesthetics.

—Exhibition co-curator, Paul Resika

Henry Rothman was a mythical figure to me.

The grandfather of a close childhood friend, Rothman occupied the center of a community of artists in Provincetown who largely defined for me what it was to be an artist. Living humbly, enjoying the beach and tides, dining with family and his many friends, playing poker, going back and forth to New York, and working.

Among the many great gifts bestowed upon those of us who spent our childhood summers in Provincetown's East End was an appreciation for, or at the very least an indoctrination into, the world of abstract art. Abstract expressionism had eclipsed most other forms of mid-20th century modernism by the time that Rothman and I became near neighbors during the 1970s.

The first time I actually remember seeing one of Rothman's collages, it was precisely what I had expected: refined, even if conjured of coarse elements, purely abstract, and assembled in a manner that reflected a series of choices that made it impossible to imagine having been composed in any other way.

There is certain sensibility, common to the best work of the abstract expressionist, that is well beyond my ability to describe. We do know



Henry Rothman and friends at Robert Motherwell's Sea Barn, date unknown

that in most cases this was achieved only after decades of dedicated hard work. Rothman's collages should be considered among the the most sophisticated work of the period. During a time when many important artists routinely showed their work in Provincetown, it was not uncommon to enter a large group exhibition at the Art Association (PAAM) and be immediately drawn to a small collage by Henry Rothman that just somehow said it best—whatever that was—most simply, directly, and beautifully.

*—Exhibition co-curator, Samuel Tager*

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:**

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Margaret McLeish  
And Toby Mostel

# HENRY ROTHMAN



Detail from *Untitled (Red T)* (Private collection, courtesy of Lori Bookstein Projects, New York)

## ARTWORK LIST

*Untitled (Blue)*, c. 1978

Paper collage, 10.5" x 8.5"

Private collection (Courtesy of Lori Bookstein Projects, New York)

*Guidi*, 1986

Paper collage, 5" x 4"

Private collection

*Door*, 1986

Paper collage, 5.25" x 7.25"

Collection of Christine Rothman

*i*, n.d.

Paper collage, 3.75" x 5.75"

Collection of Christine Rothman

*Provincetown Flats for Chris*, c. 1984

Paper collage, 4.5" x 6.75"

Collection of Christine Rothman

*Untitled (CR)*, c. 1978

Paper collage, 4.75" x 3.25"

Collection of Christine Rothman

*Untitled (Prussian Blue)*, n.d.

Paper collage, 10" x 7"

Collection of Christine Rothman

*Untitled (N)*, c. 1974-79

Paper collage, 7.25" x 10"

Collection of Melanie and Josh Clark (Courtesy of Lori Bookstein Projects, New York)

*Opening Night*, 1964

Paper collage, 5.875" x 8.25"

Private collection

*Untitled (Wedding Gift)*, 1983

Paper collage, 5" x 6.75"

Private collection

*Untitled (Grid)*, n.d.

Paper collage, 6" x 8.75"

Collection of Kristin Gamble Flood

*Untitled (Crescent)*, c. 1968

Paper collage, 2.5" x 3.75"

Collection of Laure Stevens

*Untitled (RT)*, 1972

Paper collage, 5.375" x 7.375"

Collection of Lori Bookstein (Courtesy of Lori Bookstein Projects, New York)

*Homage to Schwitters*, c. 1970s

Paper collage, 9" x 6.5"

Collection of David Rothman

*Orange Moonrise*, c. 1971-72

Paper collage, 4.5" x 6.25"

Collection of Christine Rothman

*Provincetown Tide*, c. 1978

Paper collage, 5" x 7"

Collection of Christine Rothman

*Red, Black & Yellow*, 1963

Paper collage, 3.5" x 5.875"

Collection of David Rothman

*Untitled (Arrow)*, c. 1983

Paper collage, 3.5" x 6.25"

Collection of Christine Rothman

*Untitled (Blue with Red)*, 1962

Paper collage, 6" x 4.25"

Collection of David Rothman

*Untitled (Homage to "Big O")*, c. 1970s

Paper collage, 9.75" x 6.5"

Collection of Frederic Bloch

*Untitled (Ouest)*, c. 1976

Paper collage, 9" x 6.5"

Private collection (Courtesy of Lori Bookstein Projects, New York)

*Untitled (Red T)*, c. 1974-79

Paper collage, 7.25" x 10.5"

Private collection (Courtesy of Lori Bookstein Projects, New York)

*Untitled (S)*, c. 1978

Paper collage, 4.5" x 6"

Collection of Susannah Phillips

*Untitled (East)*, c. 1969

Paper collage, 7" x 4.75"

PAAM Permanent Collection, Gift of Barbara Salander, 2008

*Untitled (A Cura)*, c. 1971-72

Paper collage, 6.25" x 9.5"

Collection of Blair and Paul Resika

*Untitled (Africa)*, c. 1971

Paper collage, 7.5" x 6.25"

Collection of Blair and Paul Resika (Courtesy of Lori Bookstein Projects, New York)

*Untitled (Composition)*, c. 1949

Paper collage, 2.625" x 3.875"

Collection of Blair and Paul Resika

*Untitled (A)*, 1978

Paper collage, 4.25" x 4.25"

Collection of Raphael Sbarge

*Untitled (Turquoise O)*, 1977

Paper collage, 9.5" x 4.375"

Collection of Raphael Sbarge

*Small O*, n.d.

Paper collage, 4.25" x 8.5"

Private collection

*Untitled (For Emily Paley)*, 1974

Paper collage, 7.25" x 5.25"

Collection of Tobias Mostel

*Untitled (Subterranean)*, 1962

Paper collage, 7.75" x 4.75"

Collection of Tobias Mostel

*Untitled (DEA)*, n.d.

Paper collage, 9.75" x 6.25"

Private collection

# HENRY ROTHMAN

## THE ARTIST

Born in 1910 in New York City to Eastern and Central European Jewish immigrants, Henry Rothman studied Journalism at New York University. Drawn to the Bauhaus and Cubist movements, he left NYC to study at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

In 1949, Rothman traveled with his friend Joseph De Martini (1896–1984) to Provincetown to study with Hans Hofmann. The summer of 1949 would set in motion nearly 40 summer spent in Provincetown, where Rothman eventually settled with his family into the pale, yellow-painted Nonie Bell at 585 Commercial Street, a former fishing shack.

In the fifties, Rothman's artistic practice turned to collage. Using found weathered, layered old posters and demonstrating an affinity for torn, aged, blistered advertisements, he would apply these decayed scraps to create his pictures. On his annual trips to Europe, Rothman would always leave enough room in one of his suitcases to fill with old billboard advertisement papers and ephemera he'd happen upon during his travels.

Rothman opened a frame shop in New York City's flower market district in an old five-story Beaux Arts building. There, he also became an early loft dweller, living on the top floor of the building. Brothers Henry and Herbie Kallem had studios on the same block with Joe De Martini around the corner on 27th Street. Zero Hostel and Remo Farruggio also had their painting studios on the same block of 28th Street. They all congregated at Rothman's Frame Shop, which emerged as a salon of sorts. Many contemporary Provincetown artists befriended Rothman, such as Varujan Boghosian, Arthur Cohen, Mervin Jules, Leo Manso, and Robert Motherwell.



In Provincetown, Rothman could either be found inside at his collage table with opera or classical music playing or on the waterfront hosting his friends and fellow artists who held the Nonnie Bell as an extension of 28th Street.

Henry Rothman's works are in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, National Gallery of Canada, Arkansas Arts Center, Provincetown Art Association and Museum, and the International Museum of Collage, Assemblage and Construction. In years past, his collages were shown the Long Point Gallery, Provincetown Art Association, and posthumously at Bookstein Projects in New York City.

Rothman's abstract collages occupy their own territory.

The different ways Rothman utilizes printed letters distinguishes his collages from others [...] Rothman uses letters and portions of them to initiate a dance between two mutually exclusive perceptions; legibility and incomprehension. Our attention moves back and forth, from the readable, to the deducible, to the unreadable. Along the way we become aware of particular shapes separated from the familiar role as letters or numbers. By shifting our attention between reading and seeing, Rothman slows down our looking, as well as invites us to self-reflect.

–John Yau



Detail from *Untitled (Homage to "Big O")* (Collection of Frederic Bloch)