

Artist Resources – Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)



Twombly in Rome studio, 1962
Photograph: Mario Dondero

[Cy Twombly Foundation](#)

[Twombly at Gagosian Gallery](#)

[Twombly at the Tate](#)

[Vogue's in-depth profile](#), originally published in 1994, gives insight into Twombly's enigmatic personality, which was captured through only a handful of interviews. The author visited Twombly in Italy, traveling between his homes in Rome and Gaeta as the artist prepared his [Four Seasons series](#) for an upcoming exhibition. "At a certain point I was ready to throw in the brush. But I got crazy in a good way here," Twombly reflected about the series.

In 1994 MoMA hosted [the most comprehensive exhibition of Twombly's work in the United States](#), filling the third-floor galleries with 100 paintings, sculptures, and works on paper including key and lesser-known works never before seen together, tracing his development beginning in 1946 through his most recent work completed just before the exhibition opened.

The Menil Collection in Houston opened [The Cy Twombly Gallery](#) in collaboration with the artist in 1995. Twombly designed the building with architect Renzo Piano and had final say on [the selection of works](#), which now range from 1953 to 2004 to provide a concise retrospective outline.

"I'm not too sensitive to colour, not really. I don't use it with any nuance that I know of. The form of the thing is more interesting to me than colour. I take the colour as primary - like, if it's the woods, it's green; if it's blood, it's red; if it's earth, it's brown," Twombly explained in [conversations](#) with curator Nicholas Serota as the duo prepared for the Tate Modern's [2008 exhibition](#). Bringing together key works and series, the show surveyed Twombly's career from the 1950s through present day. Serota also discussed Twombly and the exhibition during a gallery installation in [Tate Shots](#).

[The Guardian](#) traced Twombly's career and travels in a commemorative profile following his death in 2011.

American photographer Sally Mann, close friend and mentee of Twombly's, [captured the remnants of his Lexington VA studio](#) for a [memorial exhibition](#) at the Gagosian Gallery, and a [book of photographs](#) in 2016. Taken from 1999 through 2015, Mann's images move through Twombly's cluttered and paint-splattered workspace, becoming material memories of creativity and artistic drive.

Twombly's seminal [Fifty Days at Iliam](#) series (1977-78), which retells the narrative of Homer's *The Iliad* in ten abstract canvases, maintains a permanent home at The Philadelphia Museum of Art. [In 2017, the museum also showcased](#) the full cycle with six sculptural parallels produced in the late 1970s.

Gagosian Gallery in London presented an exhibition of [Twombly's sculptures in 2019](#), celebrating the release of volume two of his [catalogue raisonné](#). Twombly began experimenting with sculpture in the 1940s, creating assemblages of plaster, wood, iron, and found materials in his studio, which he frequently painted white – a nod to the marble sculptures of antiquity.



Twombly, 2005
Photograph: Michael Stravato



Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Ferragosto I, 1961

Oil paint, wax crayon, and lead pencil on canvas

Private Collection; L2023:1.2

Cy Twombly studied at the Art Students League of New York and Black Mountain College in the early 1950s, when he became close friends with the artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008). In 1952, Twombly and Rauschenberg traveled to North Africa, Spain, France, and Italy together – a trip that proved pivotal to both artists' careers. Twombly was particularly fascinated by graffiti in the ancient city of Pompeii, which spoke to his interest in painting with scrawled, glyphic marks. With his ongoing love of classical art, literature, and history, the artist decided to move permanently to Rome in 1957. **Ferragosto I** is part of a series inspired by Ferragosto, the Italian public holiday that began with emperor Augustus in 18 BCE to celebrate the end of the harvest season. As Twombly once said: "The past is a springboard for me.... Ancient things are new things. Everything lives in the moment; that is the only time it can live, but its influence can go on forever."

On view May 10 – August 13, 2023

Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Untitled (Souvenir of D'Arros), D'Arros, Seychelles, 1990

Acrylic on handmade paper

Private Collection; L2023:26.1

Cy Twombly began his career in post-World War II art circles in the United States, but lived and worked in Rome for most of his life. His interest in classical art and literature led to many trips throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia, including one to D'Arros Island in 1990. The small island, part of the nation of Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, inspired a series of untitled drawings and small paintings. **Untitled (Souvenir of D'Arros), D'Arros, Seychelles** is one example from this series. The bright, abstract bouquet features active brushstrokes and flung paint, part of Twombly's late-career interest in flowers as symbols of both life and death.

On view April 26 – July 30, 2023





Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Untitled, 2006

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2022:117.2

“Graffiti is linear and it’s done with a pencil, and it’s like writing on walls. But in my paintings it’s more lyrical.” American painter Cy Twombly is known for his scribbled, childlike marks that defy interpretation. The artist first became interested in graffiti in 1952, when he traveled to North Africa, Spain, Italy, and France with Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) and was inspired by ancient scrawls on historic monuments. The fluid loops of **Untitled** return to this theme towards the end of Twombly’s life. The stark juxtaposition of white strokes on a gray background also evokes the famous “blackboard paintings” that defined Twombly’s earlier oeuvre. As one of his last large-scale paintings, **Untitled** thus offers a reflection across the prolific artist’s career.

On view March 15 – June 18, 2023

Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Untitled (Rome), 1959-1961

Graphite, colored crayons, ball-point pen and oil on paper

Private Collection; L2022:126.1

“I sit for two or three hours and then in 15 minutes I can do a painting, but that’s part of it. You have to get ready and decide to jump up and do it; you build yourself up psychologically, and so painting has no time for brush.” Born in Virginia, Cy Twombly served as a U.S. Army cryptologist in the 1950s while maintaining his artistic practice. In 1957, Twombly moved permanently to Italy and worked between an apartment in Rome, a 17th century villa in Bassano in Teverina, and later, a studio in Gaeta. The Italian setting inspired the artist, allowing him to explore his interests in classical art and literature through his scribbled, childlike style.

On view January 25 – April 30, 2023





Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)
24 Short Pieces, 1973
House paint, crayon, pencil on paper, 25 sheets

Private Collection; L2022:35.3

On view September 21, 2022 – January 1, 2023

Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Sahara, 1960

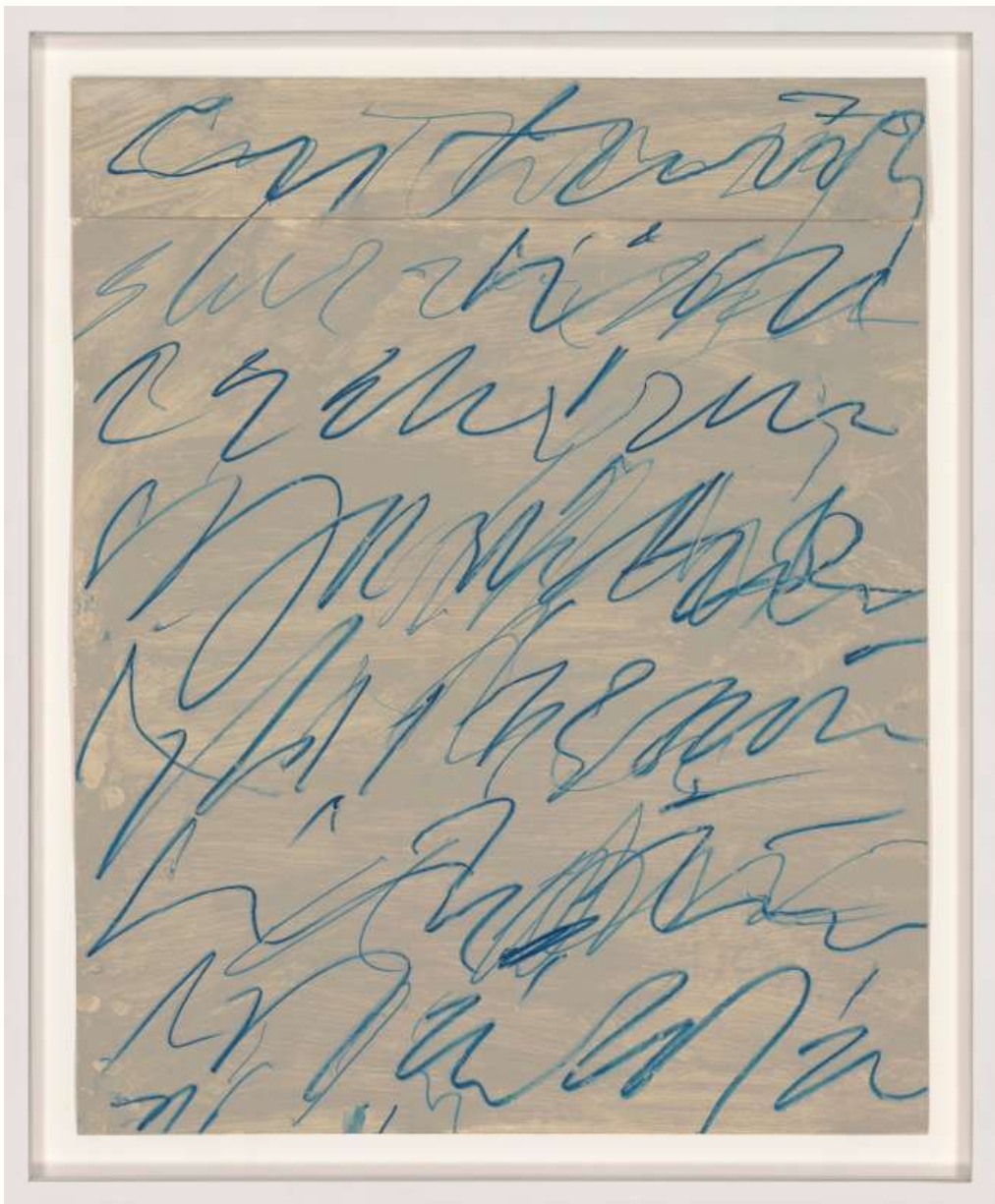
Oil, crayon, pencil on canvas

Private Collection; L2022:13.1

“My line is childlike, but not childish. It is very difficult to fake.” Cy Twombly is best known for his scribbled, graffiti-like paintings that defy clear interpretation. The artist began his career in post-World War II art circles in the United States, but moved to Rome in the late 1950s to explore his interests in classical art and literature. In 1960, Twombly embarked on a one-month trip to the Sahara Desert. **Sahara** evokes the artist’s experience in Africa through his characteristic doodles, symbols, and scrawled, illegible script. The only readable word is the painting’s title, “Sahara,” found off-center at the top of the canvas.

On view July 20 – October 23, 2022





Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Untitled, 1970

Oil paint, wax crayon on paper

Private Collection; L2022:48.1

Drafted into the U.S. Army as a cryptologist in the 1950s, painter Cy Twombly was interested in coded writing and its history in Paleolithic art. **Untitled** features the artist's characteristic scribbled notations that do not form legible words. Twombly produced many similar works between 1966 and 1971, often termed "blackboard paintings." However, this example evokes the crayon doodles of a child learning to write on paper. The repetitive, looped marks and lines seem to position Twombly as a student rather than as a trained artist. Though he rarely gave interviews, Twombly once said: "It's instinctive in a certain kind of painting... It's like a nervous system. It's not described, it's happening. The feeling is going on with the task. The line is the feeling, from a soft thing, a dreamy thing, to something hard, something arid, something lonely, something ending, something beginning."

On view June 8 – September 11, 2022

Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Duino, 1967

Oil-based house paint and wax crayon on canvas

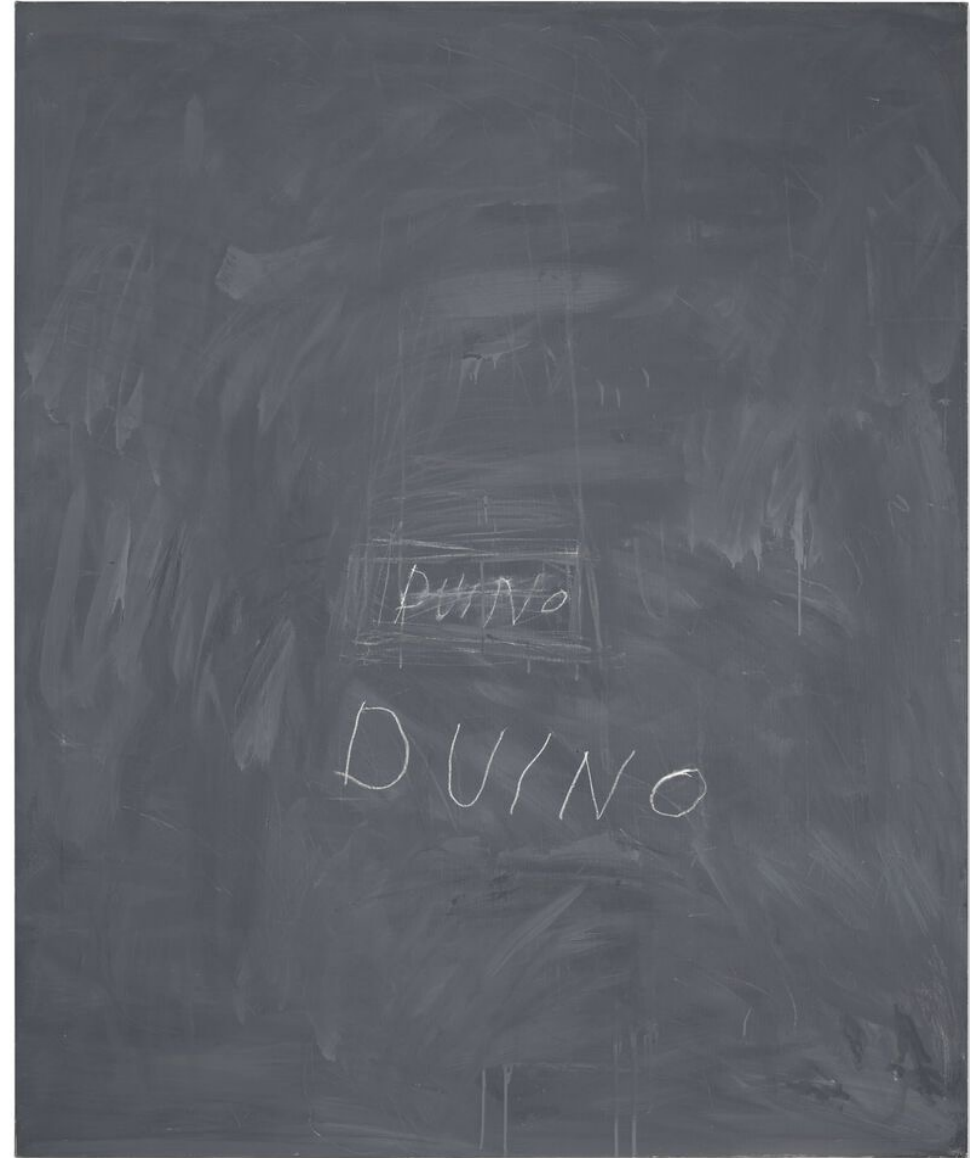
Private Collection; L2021:167.1

Cy Twombly's numerous "blackboard paintings" often feature chaotic, scrawling, glyphic marks that defy logical interpretation. **Duino**, on the other hand, reflects the artist's interest in language by aligning with the more conceptual and minimalist trends of the 1960s. The painting is a tribute to the Duino Elegies, a series of poems by Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) about the intersection of existential suffering and beauty. Twombly shared Rilke's interest in words as a method of communicating an experience of the world and frequently read the poet's work while studying at Black Mountain College in the 1950s. The semi-erased trace of the word "Duino" in the center of the canvas indicates a hesitation, which is followed by a commitment to the idea in larger block letters below.

From the Elegies:

"For our part, when we feel, we evaporate; ah, we breathe ourselves out and away; with each new heartfire we give off a fainter scent. True, someone may tell us: you're in my blood, this room, Spring itself is filled with you... To what end? They can't hold us, we vanish within them and around them."

On view March 30 – July 3, 2022





Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Panorama (New York City), 1955

Oil based house paint, wax crayon on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:83.1

Born in Lexington, Virginia, Cy Twombly worked alongside artists Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) and Jasper Johns (b. 1930) in 1950s New York. In 1955 Twombly was teaching at the Southern Seminary and Junior College (now Southern Virginia University), but traveled to New York in the summer to work in his Williams Street studio, where he painted **Panorama (New York City)**. One of Twombly's most famous paintings, it was first shown at Stable Gallery in 1956 and is widely regarded as a pivotal work in Twombly's six-decade career. The massive, eleven-foot canvas features the scattered chalk-like lines that reappear in later paintings, such as *Untitled (New York City)*, which is also on display in this gallery. The mysterious marks seem almost legible, but they still defy interpretation.

On view August 11 – December 12, 2021

Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Untitled (New York City), 1967

Oil based house paint, wax crayon on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:83.2

Cy Twombly is known for his paintings that feature scrawling, glyphic marks. Drafted into the U.S. Army as a cryptologist in the 1950s, Twombly was interested in coded writing and its history in Paleolithic art. **Untitled (New York City)** is one of the artist's "blackboard" paintings, which evoke scribbled notations but do not form actual words. Twombly produced many similar works between 1966 and 1971, seemingly inspired by child-like doodling and rote learning in the classroom. The repetitive blocks and lines seem to position Twombly as a student standing at the blackboard learning to "write," rather than as a trained artist. Though he rarely gave interviews, Twombly once said: "It's more like I'm having an experience than making a picture."

On view August 11 – December 12, 2021





Cy Twombly (American, 1928-2011)

Donna Fugata, Bassano in Teverina, 1987

Oil stick, lead pencil on wooden panel

Private Collection; L2020:88.4

Merging antiquity with the contemporary, painterly romanticism with the raw energy of graffiti, Cy Twombly occupied a pivotal role in postwar American art. After graduating from the Art Students League and Black Mountain College, Twombly turned away from the conceptual craftsmanship of friends and contemporaries such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, favoring the gestural declarations of Abstract Expressionism. After his permanent move to Italy in 1957, Twombly developed a more lyrical style inspired by the ancient landscape and classical literature. **Donna Fugata, Bassano in Teverina** plays with the duality of two reference points: *donna fugata*, which loosely translates to “woman who fled” or “fugitive woman,” and is the namesake of a 14th century castle in Sicily; and Bassano in Teverina, a 14th century Vatican municipality north of Rome where Twombly lived part time. The range of gesture matches the range of materials and colors, producing an image that hesitates between the tangible and intangible, with shapes and associations suggesting themselves before dissolving back into the composition.

On view September 30, 2020 – January 3, 2021