



MARK TOBEY

(Centerville 1890–1976 Basel)

Composition. 1957.

Sumi ink on paper.

Signed and dated lower right: Tobey 57.

59 x 87 cm.

Provenance: - Galerie Beyeler, Basel (verso with the label). - Purchased from the above, private collection Switzerland. - By descent to the present owner, since then private collection Switzerland. Exhibitions: Mannheim 1960/61, Mark Tobey. Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, December - February, cat. no. 35 (verso with the label). Mark Tobey, a major pioneer of Abstract Expressionism, is one of the most respected American artists of the 20th century. His works are the result of an almost lyrical combination of Western

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and Eastern culture – from Chinese scroll paintings to European Cubism. With his conversion to the Bahai faith in 1918, the meditative calligraphic exercises and the pictorial worlds of the Far East were already influencing his compositions. Through a Chinese student, from 1923 onwards Tobey became acquainted with the secrets of East Asian painting and Far Eastern spirituality, which informed his cast of mind and his artistic work, as did his numerous journeys to Europe and Asia. The "decisive calligraphic impulse" however, which led him to the "white script" and opened up completely new dimensions for his work, was not felt by Tobey until his journey to Asia in 1934. The artist spent an entire month in the hermetic world of a Zen monastery in Japan, became fully engaged in Zen Buddhism and Zen painting, which centres on meditation, and delved further into Far Eastern calligraphy. The present two works were created in an intermediate period in 1957, the so-called year of the Sumi ink drawings. In addition to the broad calligraphy, the two works feature decidedly three-dimensional, contrasting layers of light and dark, which occupy the entire surface. With a vehemence and a hitherto unattained and liberating spontaneity, Tobey leads the gesture into the pictorial space, unconsciously following his own intuition. What appears to be a product of chance is the result of a meditatively energetic process. "Offhand, I really don't know how I began this period - it happened one day, a suggestion of a brown-black painting which I felt could be carried on in blacks. How long I had this Sumi paintings in cold storage or had the delayed-unrealized desire to paint them I don't know. It was a kind of fever, like the earth in spring or a hurricane. [...] I could say I painted the Sumis to experience a heightened sense of living." Mark Tobey

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