Stop 902
Mark Rothko
Untitled (Painting)
1953-54

NARRATOR: This monumental canvas by Mark Rothko fills our field of vision with color and light. Rectangles of rich, warm orange and yellow seem to float in front of the picture plane, while also creating an enveloping sense of depth that draws us in.

Rothko's version of Abstract Expressionism is quite different from the gestural approach of other artists of his generation. Instead of the active brushwork you see in many other works in these galleries, Rothko's painting explores the relationship between color and form in a different way. As you study these soft fields of color, you can see the way the pigment is interacting with the raw canvas beneath. It was Rothko's intention to encourage an emotional, even spiritual response to his work. As he once wrote:

"I realize that historically the function of painting large pictures is painting something very grandiose and pompous. The reason I paint them, however . . . is precisely because I want to be very intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience, to look upon an experience as a stereopticon view or with a reducing glass. However you paint the larger picture, you are in it. It isn't something you command!"

Now look for Rothko's Untitled Purple, White and Red painting. When you're ready to hear about it, press play.