

Red: Ming Dynasty/Mark Rothko

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Created more than five centuries apart, an imperial Chinese porcelain dish and a painting by Mark Rothko—unexpectedly brought together in visual dialogue—reveal the immensity of the color red. The richly layered tonalities of both the porcelain dish and the oil and acrylic painting were achieved in dramatically different ways, but they uncannily echo each other.

Chinese monochrome porcelains are among the greatest achievements in ceramics, and no color is more coveted than the luscious copper-red glaze perfected during the Xuande (1426–35) reign. As seen in this dish, made around 1430, the potters masterfully controlled copper—the most difficult of all glaze colorants—to achieve the color and velvety texture of crushed raspberries. In 1959, Rothko (1903–1970) layered red pigments in daring ways, achieving depth and variations that make his flat canvas seem palpable. In both works, the unstable, subtly shifting hues touch our imagination, reminding us that color not only results from materials and processes but also transcends time and place.

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Dish with copper-red glaze, and a Xuande mark in cobalt oxide on the base
China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen
Ming dynasty, Xuande reign (1426-1435)
Porcelain with copper-red glaze
H x Diam; 4.6 × 22 cm (1 13/16 × 8 11/16 in)
Purchase— Charles Lang Freer Endowment and Friends of the Freer and Sackler Galleries
Freer Gallery of Art, F2015.2a-b



Untitled - Seagram Mural sketch
Painting
Artist: Mark Rothko
1959
Oil and acrylic on canvas
H x W: 182.8 × 152.6 cm (71 15/16 × 60 1/16 in)
Gift of the Mark Rothko Foundation, Inc.
National Gallery of Art

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