

THE ART OF BEER **Multiforms and Barleywines**

By **DON TSE**

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Another summer is gone. As the temperatures cool and the sunlight hours shorten, the only way to lift the spirits is to go down into the beer cellar (which is ironically cool and dark) and bring up some lovingly matured barleywines. These beers have a unique ability, through their rich malty flavors, to warm both the palate and the heart.

And whenever I drink them, I think of Mark Rothko's paintings known as the Seagram murals. Nine of these murals are showcased in London's Tate Modern art gallery and the remainder are on display at Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art in Japan and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. A small number also ended up in the private collections of the Rothko family.

The works were originally commissioned in 1958 for the Four Seasons restaurant in the Seagram Building on New York's Park Avenue. While dining in the restaurant, Rothko was taken aback by the pretentiousness of the restaurant, returned his fee and kept the paintings, which would later be scattered throughout the world, despite having originally been intended as one collective work.

If you've been in any modern art gallery in any major city in the world, you will have seen Rothko's work. The American painter, born as Marcus Rothkowitz in 1903 in Dvinsk, Russia, is one of the most famous modern artists and is probably the best known artist of the abstract expressionism movement. He spent most of his life in New York and is well-connected to art movements in that city, but also spent a significant part of his life in Oregon and California.

Rothko covered huge canvasses in color. These canvasses could stretch as much as 12 feet in length and nine feet in height and, after being covered in one color, would contain between two and five large, somewhat rectangular shapes of other colors. For this reason, Rothko's works are often described as "multiforms" and although they are rather simple shapes of color, Rothko himself was quite insistent that his work was not about color. Instead, Rothko intended his works, despite their outward simplicity, to stir emotions from within the viewer.

Nowhere in the world can Rothko's work be better understood than in the specially-built Rothko room at London's Tate Modern. Here, the deep colors of the Seagram murals stir the spirit despite their darkness and

calmness. And whenever I drink a good barleywine, I am often brought to remember the paintings in the Rothko room.

The barleywines have a similar deep richness to their flavors as the colors do to the Seagram paintings. The plums and prunes match the maroons and burgundies while the molasses and the treacle match the browns and the grays. Even the colors of barley wines themselves can be found in the Seagram paintings.

And despite the calm warming feeling one gets from a beer of this style, good barleywines can also cause an emotional flutter when complex flavors as diverse as prunes, wafer cookies and gingerbread dance atop the solid malt platform. My favorite of the style is Thomas Hardy, now brewed by O'Hanlon's Brewery. Very full-bodied, the beer sends flavorful bursts throughout the mouth. Decidedly malty with a strong molasses flavor and hints of fruit and cookies, the balance comes in part from a light acidity.

But if you're insistent that you must celebrate the works of an American painter with the beers of an American brewer, try Rogue's XS Old Crustacean Barleywine. The rich malt flavors of this beer move away from molasses and more toward treacle and its large-format bottle is perfect for sharing.