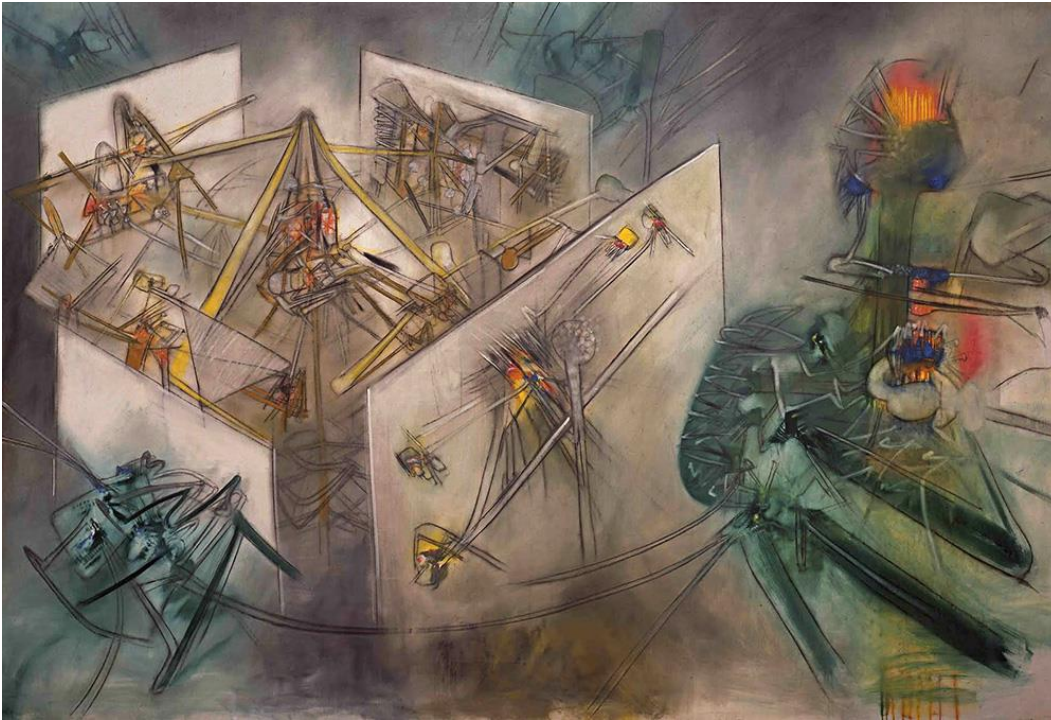




THE ART NEWSPAPER RUSSIA



Exhibitions. Russia

Saint Petersburg, Russia

Space Odyssey of Surrealist Roberto Matta

The State Hermitage features a retrospective of the famous visionary – first time in Russia

The State Hermitage. Roberto Matta and the Fourth Dimension. April 10 – June 30

The State Hermitage received 94 works by Roberto Matta (1911 – 2002) for the exhibition from 24 private collections and two foundations across Great Britain, Israel, Mexico, the US, France and Switzerland. This is the first time that the works of Matta—a mystic and Surrealist, Chilean by birth but French by passport—have been shown in Russia.

Matta insisted that he was born on November 11, 1911 (11/11/11); according to a different version, his birth happened one year later. Having received a degree in architecture in Santiago, Chile, Matta left for Paris where he worked for Le Corbusier. He met Pablo Neruda in France and Salvador Dali and Federico Garcia Lorca in Spain, and they recommended him to Andre Breton, the ideologist of Surrealism, who included a picture by Matta in his legendary Surrealist exhibition.

In his early years, Matta created "gelatin" landscapes and cosmic spaces filled with creepy organic forms of unnatural, fluorescent colors. Marcel Duchamp noted later that Matta had discovered space for other artists. Breton would say that Matta "expresses the need to create a visible representation of the four-dimensional universe in his own particular way."

After the start of World War II, he fled to the US along with Duchamp and Breton. There, he worked to create huge, five-meter canvasses ("mindscapes") to expand on the notion of *les grands transparents*, which were invented by Breton; they are the invisible things that surround people. The followers of Abstract Expressionism—Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell—began to gather at Matta's workshop in Greenwich Village, New York. He is often blamed for the suicide of Gorky, but the latter had many other reasons to take his own life other than his wife leaving him for a fellow artist. However, Matta failed to settle down in the US. He returned to Europe after WWII, but was again unable to convert his achievements into mass media recognition. However, Desmond Morris has quoted Matta in his *Surrealists in Life* book (recently published in Russian too): "It is only the unknown that interests me. And I work for the only purpose to surprise myself." Matta died in Italy. The obituary in *The New York Times* included another quote by him: "True art is imagination, something impartial that everyone needs because it begets such a kind of energy that cannot turn into violence."

Where does the "fourth dimension" come from? According to Dmitry Ozerkov, the co-curator of the exhibition, Matta discussed the ideas of the Russian mystic Pyotr Ouspensky (1878–1947) with Thomas Elliott and Aldous Huxley in the late 1930s in London, where Ouspensky was presenting some lectures then. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum* and *The Fourth Dimension* describe the four-dimensional space as an endless and complex repetition of our three-dimensional space through time. In this space, "...different, even the most remote points of our space and time...should cross...", and objects "should be visible not only from all sides, but also before and after." Art is "beyond logic, beyond the three-dimensional sphere." According to Ouspensky, "it brings man closer to the mysterious world of four dimensions."

Dmitry Ozerkov sees similarities between Matta's works, inspired by Ouspensky's theories, and the legacy of **Pavel Filonov** and **Pavel Chelishchev**. However, the mainstream art of the 20th century chose pure abstraction instead