# Child causes damage to £42.5 million Rothko painting at Rotterdam museum



A child has caused damage to a painting valued at approximately €50 million (£42.5 million) by the American abstract artist Mark Rothko at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The incident, which occurred during an "unguarded moment," has prompted the museum to assess the extent of the harm to the artwork titled Grey, Orange on Maroon, No. 8, and determine appropriate conservation measures.

According to a spokesperson for the museum, the damage to the Rothko painting is "superficial," with small scratches visible in the unvarnished paint layer located in the lower section of the piece. The museum is currently consulting with art conservation experts both within the Netherlands and internationally to explore options for repairing the work. The spokesperson expressed optimism that the painting could be displayed again in the future following restoration efforts.

Sophie McAloone, conservation manager at the Fine Art Restoration Company, explained the particular vulnerability of modern unvarnished paintings like Rothko’s, noting that "modern unvarnished" pieces are especially prone to damage because of their complex materials, absence of a protective varnish, and the presence of large areas of flat colour, which make any damage immediately noticeable. She noted that in this case, "scratching of the upper paint layers can have a significant impact on the viewing experience of the piece."

The Rothko painting was on display in the museum’s Depot, a publicly accessible storage facility adjacent to the main museum building, as part of an exhibition showcasing "public favourites" from the gallery’s collection.

The incident raises questions for other cultural institutions considering similar public access to archival collections. Jonny Helm, marketing manager at art restoration service Plowden & Smith, highlighted that such events could influence policies at UK institutions like V&A East and the British Museum, which are exploring ways to open up their archives to the public. "How will this event affect other UK institutions who are opening up their archives in the same way?" he said.

Restoring Rothko paintings poses substantial challenges due to the artist’s complex mixture of pigments, resins, and adhesives. Additionally, the unvarnished nature of the work leaves it more exposed to environmental effects, complicating conservation efforts further, noted Mr Helm. Conservators are expected to document the damage thoroughly and research previous successful treatments of Rothko paintings before proceeding with restoration.

This is not the first instance of damage to a Rothko artwork. Notably, Rothko’s 1958 painting Black on Maroon was deliberately vandalised at London’s Tate Modern by Wlodzimierz Umaniec in October 2012. Umaniec was sentenced to two years in prison and later apologised for the act. The repair of Black on Maroon cost around £200,000 and took conservators 18 months to complete before the painting was returned to display.

The Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen continues to evaluate the situation as they collaborate with conservation specialists to devise a plan for the preservation and future exhibition of the damaged Rothko painting.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)