

generally unhealthy lifestyle. He did, however, reduce the size of his canvases to be less physically demanding. The *Black Painting* series are part of these series of smaller canvases.

The general interpretation of **Rothko**'s later works is that they aim to engage with the viewer on a primal level, tapping deep into emotions and beliefs. Ironically, in the simplicity of his images, we find the biggest questions in life. Who are we? What is our purpose? – questions that humans have grappled with since the beginning of time.

With **Rothko**'s diminishing health, and suffering from deep depression, *Untitled (Black with grey)* is commonly assumed to be about tragedy, death and desolation. In an unconfirmed statement, Rothko, when asked in particular of the meaning behind his Black and Grey paintings, answered simply that they are “about death”.

However, in a 2008 interview with Kate Rothko Prizel, Rothko's daughter, this assumption is challenged. Although she admits that her father was deeply depressed “*No one would deny that my father was very depressed towards the end of his life*” She views these paintings as less of a story and more individually.

“...there is often a feeling as you approach the monochromatic late works that this was the ultimate walk towards his suicide. But look at them in isolation, and instead you simply feel something opening up before him. I do not connect any feeling of frustration in him at this time with a frustration over where his work was going. I see these paintings as a new beginning for him, rather than a reflection of his mood.”

However, this interview was done on the eve of the opening to a retrospective exhibition on **Rothko** that Kate Rothko Prizel was helping to organise, and it may be that she was simply trying to celebrate her father, rather than mourning him in this interview. That said, her statement does open your eyes to other possible meanings of the artwork, and reveals that the artwork itself may have become a victim of its own creator – that these works are not about Rothko and his death, but instead are open to any kind of interpretation.

Much of **Rothko**'s colour field imagery is desolate, empty and rich in ambiguity. To me they convey a chilling, contemplative sense of floating in space, looking back at the earth and realising how small you really are. The scale of his works may also work in favour of this feeling. Although **Untitled (Black on Grey)** is not as large as some of his other works, which “enveloped” the viewer, the image still draws you in. It warps your peripheral vision and tunnel visions you, the layered paint quivers and vibrates, drawing you deeper into the abyss.