

# Thoughts Out of Season

Occasional Reviews and Notes  
Of Mutual Interest  
Compiled by Tim Froward

## Facing the Blank (Page)

Now Motherwell<sup>1</sup> had been very close indeed to the Surrealists during their exile from Europe in New York City [around and during WW II], and acted as their interpreter to New York and to American ways of living, as they cared about it: for things as small as where to get the best olive oil, and as large as society's various and ongoing connections with the endless spreading world of art. It was in particular Roberto Matta<sup>2</sup> to whom he [Motherwell] was drawn: they went together to Mexico, on which trip Motherwell would meet his first wife, Maria; and it was Matta who gave him the idea of the "doodle," the mark or line you lay down spontaneously, which breaks the ice or the terribleness of the white page, and permits the further creative spurt. It was this emphasis on the power of the spontaneous - on the initial impulse that would free the unconscious into a fruitful productive mode - that concerned him [Matta].<sup>3</sup> It was this idea that both artists then transmitted to the other painters of what we call the New York School.<sup>4</sup>



*Napoleon's Retreat from Moscow* by Tim Forward  
watercolor and graphite on paper 3" x 5"  
collection of the artist

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Motherwell (1915 – 1991) was an American abstract expressionist painter, printmaker, and editor. He was one of the youngest of the New York School, which also included Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko.

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren (1911 – 2002), better known as Roberto Matta, was one of Chile's best-known painters and a seminal figure in 20th century abstract expressionist and surrealist art.

<sup>3</sup> Actually the Surrealist writer Robert Desnos had, long before Matta, found that tracing a line on the page led him into his most valuable drawings: the scribble or doodle was to set loose the creative imagination.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Benfey and Karen Remmler (Ed.), *Artists, Intellectuals, and World War II: The Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke College, 1942-1944*. (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006) Page 116.