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PAUL THEK: DIVER, A RETROSPECTIVE TRAVELS TO THE HAMMER MUSEUM
On view May 22 – August 28, 2011

Paul Thek. *Untitled (Diver)*, 1969-1970. Synthetic polymer and gesso on newspaper. Overall: 22 1/4 x 33 3/16in. (56.5 x 84.3 cm). Collection of Gail and Tony Ganz.



Los Angeles – This summer the Hammer Museum presents a retrospective of work by legendary American artist **Paul Thek** (1933-1988). Co-organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art and Carnegie Museum of Art, *Paul Thek: Diver, a Retrospective*, is the first major exhibition in the United States to explore the work of this sculptor, painter, and creator of radical installations, and the first major exhibition of this artist's work to be presented on the west coast. Many of the approximately 130 objects, which include paintings, drawings, and sculpture, have not been seen in the U.S. in the decades since they were made; while others have never been seen here at all. Several of Thek's "meat pieces" will be shown, along with rare works such as *Untitled (Dwarf Parade Table)*, never before seen in this country. The exhibition also includes images documenting the artist at work in his studio by photographer Peter Hujar as well as Thek's journals, filled with deeply personal thoughts and drawings.

"*Paul Thek: Diver, a Retrospective* is the kind of exhibition we love at the Hammer. Thek has achieved an almost cult-like status among artists—both during his lifetime as well as with a younger generation of artists. Despite that, his work is little known to the broader public and so it is our great pleasure to bring it forward to a greater audience," remarks Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin.

Paul Thek first gained recognition for his sculpture in New York during the 1960s. The first works he exhibited, called "meat pieces," or *Technological Reliquaries*, were made of beeswax and resembled glistening pieces of raw flesh housed in geometric Plexiglas boxes. In a 1969 interview with critic Emmy Huf in the Dutch paper *De Volkskrant* he said: "In New York at that time there was such an enormous tendency toward the minimal, the non-emotional, the anti-emotional even, that I wanted to say something

again about emotion, about the ugly side of things. I wanted to return the raw human fleshy characteristics to the art.”

His most famous work, *The Tomb*, opened in 1967 at the Stable Gallery in New York. *The Tomb* included a life-size effigy of the artist, which came to be known as the “Hippie,” a mannequin with a face and hands that had been cast in wax from Thek’s body. The work vanished in the early 1980s, but some elements will be on view at the Hammer. Between 1969 and 1973 Thek created major installation works in Europe, many of which drew on religious processions, the theater as tableau, and the common experiences of everyday life as subjects. Even with these monumental installations, Thek continued using fragile materials, including wax, latex, sand, and tissues, which has resulted in most of this installation work being lost. Respecting Thek’s aesthetic and his acceptance of the ephemeral nature of his work, the curators have not attempted to fully reconstruct environments or exhibitions from Thek’s lifetime, rather they have included important remaining elements from these installations alongside vintage photographs and a film which illustrates the full installation in its original context.

As Douglas Fogle notes, “The presentation of this unique retrospective in Los Angeles is really unprecedented. Even though Thek was based in New York and Europe, many artists living and working here in Los Angeles hold his work in the highest esteem. From Paul McCarthy to younger artists such as Richard Hawkins and Friedrich Kunath, Thek’s influence has been felt in a profoundly visceral way. No doubt the exhibition will provide some historical context for the kinds of sculpture, painting, and installation that have been generated by artists in Los Angeles for the past three decades.”

In addition to Thek’s sculptural and installation work, the exhibition presents a selection of his paintings and drawings, including paintings that Thek made in 1969-1970, on the island of Ponza, possibly inspired by the cover slab from the *Tomb of the Diver*, an ancient fresco unearthed in Paestum in 1968. Along with these celestial blue images of swimmers and divers that inspired the title of the exhibition, Thek’s earliest newspaper paintings populated with pipe-smoking dwarves, a recurring motif, will also be shown.

In 1976, Thek returned to New York from Europe to an art world in which he was largely unknown. In the 1980s, he began showing mostly small drawings and paintings in New York and Paris and in 1985 he was chosen to represent the U.S. at the Bienal de São Paulo. In 1987 he learned that he had AIDS, and by 1988, he died at the age of 54, from complications from AIDS.

Paul Thek: Diver, a Retrospective is co-curated by Elisabeth Sussman, curator and Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography at the Whitney, and Lynn Zelevansky, the Henry J. Heinz II Director of Carnegie Museum of Art.

Catalogue

The exhibition catalogue includes a foreword by **Adam D. Weinberg** and **Lynn Zelevansky**, an introduction by co-curators **Elisabeth Sussman** and **Lynn Zelevansky**, and individual essays by Sussman and Zelevansky. The artist's early Italian period is addressed by **David Breslin**; Whitney curator **Scott Rothkopf** places Thek in the context of Surrealist tendencies in American art of the 1960s; **Michael Nickel** provides a first-person account of Thek's first installation; artist **Ann Wilson**, who worked closely with Thek and was a lifelong friend, writes of working with him in the 1970s; Thek's inclusion in *documenta 5* and the critical reaction to the show are analyzed by **Susanne Neubauer**; **George Baker** explores Thek's outpouring of paintings in the last decade of his life; and **Eleonora Nagy** reports on recent conservation efforts. The book, which also presents images from the artist's notebooks, is published by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, and distributed by Yale University Press.

Credit

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ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum, a public arts unit of the University of California, Los Angeles, is dedicated to exploring the diversity of artistic expression through the ages. Its collections, exhibitions, and programs span the classic to the cutting-edge in art, architecture, and design, recognizing that artists play a crucial role in all aspects of culture and society.

The museum houses the Armand Hammer Collection of Old Master, Impressionist, and Post-Impressionist paintings and the Armand Hammer Daumier and Contemporaries Collection. The Hammer's newest collection, the Hammer Contemporary Collection, is highlighted by works on paper, particularly drawings and photographs from Southern California. The museum also houses the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, comprising more than 45,000 prints, drawings, photographs, and artists' books from the Renaissance to the present; and oversees the management of the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden on the UCLA campus.

The Hammer presents major single-artist and thematic exhibitions of historical and contemporary art. It also presents approximately ten Hammer Projects exhibitions each year, providing international and local artists with a laboratory-like environment to create new work or to present existing work in a new context.

As a cultural center, the Hammer offers a diverse range of free public programs throughout the year, including lectures, readings, symposia, film screenings, and music

performances. The Hammer's Billy Wilder Theater houses these widely acclaimed public programs and is the new home of the UCLA Film & Television Archive's renowned cinematheque.

HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION

For current program and exhibition information call **310-443-7000** or visit **www.hammer.ucla.edu**.

Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, 11am – 7pm; Thursday, 11am – 9 pm; Sunday, 11am – 5 pm; closed Mondays, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Admission: \$10 for adults; \$5 for seniors (65+) and UCLA Alumni Association members; free for Museum members, students with identification, UCLA faculty/staff, military personnel, veterans, and visitors 17 and under. The Museum is free on Thursdays for all visitors. Public programs are always free.

Location/Parking: The Hammer is located at 10899 Wilshire Boulevard, at Westwood Boulevard. Parking is available under the Museum. Rate is \$3 for three hours with Museum validation.

Hammer Museum Tours: For group tour reservations and information, call 310-443-7041.