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## Hammer Museum Presents *Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine* October 11, 2022-January 8, 2023



(Los Angeles, CA)— The Hammer Museum at UCLA presents *Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine*, the first major survey of works by the visionary African American painter in more than two decades. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, **Bob Thompson** (1937–1966) earned critical acclaim for his paintings of figurative complexity and chromatic intensity. *This House Is Mine* offers a rich reconsideration of the artist’s brief but prolific transatlantic career, featuring more than 50 paintings and works on paper from nearly 40 public and private collections across the United States. Organized by the Colby College Museum of Art, the nationally touring exhibition concludes in Los Angeles and will be on view from October 11, 2022 to January 8, 2023.

Hammer Museum director Ann Philbin shares, “Bob Thompson’s striking aesthetic makes his paintings unforgettable. His bold figures and landscapes have influenced contemporary artists like Rashid Johnson, Henry Taylor, and Alex Katz, all of whom contributed to the exhibition catalogue. We’re thrilled that Los Angeles is part of this national tour, and that audiences across the country are being reintroduced to this important artist.”

*This House Is Mine* examines Thompson’s formal inventiveness and his engagement with universal themes of collectivity, bearing witness, struggle, and justice. Over a mere eight years, he grappled with the exclusionary Western canon, developing a lexicon of enigmatic forms that he threaded through his work. Human and animal figures, often silhouetted and relatively featureless, populate mysterious vignettes set in wooded landscapes or haunt theatrically compressed spaces. Thompson reconfigures well-known compositions by European artists such as Piero della Francesca and Francisco Goya through brilliant acts of formal distortion and elision, recasting the scenes in sumptuous colors. On occasion, fellow contemporaries appear, for instance jazz greats Nina Simone and Ornette Coleman and the writers LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) and Allen Ginsberg.

The exhibition title borrows its name from a diminutive but exquisite painting created by the artist in 1960. With this title, Thompson declared his ambition to synthesize a new visual language out of elements of historic European painting. *This House Is Mine* centers Thompson’s work within expansive art historical narratives and ongoing dialogues about the politics of representation, charting his enduring influence.

The exhibition originated at Colby College in Maine and has toured the country with stops at the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta.

## **BOB THOMPSON**

Robert Louis (Bob) Thompson briefly studied medicine at Boston University before enrolling in the studio program at the University of Louisville, which had desegregated in 1951. As an art student, Thompson explored the languages of totemic abstraction then in vogue and developed an extraordinary proficiency in academic drawing. He spent the summer of 1958 in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where he continued his training at the Seong Moy School of Painting and Graphic Arts and forged valuable friendships. Thompson also encountered the work of the recently deceased German émigré artist Jan Müller (1922–1958), whose figurative style pointed him toward new expressive possibilities.

Thompson soon settled in New York City, where he joined fellow artists Allan Kaprow and Red Grooms in some of their first so-called “Happenings,” multimedia performance events. A devotee of jazz, Thompson frequented downtown clubs such as Slugs’ Saloon and the Five Spot Café, where legendary performers including Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Charlie Haden played. Musicians materialize in many of Thompson’s paintings and drawings including *Homage to Nina Simone* (Minneapolis Institute of Art, 1965). This pivotal period was marked by Thompson’s first solo New York City exhibition, and within the next few years his work entered some of the preeminent modern art collections in the United States.

In 1961, Thompson and his wife, Carol, made their first trip to Europe together, spending time in London and Paris and eventually settling in Ibiza. Thompson was able to fully immerse himself in the traditions that formed the core of his practice. While in Spain, he deepened his study of Francisco de Goya (1746–1828), and canvases such as *Untitled* (Colby College Museum of Art, 1962) demonstrate his heady dialogue with *Los Caprichos*, the Spanish artist’s mordantly satirical print series. On a second trip to Europe, the couple settled in Rome, where Thompson died tragically on May 30, 1966, of complications following gall bladder surgery.

Memorial exhibitions at the New School for Social Research (1969) and the Speed Art Museum (1971) celebrated his life and career. In 1998, Thelma Golden and Judith Wilson mounted a foundational scholarly retrospective of his work at the Whitney Museum of American Art. More recently, paintings by Thompson have featured in group exhibitions such as *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*; *The Color Line: African-American Artists and Segregation*; and *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*. The Estate of Bob Thompson is represented by Michael Rosenfeld Gallery.

## **CATALOGUE**

The exhibition is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue co-published by the Colby College Museum of Art and Yale University Press. Edited by exhibition curator Diana Tuite, the catalogue features contributions from scholars, artists, and poets, including **Kraig Blue, Adrienne L. Childs, Bridget R. Cooks, Robert Cozzolino, Crystal N. Feimster, Jacqueline Francis, Rashid Johnson, LeRoi Jones, Adjoa Jones de Almeida, Alex Katz, Mónica Mariño, George Nelson Preston, Lowery Stokes Sims, A. B. Spellman, Henry Taylor, and Diana Tuite.**

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

The exhibition will be accompanied by a range of public programs, including exhibition walk-throughs, a panel conversation about Bob Thompson, and an 826LA writing workshop for kids. Check [hammer.ucla.edu](http://hammer.ucla.edu) for full schedule to be announced closer to the exhibition opening date.

## **CREDITS**

*Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine* is organized by the Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine, and curated by Diana Tuite, visiting senior curator of modern and contemporary art at the Stanley Museum of Art. The presentation at the Hammer Museum is organized by Erin Christovale, associate curator, with Vanessa Arizmendi, curatorial associate.

## **ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM**

The Hammer Museum is part of the School of the Arts and Architecture at UCLA, and offers exhibitions and collections that span classic to contemporary art. It holds more than 50,000 works in its collection,

including one of the finest collections of works on paper in the nation, the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts. Through a wide-ranging, international exhibition program and the biennial, Made in L.A., the Hammer highlights contemporary art since the 1960s, especially the work of emerging and under-recognized artists. The exhibitions, permanent collections, and nearly 300 public programs annually—including film screenings, lectures, symposia, readings, music performances, and workshops for families—are all free to the public.

#### **HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION**

Admission to all exhibitions and programs at the Hammer Museum is free. Tuesday-Sunday: 11am to 6pm. Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Boulevard at Westwood, Los Angeles. Onsite parking \$7 (maximum 3 hours) or \$7 flat rate after 6 p.m. Visit [hammer.ucla.edu](http://hammer.ucla.edu) for details or call 310-443-7000.