



## Colby College Museum of Art to Open First Major Survey On Artist Bob Thompson in More Than 20 Years in July

### *Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine* to Travel to Museums Across the United States

Waterville, ME—March 4, 2021—This summer, the Colby College Museum of Art will present [\*Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine\*](#), the first major survey of the American artist's work in more than two decades. Curated by Diana Tuite, Colby's Katz Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, the exhibition features approximately 85 paintings and works on paper brought together from more than 20 public institutions and 25 private collections, including important works donated to the Museum by the Alex Katz Foundation. Thompson (1937–1966), who died prematurely at the age of twenty-eight, has featured in recent group exhibitions, but *This House Is Mine* centers his work within art historical narratives, significantly expanding the depth of scholarship on the artist and establishing his enduring influence on contemporary practice. *This House Is Mine* will premiere at Colby and remain on view from July 20, 2021 through January 9, 2022. It will then embark on a national tour, with presentations at the Smart Museum of Art, the High Museum of Art, and the Hammer Museum.

The exhibition is accompanied by a scholarly catalogue of the same name. Published by Yale University Press, the catalogue features the voices of curators, historians, artists, poets, and educators, including Tuite, Adrienne L. Childs, Bridget R. Cooks, Robert Cozzolino, Crystal N. Feimster, Jacqueline Francis, Rashid Johnson, Alex Katz, George Nelson Preston, Lowery Stokes Sims, A. B. Spellman, and Henry Taylor, as well as Kraig Blue, Adjoa Jones de Almeida, and Mónica Mariño of the Brooklyn Museum. The contributors ask new questions of Thompson's practice, exploring themes in his work from a multitude of perspectives and illuminating the multi-faceted nature of his vision and style. Together, the exhibition and catalogue, model new possibilities for an inclusive art history that more accurately reflects and contextualizes Thompson's significance and illuminates critical questions about the politics of representation, particularly for Black artists.

Thompson's work is characterized by a rigorous engagement with art history and a commitment to expressive figuration. Throughout his career, from 1958 through 1966, he developed a style that used canonical European paintings as points of departure to create radically inventive contemporary allegories. Inspired by such artists as Jacopo Tintoretto and Francisco de Goya, Thompson developed a highly personal and symbolic visual vocabulary that often included vignettes of silhouetted figures and animals in pastoral settings. These works recast the narrative content of his historical sources through his own aesthetic lens, producing fascinating and enigmatic compositions. Highly adept at working at various scales, Thompson's paintings are as successful on a diminutive piece of wood as on a mural-sized canvas.

#### Colby College Museum of Art

5600 Mayflower Hill  
Waterville, Maine 04901-8856

TEL 207.859.5600

FAX 207.859.5606

[museum@colby.edu](mailto:museum@colby.edu)

[www.colby.edu/museum](http://www.colby.edu/museum)

The artist's body of work is further distinguished by euphoric color, exemplified by paintings as *The Drying After* (1961) and *Blue Madonna* (1961), and this establishes an instructive bridge with European Post-Impressionists, such as the Fauves.

“Thompson’s career offers tremendous insight into the aesthetic possibilities available to post-war artists. Faced with the expectation that he, like other Black artists of that era, commit to socially illustrative representation, Thompson instead honed a brilliant and complex figurative style,” said Tuite. “He brings into relief the unnatural, ideologically constructed, violent—even absurd—conventions underlying canonical Western art, prompting us to see those paintings with fresh eyes, and to examine the exclusion—or conditional inclusion—of artists like himself in certain narratives. *This House Is Mine* highlights the incredible ambition and range of Thompson’s work and establishes important connections to historic genealogies, contemporaries, and new generations of artists continuing to press the possibilities of figuration. Artists have always been looking at Bob Thompson.”

Through a robust array of artwork, including a selection of paintings that have not been exhibited since the 1960s, *This House Is Mine* traces the trajectory of Thompson’s life and career, from 1958 to his untimely death in 1966. Thompson was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1937, and studied painting at the University of Louisville. In 1958, he spent a pivotal summer in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where he encountered the work of the recently deceased artist Jan Müller. The German émigré’s figurative style offered a way forward, and Thompson intensified his analysis of historical European painting, using it as the scaffolding for reinterpretations executed in the chromatic key of Paul Gauguin. *This House Is Mine* features *The Funeral of Jan Müller* (1958), an elegiac painting that exemplifies the relationship between influence and imagination in Thompson’s work.

By 1959, Thompson had settled in New York City’s Greenwich Village, where he befriended artists, poets, and jazz musicians—many of whom became portrait subjects. He participated in Happenings organized by Allan Kaprow and Red Grooms and frequented the Five Spot, a jazz club where legendary talents like Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Charlie Haden played. These musicians appeared in many of Thompson’s paintings and drawings, including *Ornette* (1960–61) and *Garden of Music* (1960). It was during this pivotal period that Thompson enjoyed his first solo New York City exhibition, and, within the next couple of years, his work entered some of the preeminent modern art collections in the United States.

In 1961, Thompson made his first trip to Europe, spending time in London and Paris and eventually settling in Ibiza. Thompson was able to fully immerse himself in the traditions that formed the foundation of his practice. While in Spain, Thompson deepened his study of Francisco de Goya (1746–1828), and canvases such as *Untitled* (1962) demonstrate the heady dialogue he initiated with *Los Caprichos*, the Spanish artist’s satirical print series. On a second trip to Europe in 1965, Thompson and his wife, Carol, settled in Rome, where he died tragically in May 1966 of complications following surgery. *This House Is Mine* makes a strong argument for situating Thompson within extended, trans-national narratives involving Black expatriates. The exhibition includes important examples of works from his late years, including *The Judgment of Paris* (1964) and *Homage to Nina Simone* (1965), which suggest the unrealized potential of a practice cut short by his premature death.

“*This House Is Mine* embraces and engages with the wide range of ideas, conceptual threads, and considerations within Thompson’s practice, focusing attention on the work of an artist who has long been undervalued along with so many others who have been marginalized as a result of racist and normative aesthetic systems,” said Jacqueline Terrassa, Colby’s Carolyn Muzzy Director. “As a museum with an emphasis on American art, Colby actively seeks to complicate and redefine the narratives of art history, bringing attention to those who have been underrepresented and omitted from scholarly and cultural dialogues, while inviting questions regarding who and what we value. Conceived before the events of 2020 that spurred a new scale of reckoning across the field, the exhibition and catalogue manifest our commitment to artists and our belief in the power of art to embody the social, emotional, sensorial, and intellectual complexity of human experience.”

*Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine* is generously supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld, the Alex Katz Foundation, Richard and Mary L. Gray Foundation, the Robert Lehman Foundation, and the Terra Foundation for American Art. Additional support is provided by the 25th Anniversary Fund, Everett and Florence Turner Fund, and Mirken Family Publications Fund.

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery represents the Estate of Bob Thompson.

### **About the Colby College Museum of Art**

Founded in 1959, the Colby College Museum of Art is a teaching museum, a destination for American art, and a place for education and engagement with local, national, and global communities. Part of Colby College, the museum is located in Waterville, Maine, and actively contributes to Colby’s curricular and co-curricular programs and to the region’s quality of life. It inspires connections between art and people through distinctive exhibitions, programs, and publications and through an outstanding collection that emphasizes American art and contemporary art within holdings that span cultures and time periods. The Colby Museum actively seeks to increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and access across all of its work and to advocate for the community value of art, artists, and museums in engaging with today’s most vital questions.

Through the generosity of Paula Crane Lunder, D.F.A. ’98, GP’24, and Peter Lunder ’56, D.F.A. ’98, GP’24, the Colby Museum is home to the Lunder Collection and the Lunder Institute for American Art. The Lunder Collection includes more than 1,500 of works by artists ranging from Albrecht Dürer to Julie Mehretu, strengthening the museum’s mission. The Lunder Institute for American Art is an initiative of the Colby Museum that supports scholars, artists, and other arts practitioners in expanding and redefining American art while engaging students, faculty, and community members in its rigorous collaborative and interdisciplinary programs.

###

For more information, please contact:

Alina E. Sumajin / Aga Sablinska

PAVE Communications & Consulting

[alina@paveconsult.com](mailto:alina@paveconsult.com) / [aga@paveconsult.com](mailto:aga@paveconsult.com)

646-369-2050 / 862-216-6485