



Bob Thompson: Meteor in a Black Hat

The exhibition **Bob Thompson: Meteor in a Black Hat**, organized by the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery in New York, features 29 works in oil and gouache created between 1959 and 1966. Bob Thompson was not a typical Abstract Expressionist. He created bold colorful paintings based on European masters. His work is now described as figurative expressionism. The paintings in this exhibition are autobiographical and allegorical. Highlights of the Haggerty exhibition include *Self-Portrait*, 1964-65, and Thompson's religious paintings *Mother and Child*, 1965 and *Martyrdom of Erasmus*, 1965. During Thompson's short career, he produced over 1000 paintings.

Thompson's multicolored figures and allegorical references recall the work of the Fauves, a group of early modern painter led by Henri Matisse. The American critic Stanley Crouch describes Thompson's work in the following manner: "Primary colors dominate many of the canvasses, with red an organizing principle that makes the traditional

suggestion of fire, passion, anguish and destruction. Most of the situations and actions in the paintings take place outdoors or within caves; the architectural and technological hand of man is almost always absent." Components of Thompson's work reveal the influence of Goya and Piero della Francesca. According to LeRoi Jones, "He was always excited about something he was studying – Tintoretto, Poussin, or whomever – and he would open the book and start pointing things out to you."

Born Robert Louis Thompson in Louisville, Kentucky in 1937, Thompson studied art at the University of Louisville in 1957 before moving to Provincetown, Massachusetts. In 1958, Thompson exhibited 13 paintings at the Provincetown Art Festival. Walter P. Chrysler, his first collector, bought them all. In 1960, the art historian Meyer Schapiro took notice of Thompson's work. Collectors attracted to his work and personality began buying his paintings. After three years in Europe studying art and painting, he was given solo exhibitions at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, in 1963 and 1965.

Thompson's work has been exhibited at the J.B. Speed Art Museum; New School, New York; National Collection of Fine Arts; The Studio Museum in Harlem; Jamaica Arts Center and the Whitney Museum of Art, New York. He died in 1966 in Rome.

Acknowledgments

The Haggerty Museum of Art is pleased to present **Bob Thompson: Meteor in a Black Hat**. The exhibition, organized by the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York features a selection of paintings and gouaches by Bob Thompson (1937-1966).

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Curtis L. Carter
Director



Mother and Child, 1965

Untitled [MR113], ca. 1960

Works in the Exhibition

1. *Europa*, 1958
Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 in.
2. *The Frog and The Princess*, 1960
Oil on canvas, 28 1/2 x 25 in.
3. *Untitled* [MR113], ca.1960
Oil on wood, 7 x 30 7/8 x 3/4 in.
4. *Untitled* (Yellow Woman) [MR114], 1960
Oil on masonite, 37 3/4 x 21 in.
5. *Ascending the Stairs*, 1960-63
Oil on board, 40 x 30 in.
6. *Untitled* [MR116], ca.1961
Oil on wood, 5 7/8 x 20 in.
7. *Untitled* [MR129], 1961
Oil on canvas, 26 x 39 in.
8. *St. George and the Dragon*, 1961
Oil on canvas, 38 x 30 in.
9. *Debut*, 1962-63
Gouache on paper, 16 x 13 3/8 in.
10. *St. George and the Dragon*, 1963
Oil on canvasboard, 4 5/8 x 7 in.
11. *The Nativity*, 1963
Oil on canvas, 84 1/2 x 60 in.
12. *The Golden Ass*, 1963
Oil on canvas, 62 1/2 x 74 1/2 in.
13. *Sorrow*, 1963
Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 in.
14. *Tribute to an American Indian*, 1963
Oil on canvas, 63 x 87 in.
15. *Untitled* [MR131], 1963
Oil on canvas, 12 1/8 x 9 in.
16. *Untitled* [MR133], 1963
Acrylic on canvas, 12 1/2 x 16 3/4 in.
17. *Untitled* [MR043], 1963
Oil on canvas, 63 x 86 1/2 in.
18. *St. George and the Dragon*, 1963
Pastel on paper, 14 1/16 x 21 1/8 in.



Self-Portrait, 1964-65

19. *Untitled* (Study for North African Dream), 1963
Gouache on paper, 9 3/8 x 12 3/16 in.
20. *Untitled* [MR121], ca.1964
Oil on wood panel, 7 x 8 3/4 in.
21. *The Dentist*, ca.1964
Oil on canvas, 62 3/4 x 86 1/2 in.
22. *Untitled* [MR104], 1964
Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 in.
23. *The Entombment*, 1964
Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 in.
24. *Self-Portrait*, 1964-65
Oil on canvas, 16 x 13 1/4 in.
25. *Les Trois Amies*, 1965
Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in.
26. *Martyrdom of St. Erasmus*, 1965
Acrylic on paper mounted to Masonite, 10 7/8 x 10 3/8 in.
27. *Mother and Child*, 1965
Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in.
28. *Nymph Surprised by Satyrs*, 1965
Oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 14 1/8 in.
29. *Satyr and Maiden*, 1965
Oil on paper, 10 7/8 x 20 1/2 in.

Artist Biography

- 1937** Born Robert Louis Thompson in Louisville, Kentucky
- 1957** Started studying art at the University of Louisville
- 1958** Traveled to Provincetown, Massachusetts
Exhibited 13 paintings at the Provincetown Art Festival which were bought by his first collector Walter P. Chrysler.
- 1959** Solo exhibition at the Arts in Louisville Gallery
Moved to Manhattan's Lower East Side
- 1960** First solo exhibition in New York at the Delancey Street Museum
Marries Carol Plenda.
Receives a Whitney Opportunity Fellowship allowing the Thompsons to travel to Europe. After living in Paris for two years, they move to Ibiza, Spain
- 1963** Solo exhibition at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York
- 1964** Solo exhibition at Paula Johnson (now Paula Cooper) Gallery, NY and Richard Gray Gallery, Chicago
- 1965** Solo exhibition at Donald Morris Gallery, Detroit and Martha Jackson Gallery, New York
Return to Europe.
- 1966** Two months after a gall bladder operation, Thompson died on May 30

Select Exhibitions

- 1967** *Friends of Bob Thompson Present a Group Memorial Exhibit*, St. Mark's Gallery, New York
- 1969** Exhibition at the New School, New York
- 1971** J.B. Speed Art Museum exhibition
- 1975** Exhibition at the National Collection of Fine Arts
- 1978** Exhibition at The Studio Museum in Harlem organized by Gilbert Coker
- 1985** *Sam Gilliam & Bob Thompson*, South Campus Art Gallery, Miami-Dade Community College, Florida
- 1987** Jamaica Arts Center exhibition organized by Kellie Jones and Judith Wilson
- 1990** *Novae: William H. Johnson and Bob Thompson*, California Afro-American Museum, Los Angeles
- 1998** *Bob Thompson*, solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of Art, New York
- 2005** *Bob Thompson: Meteor in a Black Hat*, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York
- 2006** *Bob Thompson: Meteor in a Black Hat*, Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University



Untitled [MR116], ca.1961