



HIGH MUSEUM OF ART ATLANTA

1280 PEACHTREE STREET, N.E. • ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30309

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**HIGH MUSEUM OF ART TO PRESENT FIRST MAJOR SURVEY
FOR ARTIST BOB THOMPSON IN MORE THAN 20 YEARS**

ATLANTA, Dec. 8, 2021 — This summer, the High Museum of Art will present “Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine” (June 17-Sept. 11, 2022), the first major survey of the artist’s work in more than two decades. Organized by the Colby College Museum of Art, the nationally touring exhibition includes paintings and works on paper by Thompson (American, 1937-1966), who died at the age of 28. The exhibition, spanning his brief but prolific career, premiered at Colby and will travel to the Smart Museum of Art before its presentation at the High. From Atlanta, it will travel to the Hammer Museum.

Thompson’s work is characterized by a rigorous engagement with art history and a commitment to expressive figuration. Throughout his practice, canonical European painting served as a point of departure for his radically inventive contemporary allegories. Inspired by old masters such as Jacopo Tintoretto and Francisco de Goya, he developed a highly personal and symbolic visual vocabulary known for its characteristic vignettes of silhouetted figures and animals in pastoral settings. His paintings recast the mythological and religious narratives of his historical sources through his own aesthetic lens, producing fascinating and enigmatic compositions in a variety of scales and employing euphoric color.

Taking its title from one of his paintings, “This House Is Mine” traces Thompson’s trans-Atlantic artistic journey as he wrestled with the exclusionary Western canon. The exhibition reflects and contextualizes his significance as a contemporary artist and illuminates critical questions about the politics of representation, particularly for Black artists, while presenting new possibilities for a more inclusive art history.

“Though his work is represented by major art institutions, Thompson may still be unfamiliar to many. With this exhibition, we aim to introduce our audience to his art and celebrate his important legacy,” said Rand Suffolk, the High’s Nancy and Holcombe T. Green, Jr., director.

“Thompson’s art is like a free jazz adaptation of European art history, breaking down and retooling narrative conventions in an experimental manner,” added Michael Rooks, the High’s Wieland Family curator of modern and contemporary art. “As a result, he quickly developed a mature style that was electrifying and which, implausibly but brilliantly, bridged the vanguard

of art and music in New York with art of the old masters. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to present this exhibition.”

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 Jan Müller. The German artist’s figurative style offered a way forward for Thompson, who intensified his analysis of historical European painting, using it as a 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 such legendary talents as Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane and Charlie Haden played. These musicians appeared in many of Thompson’s paintings and drawings, including “Ornette” (1960-1961) 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, where he was able to fully immerse himself in the traditions that formed the foundation of his practice. While in Spain, he deepened his study of Goya; works on canvas such as “Untitled” (1962) demonstrate the heady dialogue he initiated with “Los Caprichos,” Goya’s satirical print series. On a second trip to Europe in 1965, he and his wife settled in Rome, where he died tragically in 1966 of complications following surgery. “This House Is Mine” makes a strong argument for situating Thompson within extended, transnational narratives involving Black expatriates. The exhibition includes important examples of works from his later years, including “The Judgement 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” is curated by Diana Tuite. The exhibition will be presented on the Second Level of the High’s Anne Cox Chambers Wing.

Exhibition Catalogue

Published by Yale University Press, the exhibition 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 multifaceted nature of his vision and style.

Exhibition Organization and Support

“Bob Thompson: This House Is Mine” is organized by the Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine, and 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. This exhibition is made possible by Premier Exhibition Series Sponsor Delta Air Lines, Inc.; Premier Exhibition Series Supporters ACT Foundation, Inc., Sarah and Jim Kennedy, Louise Sames and Jerome Grilhot, and wish foundation; Benefactor Exhibition Series Supporter Robin and Hilton Howell; Ambassador Exhibition Series Supporters The Antinori Foundation, Corporate Environments, The Arthur R. and Ruth D. Lautz Charitable Foundation, and Elizabeth and Chris Willett; and Contributing Exhibition Series Supporters Farideh and Al Azadi, Sandra and Dan Baldwin, Lucinda W. Bunnell, Marcia and John Donnell, Mrs. Peggy Foreman, Helen C. Griffith, Mrs. Fay S. Howell/The Howell Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter Jones, Joel Knox and Joan Marmo, Dr. Joe B. Massey, Margot and Danny McCaul, The Ron and Lisa Brill Family Charitable Trust, Wade Rakes and Nicholas Miller, The Fred and Rita Richman Fund, In Memory of Elizabeth B. Stephens, USI Insurance Services, and Mrs. Harriet H. Warren. Generous support is also provided by the Alfred and Adele Davis Exhibition Endowment Fund, Anne Cox Chambers Exhibition Fund, Barbara Stewart Exhibition Fund, Dorothy Smith Hopkins Exhibition Endowment Fund, Eleanor McDonald Storza Exhibition Endowment Fund, The Fay and Barrett Howell Exhibition Fund, Forward Arts Foundation Exhibition Endowment Fund, Helen S. Lanier Endowment Fund, Isobel Anne Fraser–Nancy Fraser Parker Exhibition Endowment Fund, John H. and Wilhelmina D. Harland Exhibition Endowment Fund, Katherine Murphy Riley Special Exhibition Endowment Fund, Margaretta Taylor Exhibition Fund, and the RJR Nabisco Exhibition Endowment Fund.

About the High Museum of Art

Located in the heart of Atlanta, the High Museum of Art connects with audiences from across the Southeast and around the world through its distinguished collection, dynamic schedule of special exhibitions and engaging community-focused programs. Housed within facilities designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Richard Meier and Renzo Piano, the High features a collection of more than 18,000 works of art, including an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American fine and decorative arts; major holdings of photography and folk and self-taught work, especially that of artists from the American South; burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, including paintings, sculpture, new media and design; a growing collection of African art, with work dating from prehistory through the present; and significant holdings of European paintings and works on paper. The High is dedicated to reflecting the diversity of its communities and offering a variety of exhibitions and educational programs that engage visitors with the world of art, the lives of artists and the creative process. For more information about the High, visit www.high.org.

###

DIGITAL IMAGES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

Media contact:

Marci Davis
Manager of Public Relations
404-733-4585
marci.davis@high.org