

ALMA THOMAS

MOVING HEAVEN & EARTH

Paintings and Works on Paper, 1958–1978

March 20 – May 16, 2015

Opening Reception:

Thursday, March 19th / 6:00-8:00pm

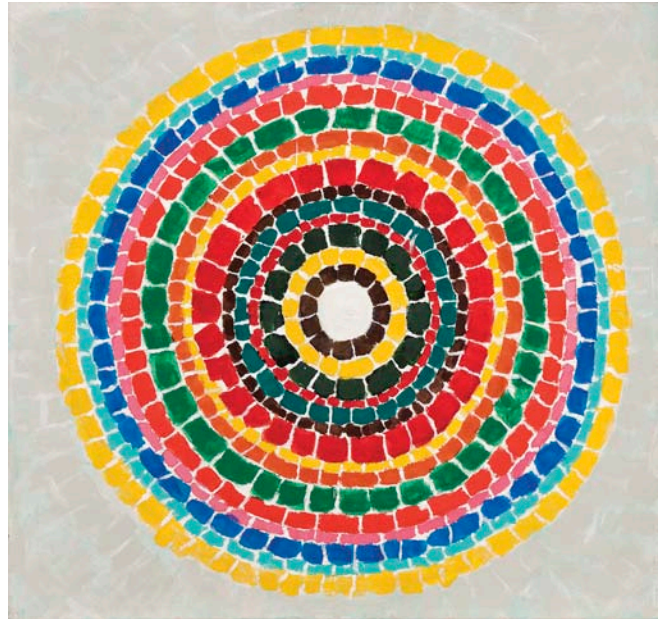
“The use of color in my paintings is of paramount importance to me. Through color I have sought to concentrate on beauty and happiness, rather than on man’s inhumanity to man.”

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(New York—March 13, 2015) **Michael Rosenfeld Gallery** is pleased to present ***Alma Thomas: Moving Heaven & Earth, Paintings and Works on Paper, 1958-1978***, an exhibition of over forty exuberant paintings, drawings, and watercolors. This exhibition will be the gallery’s second show dedicated exclusively to Thomas’s work. The first, *Alma Thomas: Phantasmagoria, Major Paintings from the 1970s* (2001), traveled to the Women’s Museum in Dallas, Texas. The current exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated color catalogue featuring a newly transcribed and previously unpublished oral history interview with the artist.

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery has long been a champion of Alma Thomas’s work. In addition to the 2001 solo exhibition, the gallery has featured her work in several major group exhibitions, including *Stroke! Beauford Delaney, Norman Lewis, Alma Thomas* (2005), *African American Art: 200 Years* (2008), *Abstract Expressionism: Reloading the Canon* (2011), and *Beyond the Spectrum, Abstraction in African American Art, 1950-1975* (2014). The gallery has also successfully placed her paintings in the permanent collections of such institutions as the Philadelphia Museum of Art and Crystal Bridges Museum of Art in Bentonville, Arkansas as well as many private collections.

Alma Thomas: Moving Heaven & Earth focuses on the last two decades of Thomas’s life, which were also the first two decades of her career as an artist. Late to commit to producing art full-time, Thomas nevertheless quickly developed an original and dynamic style characterized by large-scale abstractions comprised of rhythmic, repeated

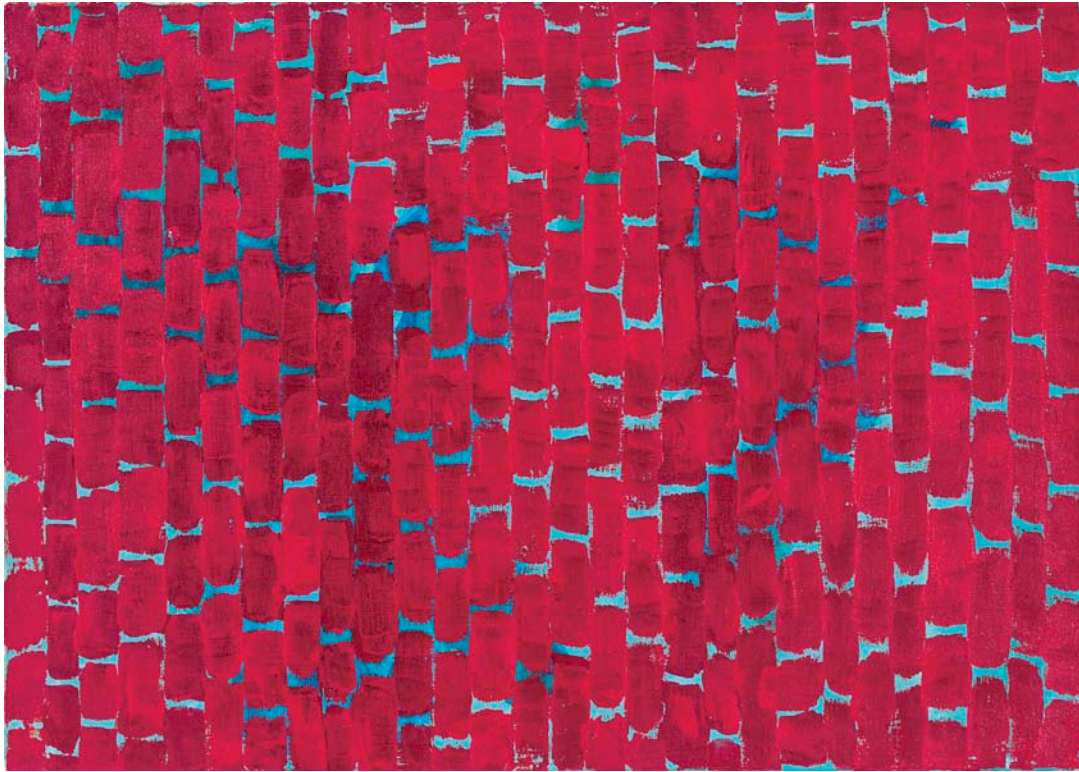


Alma Thomas (1891-1978), *Untitled*, c.1968, oil on canvas, 35 3/4" x 37 5/8"

marks of vibrant color. The monumental canvases Thomas became celebrated for in the 1960s and 1970s were informed by the Washington Color School, which included Morris Louis, Sam Gilliam, and Kenneth Noland. However, her interest in color experimentation also aligned her closely to Josef Albers, Johannes Itten, and Wassily Kandinsky.

Inspired by nature, recent discoveries in the sciences, and her observations of earthly and celestial phenomena, Thomas’s work was devoid of overt political content. Her dedication to abstraction reflected a belief shared by painter Norman Lewis that modern art at its best could transcend political and historical concerns. But also like Lewis, although Thomas chose to eschew explicitly political content, she remained actively committed to social justice and equality. In addition to her involvement with Artists for CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), Thomas continued to organize art programs and teach art classes to local Washington, DC youth throughout her life. In 1972, Thomas became the first African American woman to be given a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of Art, New York. That same year, the Corcoran Gallery (Washington, DC) also mounted *Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective*. In 1975, Howard University honored her with its Alumni of Achievement Award in recognition of her importance to the history of art as well as to the local African American communities touched by her considerable talent as an artist and teacher.

Thomas was celebrated for her undeniable talent during her lifetime, and her work has continued to be exhibited throughout the country and met with enthusiastic praise. In



Alma Thomas (1891-1978), *Deep Red Roses Chant*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 20 1/8" x 28 1/8", signed and dated

her 2001 review of *Phantasmagoria*, NY Times art critic Grace Glueck wrote, "with each new showing, Thomas's paintings look fresher and livelier, their totally abstract vocabulary of color markings conveying the spirit of a vibrant inner life. . . Laid down in irregular all-over patterns on solid grounds that show through in webs and networks, her late works are sophisticated color structures that still reveal a debt to the natural world. Joy may be in short supply elsewhere, but it resonates in these paintings." The joy that resounds in Thomas's visual chants of color will continue to reverberate as part of her legacy. A woman whose career as an artist began at age sixty-seven and rose quickly to great heights, Alma Thomas still soars, decades after her death in 1978.

Long after *Alma Thomas: Moving Heaven & Earth*, the spotlight will remain on Alma Thomas. The Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College and The Studio Museum in Harlem are co-organizing a retrospective of the

work of Alma Thomas that will open February 2016 at the Tang and be on view at the Studio Museum in summer 2016. Additional traveling venues to be announced. The exhibition is curated by Ian Berry, Dayton Director of the Tang Museum and Lauren Haynes, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection at the Studio Museum. A major catalogue will accompany the exhibition with extensive images and new essays on Thomas's important work and influential legacy.

Visuals available upon request.

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery is located at 100 11th Avenue (at 19th Street), New York, NY, 10011. Gallery hours are Tuesday–Saturday, 10AM–6PM.

For additional information, please contact Marjorie Van Cura at 212.247.0082 or mv@michaelrosenfeldart.com.



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