

Untitled (Man in Hat) ca. 1958
oil on paper, 13 1/2 x 10 3/8 in



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PRESS RELEASE
BOB THOMPSON
DRAWINGS
NOVEMBER 30 – JANUARY 8, 2012
SHFAP
208 FORSYTH ST

Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects and Martha Henry, Inc. present ***Bob Thompson Drawings*** an exhibition of drawings by Bob Thompson (1937-1966) that date from the late 1950s to the mid 1960s and includes Thompson's last known work, a large drawing in oil paint on canvas after Titian.

On view are more than 20 works on paper representing Thompson's favorite themes executed in a variety of mediums including ink, charcoal, pastel, oil and watercolor. The show covers the artist's full career beginning in 1958 in Provincetown, MA to his premature death in 1966 in Rome, Italy. All of the drawings are from private collections, and most of them have never been seen in public. We are pleased to present the first comprehensive exhibition in over 35 years devoted to Bob Thompson's drawings in SHFAP's new Lower East Side gallery located around the corner from Thompson's former Clinton and Rivington Street studios.

In the summer of 1958, Bob Thompson arrived in the artist colony of Provincetown, where he was befriended by a number of contemporary figurative painters including Red Grooms, Lester Johnson and Gandy Brodie. He also discovered and was inspired by the work of the recently deceased Jan Müller. There the younger artist developed two of his earliest themes. One, a man wearing a broad brimmed hat is a symbol for the artist. As Paul Mocsanyi wrote in a 1969 New School catalog, "The silhouette of a black observer stands far away from the action...in the background, always watching, sometimes threatening. By his posture, his hat, his gesture, one can identify him as being the artist himself." A second theme is nude women in a forest. Jeanne Siegel interviewed Thompson who said after seeing Cezanne's *Bathers* at the Barnes Foundation; he became fascinated by women and trees: "I paint a woman that is real for me...and then I am going to put her right beside a tree and I relate her to the sensuality of the tree..." The exhibition includes drawings from 1958 that establish both of the motifs in the artist's oeuvre.

Thompson had been encouraged to study Old Masters by painter Dody Müller, Jan's widow, and he heeded her advice after he moved to Europe in early 1961. Living for extended periods of time in France, Spain and Italy, Thompson immersed himself in art history, drawing upon Poussin, Goya and Italian Renaissance artists for inspiration and instruction.

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PG.2



Last Painting, 1966, oil on canvas, 55 1/2 x 63 3/4 in

A number of the drawings in this exhibition are studies of Old Masters, including Thompson's important Study for Expulsion and Nativity, an interpretation of two famous 15th century Biblical paintings by Renaissance masters - Masaccio's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* and Piero della Francesca's *Nativity*. A year later in 1964, Thompson painted *Expulsion and Nativity*, a large oil on canvas, one of his greatest paintings.

The years of study in Europe paid off with tremendous growth for the young artist. He had a new command of placing multiple figures in space, creating more complex compositions, often directly based on historical models and developing the narrative aspect of his subjects. From 1964 onwards, which art historian Judith Wilson considers to be the final phase of his career, Thompson "thoroughly combines the appropriated and the imagined." His controlled classicism is evident in the *Last Painting* of 1966, essentially a large drawing in oil on canvas. Other Thompson drawings on canvas are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY and the Hirschhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. This work was directly inspired by Titian's *Venus and Adonis*, of which several versions are known.

The artist also enjoyed making portraits of his friends: artists Red Grooms and Gandy Brodie; Beat poets LeRoi Jones and Allan Ginsburg; and many jazz musicians. Jazz was especially important to Thompson, whose life and art were similarly improvisational. Featured in the exhibition are two ink sketches - an intimate portrait of bassist, Charlie Hayden, and a spare elegant rendering of singer, Nina Simone performing, Simone's stylistic diversity appealed to the artist as well as her political role as a black cultural icon for the Civil Rights movement in the mid sixties.

Other drawings include powerful studies of the female nude that transcend their origin as life drawings to become thoroughly modern and as contemporary as a Kerry James Marshall or Jean-Michel Baquiat. Hettie Jones, who was married to LeRoi Jones in the 1960s, has written a poignant remembrance of her friendship with Bob Thompson in the catalog that accompanies the show, "I always think about Bob Thompson's work in terms of how new it was, although in many ways it was of course, old. Nevertheless, at the time it came to our notice, we were suddenly, and frighteningly, diverted from abstraction's intelligence to the stuff of nightmare - real monsters in bold colors - and forced to admit that we were looking at what was divinely, and classically, human. Which was indeed scary, because what Bob had seen and painted was us."

Bob Thompson Drawings is co-produced by steven harvey fine art projects and Martha Henry, Inc. An illustrated catalog with text by Hettie Jones is available.

PG.3



Portrait of Nina Simone, Provincetown, 1959, ink on paper, 23 3/4 x 18 in

About Bob Thompson:

Bob Thompson was born in Louisville, KY in 1937. After studying at university Thompson traveled east, arriving in Provincetown's vibrant artists' colony during the pivotal summer of 1958. There he was introduced to artists who would influence him to paint figuratively and inspire him toward his mature style. Awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in 1962, Thompson traveled to Europe where he lived and worked for many years until he died tragically young in 1966.

During his lifetime he had solo shows at Martha Jackson Gallery in New York and Richard Gray Gallery in Chicago. In 1998, the Whitney Museum of American Art mounted a major retrospective and published a book on the artist. Thompson's work is in the collections of many important museums including the Brooklyn Museum of Art; Chicago Art Institute; Detroit Institute of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art; Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art; Whitney Museum of American Art; The Studio Museum in Harlem; Minneapolis Institute of Art; and National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

About Martha Henry, Inc:

Founded in 1987, Martha Henry Inc. is an advisory firm that specializes in the exhibition, sale and appraisal of American art with a special emphasis on Provincetown Figurative Expressionism, African-American Art from the 19th century to the present, and Self-Taught Art. Martha Henry has written catalogs and organized numerous exhibitions in galleries, universities, museums and public parks with artists including Jay Milder, Jan Müller, Bob Thompson, Robert Murray, Lonnie Holley, Mr. Imagination, and Swoon.

About steven harvey fine art projects:

Shfap specializes in contemporary and modern painting and represents both contemporary painters and artist's estates in the painterly representational tradition. Exhibitions take place at our gallery located in New York's Lower East Side. We participate in art fairs including The Pulse Fair 2011 and the NY Art Book Fair at PS1 and produce publications by and about artists. The gallery is run by Steven Harvey who has organized exhibitions at galleries and museums of diverse artists including James Lee Byars, Louis Michel Eilshemius, Louisa Matthías-dóttir, and the Guerilla Art Action Group and art historian Jennifer Samet, PhD.

When: *Bob Thompson Drawings* opens November 30, 2011, reception 6- 8 pm, continues: November 30, 2011 – January 8, 2012

Where: steven harvey fine art projects, 208 Forsyth Street, NY, NY 10002, 917-861-7312 info@shfap.com. Gallery hours: Wednesday - Sunday 12- 6pm. Call for holiday hours.

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