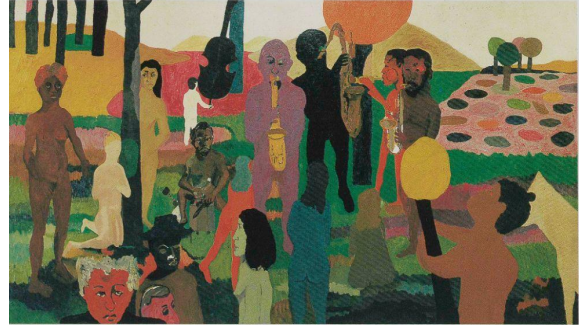


# David Zwirner

New York London Paris Hong Kong

## *So let us all be citizens too*

20 April–26 May 2023  
24 Grafton Street, London



Bob Thompson, *Garden of Music*, 1960  
Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art  
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David Zwirner is pleased to announce *So let us all be citizens too* at the gallery's London location, curated by Ebony L. Haynes, senior director of 52 Walker. This group exhibition explores and celebrates the legacy of post-war American artist Bob Thompson (1937–1966) and his dynamic figurative style and use of colour. Bringing together contemporary international artists of several generations whose aesthetic affinities to Thompson are both discernible and surprising, the exhibition includes paintings and works on paper by Emma Amos, Michael Armitage, Betty Blayton, Vivian Browne, Beverly Buchanan, Lewis Hammond, Cynthia Hawkins, Marcus Jahmal, Danielle Mckinney, Cassi Namoda, Chris Ofili, Naudline Pierre, George Nelson Preston, Devin Troy Strother, and Peter Williams. The companion survey, *Bob Thompson: So let us all be citizens*, will be on view concurrently at 52 Walker, New York.

Although his career only spanned a brief eight years from 1958 to his untimely death at the age of twenty-eight in 1966, Thompson left behind a singular body of work that turned away from the then-dominant modes of abstract expressionism. In 1959, after establishing ties with artists in his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, and Provincetown, Massachusetts, Thompson moved to New York, where he encountered such avant-garde jazz musicians as Ornette Coleman, Sonny Rollins, and Nina Simone, among others. His paintings boldly appropriated compositions from the art-historical canon and featured a vibrant colour palette and flat, interlocking planes, recasting classical figures and forms into fantastical guises that revealed the pleasure and turbulence of the human condition.

The title of the exhibition – *So let us all be citizens too* – riffs on the concluding line of a speech Thompson delivered as a teenager, which anticipated the artist's passion for the tenets of freedom and expression. His contemporaries also pursued stylistic experimentations while moving through a rapidly changing world. The enigmatic abstract tondos of American artist Betty Blayton (1937–2016), who was an educator and a co-founder of the Studio Museum in Harlem, delicately balance spiritual concerns with both personal and collective experiences. Likewise, painter Vivian Browne (1929–1993), who helped establish the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition in 1969 and was a member of the feminist collective Heresies, created vivid paintings with high-contrast palettes that move fluidly from figuration to abstraction.

Throughout the exhibition, works by Thompson from important private collections – including a rare self-portrait – will be on view, providing a centralising framework that stresses the contemporary spirit of his works among his peers as well as subsequent generations. New York-based artist Naudline Pierre (b. 1989) has directly cited Thompson as an inspiration for her works, which likewise appropriate and recast Christian iconographies from Western art history. Paintings by Marcus Jahmal (b. 1990), who is also based in New York, emphasise intentional spiritual ties with the elder artist and in particular reference the work of Francis Bacon and Francisco de Goya, whom Thompson also emulated.

Other artists on view who are situated outside of the United States bring their own allegories and stories to ambitious figurative compositions. Contributions by gallery artist Chris Ofili (b. 1968) foreground his deft merging of abstraction and figuration, employing a diverse range of aesthetic and cultural sources that include, among others, Zimbabwean cave paintings, blaxploitation films, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and modernist painting. Michael Armitage (b. 1984), also represented by the gallery, exhibits work that gives shape to real and imagined histories of his home of East Africa, constructing deeply rooted but nuanced impressions of the myriad sociopolitical and cultural contexts that affect contemporary daily life.

For all press enquiries, contact:

Sara Chan +44 20 3538 3165 [sara@davidzwirner.com](mailto:sara@davidzwirner.com)