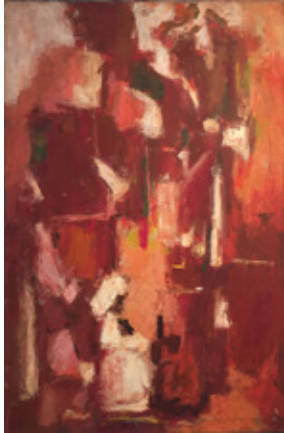


HEMPHILL

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EARLY ALMA THOMAS February 4 - April 1, 2017

Washington DC — HEMPHILL is pleased to announce the exhibition, *Early Alma Thomas* opening on Saturday, February 4, with a reception from 6-8pm. The exhibition will remain on view through April 1, 2017.

As a founding member of the Barnett-Aden Gallery in 1943, Thomas interacted with artists Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Lois Mailou Jones, and others. As the post-war era accelerated, Washington painters were quick to embrace the abstract expressionist movement. Thomas's realist works pushed toward abstraction in the 1950s as she pursued an MFA in painting at American University, where she deepened the pursuit of a bold use of color and shape which defined her late career works.

Throughout the 1950s, Thomas appropriated the tools of Abstract Expressionism and characteristically made them her own, applying pigment in blocks of color to create compositions incorporating figures and still life elements, and later, densely layered abstractions of night skies and earthly subjects. Thomas's adept use of minimal brushstrokes to render forms is in use among all the paintings, whether figure or object, night sky, or spring flowers.

"Etude in Brown – Saint Cecilia at the Organ, c. 1956-58" employs a highly graphic russet palette of reds and oranges, a diminutive figure anchoring the foreground. Dashes of white pigment represent the head and figure of Saint Cecilia, the scale and placement of the figure creating a cathedral of space filling the canvas.

The five paintings selected for this exhibition provide a timeline of Thomas's shift from realism to abstraction in a few short years. This seldom-studied period firmly places Thomas in the center of modern American painting.

Alma W. Thomas (American, 1891- 1978) was born in Columbus, GA and moved to Washington, DC with her family in 1907. In 1924, she became the first graduate of the Art Department at Howard University, and in 1935 received a Master of Arts in art education from Columbia University. Her work is represented in the collections of The Columbus Museum of Art, The Baltimore Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, The National Gallery of Art, The Howard University Gallery of Art, The Phillips Collection, The Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Hirshhorn Museum, and The Whitney Museum of American Art, among numerous other public, private, and university art collections.

HEMPHILL was founded in Washington DC in 1993. The exhibition schedule features modern & contemporary art in all media by artists ranging from emerging to mid-career to modern masters.

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday–Saturday, 10:00am–5:00pm, and by appointment.

Image: Alma Thomas, Etude in Brown, St. Cecilia at the Organ, c. 1956-58, oil on linen, 44" x 28"

IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE FOR REPRODUCTION.

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