



Tang Teaching Museum Premieres *Alma Thomas*

**Exhibition Brings Together Major Works from Public and Private Collections
in an Exploration of Full Span of Artist's Unconventional Career**

**Co-Organized by the Tang Teaching Museum and The Studio Museum in Harlem,
Exhibition Premieres at the Tang February 6 – June 5, 2016**

Saratoga Springs, NY (November 24, 2015) – The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College will premiere *Alma Thomas* beginning February 6, 2016. Examining the artistic evolution of Thomas, the exhibition will feature works from every period in her career, including rarely exhibited watercolors and early abstractions, as well as her signature canvases drawn from a variety of private and public collections. The exhibition is organized by the Tang Teaching Museum and The Studio Museum in Harlem.

Alma Thomas will join other presentations at the Tang Museum exploring the practice of modern and contemporary artists whose work defies conventional categorization. Most recently, the Tang organized exhibitions on artists Nicholas Krushenick, Corita Kent, Terry Adkins, and Nancy Grossman.

“While Alma Thomas had her supporters, she was largely underappreciated during the majority of her career. It is good to see a resurgence of interest in her work in recent years. Our exhibition will focus on the sweep of her career and practice, tracing her evolution as she found her mature artistic voice in the late 1960s and 70s,” said Tang Museum Dayton Director and co-curator of the exhibition, Ian Berry. “We will examine Thomas’ work through different series including early expressionist watercolors to vibrant, large paintings featuring what would become her signature bold style.”

“Alma Thomas’ work provides an exciting opportunity for a new collaboration between The Studio Museum and the Tang,” says Lauren Haynes, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection, The Studio Museum in Harlem. “Her work incorporates diverse influences and artistic traditions that make her a pioneering figure in American art, and we are thrilled to galvanize renewed interest in her work and life to introduce her unique vision to a broad public.”



Alma Thomas, *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses*, 1969. Acrylic on canvas. 60 × 50 inches.

Alma Thomas (1891-1978) focused on her artistic career after retiring as a school teacher at the age of 69. She charted her own course as an African-American woman within Washington D.C.'s largely white and male mid-20th-century artistic community. Her own highly personal style expanded upon traditional Abstract Expressionist or Washington Color School practices, and was developed through experimentation with abstraction, color, line, and pattern. She often cited natural elements as inspiration, and her signature style reflects the influences of Henri Matisse, Josef Albers, and Wassily Kandinsky—featuring loosely painted yet meticulously constructed canvases, filled with latticework of bright color creating patterns from negative space.

The exhibition will lead visitors through Thomas' practice, focusing each gallery on a particular way of making. Highlights include:

- *Breeze Rustling Through Fall Flowers*, 1968 (acrylic on canvas, 58 7/8' x 50'); Phillips Collection
- *Wind, Sunshine, and Flowers*, 1968 (acrylic on canvas, 71 3/4' x 51 7/8'); Brooklyn Museum
- *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses*, 1969 (acrylic on canvas, 60' x 50'); National Museum of Women in the Arts
- *Starry Night and the Astronauts*, 1972 (acrylic on canvas, 60' x 53'); Art Institute of Chicago
- *Arboretum Presents White Dogwood*, 1972 (acrylic on canvas, 67 7/8' x 54 7/8'); Smithsonian American Art Museum
- *Hydrangeas Spring Song*, 1976 (acrylic on canvas, 78' x 48'); Philadelphia Museum of Art

A comprehensive catalog will accompany the exhibition, featuring new essays on Alma Thomas' work and legacy. *Alma Thomas* is curated by Ian Berry, Dayton Director of the Tang Museum and Lauren Haynes, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection at The Studio Museum. The show will be on view February 6 – June 5, 2016 at the Tang before traveling to The Studio Museum July 14 – October 30, 2016.

Alma Thomas is organized by the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College and The Studio Museum in Harlem.

About Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891–1978)

Born in Columbus, Georgia, Alma Thomas moved with her family to Washington, D.C. in 1907 to escape Atlanta's erupting racial tensions, and so that she and her three younger sisters could receive a better education. She attended Howard University from 1921 to 1924, and then worked until 1960 as an art teacher at a local junior high school, receiving her master's in art education from Columbia University Teachers College in 1934. In the late 1940s, Thomas participated in Lois Mailou Jones' Washington salons for black artists. Beginning in 1950, Thomas enrolled in American University and was close to Jacob Kainen, with whom she studied, earning her MFA in painting in 1960. In 1972, at the age of 80, Thomas was the first black woman to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and her work was recently chosen to be prominently displayed in the White House.

About the Tang Teaching Museum

The Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College is a pioneer of interdisciplinary exploration and learning. A cultural anchor of New York's Capital Region, the institution's approach has become a model for university art museums across the country—with exhibition programs and series that bring together the visual and performing arts with fields of study as disparate as history, astronomy, and physics. The Tang has one of the most rigorous faculty-engagement initiatives in the nation, the Mellon Seminar, and robust publication and touring exhibition initiatives that extend the institution's reach far beyond its walls. The Tang Teaching Museum's building, designed by architect Antoine Predock, serves as a visual metaphor for the convergence of ideas and exchange the institution catalyzes. The Museum celebrates its 15th anniversary in 2015. More information at <http://tang.skidmore.edu>.

About The Studio Museum in Harlem

Founded in 1968 by a diverse group of artists, community activists and philanthropists, The Studio Museum in Harlem is internationally known for its catalytic role in promoting the work of outstanding artists of African descent. The *Artist-in-Residence* program was one of the institution's founding initiatives and is the reason why "Studio" is in the name. The program has supported more than one hundred emerging artists of African or Latino descent, many of whom who have gone on to highly regarded careers.

The Museum's collection includes nearly two thousand paintings, sculptures, works on paper, prints, photographs, mixed-media works and installations dating from the nineteenth century to the present. The Studio Museum's exhibitions expand the personal, public and academic understanding of modern and contemporary work by artists of African descent. A wide variety of on- and off-site programs brings art alive for audiences of all ages—from toddlers to seniors—while serving as a bridge between artists of African descent and a broad and diverse public. A leader in scholarship about artists of African descent, the Studio Museum publishes *Studio* magazine twice a year and creates award-winning books, exhibition catalogues and brochures. For more information visit studiomuseum.org or call 212.864.4500.

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