

# PAUL THIEBAUD GALLERY

## *William Theophilus Brown* *In The Studio*

January 18 – March 8, 2025

Opening reception: Saturday, January 18th, 3–5pm

Remarks: 3:30pm

Paul Thiebaud Gallery is pleased to announce *William Theophilus Brown: In the Studio*, an exhibition of thirteen paintings on canvas, panel, and paper from the artist's estate, opening on Saturday, January 18, 2025, with a reception from 3-5pm and remarks at 3:30pm. Well known as a member of the Bay Area Figurative Painting movement and for his focus on painting the male form, the exhibition features a selection of Brown's works from across five decades of his career. Sometimes clothed, but more often nude, the selected paintings include single figures in various poses, depictions of studio drawing sessions with a model and other artists, images of Brown's favorite model Jamie Yates, and a self-portrait at the age of 79. The exhibition will be on view through March 8, 2025.

First emerging as a member of the Bay Area Figurative Painting movement in the 1950s, by the end of the 1960s William Theophilus Brown began searching for new subject matter and a fresh style of painting. He found his inspiration in portraiture and the male form, often depicted nude. These subjects and others would be rendered in the more polished, contained painting method that Brown shifted to around 1970 and which would define the latter half of his career. Showcased in the exhibition are two large canvas works, *Portrait of Shawn* (1970) and *Untitled (David M.)* (1981-1996) from a series of large-scale, full length portraits Brown began in 1970. Alongside them are studies of single, two-person, and group compositions of male nudes arranged sitting, standing and lying prone in Brown's studio. Among them are two renderings of his favorite model Jamie Yates, as well as a self-portrait of the artist sitting at his studio table. Brown structures his pictorial arrangements by surrounding each sitter with a backdrop at times as classic as a supplely draped cloth, while in others he has included tables, chairs, and other objects to create more complex formal relationships.

Throughout his career, Brown regularly participated in model drawing sessions with other artists. Two such sessions are depicted in respective works, with the other artists shown either in the fore- or background. This compositional motif has a long history in western art and is one Brown mined regularly in his drawings and paintings. Brown's choice to focus on the male form is one that sets him apart in the history of American and European art, with its long history

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of celebrating the female figure. It was a provocative and revolutionary move in 1970 when he set upon that path.

Born in Moline, Illinois in 1919, William Theophilus Brown earned a Bachelor's degree in Music from Yale University in 1941 and an MFA in painting from the University of California, Berkeley in 1954. From the 1950s until the mid-1970s, Brown he taught painting at several universities, including the University of California, Berkeley, the California School of Fine Arts (later known as the San Francisco Art Institute), Stanford University, University of Kansas at Lawrence, and the University of California, Davis.

In 1957, Brown's paintings were included in the seminal show *Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting*, which codified the Bay Area Figurative movement as revolutionary in its pushing back at the dominance of Abstract Expressionism then reigning in the art world. Curated by Paul Mills at the Oakland Art Museum, the exhibition included the works of David Park, Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn, Paul Wonner, Bruce McGaw, Joseph Brooks, Robert Downs, Robert Qualters, Walter Snelgrove, Henry Villierme, and James Weeks. The show later travelled to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Dayton Art Institute, and the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

In 2023, The Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, CA organized *Breaking the Rules: Paul Wonner and William Theophilus Brown*, the first full career retrospective for Brown and his life partner Paul Wonner. The exhibition later travelled to the Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, CA and the Dixon Gallery and Gardens in Memphis, TN.

William Theophilus Brown's paintings, drawings, and prints have been exhibited extensively across the United States and can be found in numerous private and public collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian American Art Museum; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Oakland Museum of California; Crocker Art Museum; San Jose Museum of Art; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Art Centre at Stanford University; Anderson Collection at Stanford University; and di Rosa Centre for Contemporary Art, among many others. William Theophilus Brown died in San Francisco, CA in 2012 at the age of 93.

All sales of works from the Estate benefit The Paul Wonner and William Theophilus Brown Endowment Fund at the Crocker Art Museum, which supports projects relating to emerging artists or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI+) artists. Proceeds go to the acquisition, care, exhibition, scholarship, and publication of art by emerging and LGBTQI+ artists, along with related public programs.

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