

PAUL THIEBAUD GALLERY

Paul Wonner *A Bountiful Feast*

January 18 – March 8, 2025

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

Remarks: 3:30pm

Paul Thiebaud Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *Paul Wonner: A Bountiful Feast* on Saturday, January 18th from 3-5pm, with remarks at 3:30pm. On view from the artist's estate will be twelve paintings on paper from Wonner's heralded series of still lifes from the second half of his career. Full of produce, cut flowers, and other everyday objects arranged on broad flat surfaces, Wonner's works celebrate the common objects of contemporary life through his modern reinterpretation of the historic genre of the still life. The exhibition will be on view through March 8, 2025.

Using vivid colors and complex compositional arrangements, Paul Wonner took his inspiration for this series from 17th and 18th century Dutch still life paintings. In doing so, however, Wonner turned the traditional notions about the appearance and meaning of a still life completely on their head. Through Wonner's artistic lens, the perspectival plane has been tilted up to exaggerate the foreground, seemingly unrelated objects are arranged singularly across the composition, and the elements of story telling and implicit meaning usually associated with the genre have been removed. Of particular note is Wonner's use of pattern in the fabrics and tea towels he employs to create visual textures and provide structure for the other objects to be placed on.

Originating in the mid-1970s, Wonner's still lifes afforded an important boost to his career at a time when the art world was returning to realism as an accepted and even lauded mode of painting. With the help of Philip Guston, the emergence of the "new realism" in the mid-1970s came at a time when the course of modern art had reached an apogee through minimalism and conceptualism, leaving room for something as timeless as the realistic image to be considered "new" again.

Born in Tucson, Arizona, Paul Wonner (1920-2008) first earned a Bachelor's degree in Art Education from the California College of Arts and Crafts (now California College of the Arts) in 1941, and later studied at the Art Students League and Subjects of the Artist School in New York. He then went on to earn both a BA (1952) and an MFA (1953) in Art from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Master's of Library Science from UC Berkeley in 1956.

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Wonner first became known as a painter for his role as a member of the Bay Area Figurative Painting movement during the 1950s and early 1960s, which fought back against the dominance of Abstract Expressionism at that time. His works were included in the seminal show *Contemporary Bay Area Figurative Painting*, which was curated by Paul Mills at the Oakland Art Museum in 1957 and also included the works of David Park, Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn, William Theophilus Brown, 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 Wonner and his life partner William Theophilus Brown. The exhibition later travelled to the Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, CA and the Dixon Gallery and Gardens in Memphis, TN.

Over the course of his career, Paul Wonner taught art at colleges, universities, and art centers across California, including University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); Otis Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design); UC Santa Barbara; Art Center College of Design; California State University, Long Beach; UC Davis; the Davis Art Center; and the Laguna Beach School of Art. He also taught at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

Wonner also received awards and accolades throughout his life, including the 1953 Anne Bremer Prize in Art from the California School of Fine Arts (later known as the San Francisco Art Institute); The 1954 Walter Haas Award for promising young artists from the San Francisco Museum of Art (now SFMOMA); second prize at the Fifth Annual Painting and Sculpture Exhibition from the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1955; prize at the 1958 Seventy-Seventh Annual Painting and Sculpture Exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association; First place (later rescinded) at the 1960 Los Angeles All-City Art Festival; and the 2004 Elder Artist of the Year Award, conferred by Eldergivers of Napa County in collaboration with di Rosa Preserve: Art and Nature, Napa, CA.

Paul Wonner's works have been exhibited extensively across the United States and internationally, and can be found in the numerous public and private collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, NY; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Whitney Museum of American Art; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Smithsonian American Art Museum, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Fine Arts Boston; Orange County Museum of Art; Santa Barbara Museum of Art; Oakland

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Museum of California; Crocker Art Museum; San Jose Museum of Art; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University; Anderson Collection at Stanford University; and the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, CA, among many others.

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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