

MILDRED THOMPSON

Throughlines: Assemblages and Works on Paper from the 1960s to the 1990s

February 18 – March 27, 2021

Opening Thursday, February 18, 2021, 10:00am – 6:00pm



Mildred
Thompson, *Stele*,
c. 1963

Galerie Lelong & Co., New York, is pleased to present *Throughlines: Assemblages and Works on Paper from the 1960s to the 1990s*, our second solo exhibition of works by Mildred Thompson and the late artist's first presentation of this body of work in New York. A selected survey of the artist's sculptural practice over four decades, *Throughlines* begins at the moment of Thompson's first mature body of work. Her *Wood Pictures* began in New York and further developed in Düren, Germany during Thompson's self-imposed exile. Thompson's foray in experimenting with wood continued throughout her life and informed the development of her abstract language, as evinced in her sculptures, works on paper, and paintings.

After receiving early recognition during her studies in the US and Germany, Thompson returned to New York in 1961, eager to begin her professional practice. However, her encounters with racism and sexism led her to return to Europe three years later. Over the next 13 years, she worked and participated in notable museum and gallery presentations in Aachen, Cologne, and Düren in Germany as well as in France. Thompson's intimate reliefs of wood and found material soon evolved to two and three-dimensional collages, including elegantly staged outdoor installations of wood assemblages nailed to trees. For the artist, the material's texture, shape, and form gave Thompson multiple entry points to create metaphorical connections across history and memory, individuality and universality. Some works, such as *Stele*, c.1963, reveal Thompson's early use of color in her practice.

Thompson continued to investigate her body of work in wood during her return to the US in the late 1970s. The minimalist works continued her exploration with found and manipulated wood, yet were more often made in a consistently larger scale than her earlier assemblages. Further pushing the medium, Thompson began experimenting more widely in three dimensions. Simultaneously in the 1990s, Thompson began her *Music of the Spheres* paintings which endeavored to make visible the sound and vibrational patterns found in planetary orbits and astrophysics. The freestanding wood works on view created during this period resemble the inner bodies of pianos and violins hidden from the musician's eye, their curves and linearities eliciting an emotional tone.

Thompson's works on paper reveal a continuum in her practice through an inquiry of spatial structures. Created in the 1970s, Thompson sought to represent both physical and cosmological spaces in her "architectural studies" etchings, as well as in her silkscreen prints on paper where segmented forms in warm tones of burnt orange, mustard, violet, and forest green parallel the compositions and tonality of her *Wood Pictures*.

For press enquiries, please contact Grace Hong, 212.315.0470 or grace@galerielelong.com.

In a period when African American artists primarily worked in figuration and representation, Thompson championed a dynamic language of abstraction. The artist's early experimentation in creating complex juxtapositions laid the groundwork for her signature style—from her *Wood Pictures* of the 60s to the vibrant paintings of the 90s for which she became known.

About the Artist

In a prolific career spanning over four decades, Mildred Thompson created paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures using a distinctly unique language of abstraction. Thompson's paintings and works on paper are characterized by energetic mark-making, profound understanding of color, and complex compositions that absorb the viewer. She was interested in physics and astronomy and through her own interpretation, sought to visually represent scientific theories and systems that are invisible to the eye. Thompson's work has received increasing institutional attention in recent years as understandings of abstraction shift to become more inclusive to women artists of color.

Thompson's work was recently featured in the group exhibition *Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today*, which travelled from the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC, and Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida. In 2019, Spelman College Museum of Fine Art presented a solo exhibition of her work entitled *Mildred Thompson: The Atlanta Years, 1986-2003*. In 2018, her *Wood Pictures* were featured in a solo presentation, *Mildred Thompson: Against the Grain*, at the New Orleans Museum of Art, as well as in the 10th Berlin Biennale. In 2016, the solo exhibition *Mildred Thompson: Resonance, Selected Works from the 1990s* was presented at the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia. Thompson's work can be found in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana; and Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., among other institutions.

Alongside her artistic practice, Thompson also explored creative avenues as a writer, poet, musician, and professor. She served as associate editor of ART PAPERS from 1989 to 1997 and performed with her partner Donna Jackson under the name of WedoBLUES.

Thompson was born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1936, and died in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2003. The [Mildred Thompson Estate](#) is curated by Melissa Messina.

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