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Robert Fishko, *Director*

Michael C. Thorpe

(b. 1993)

American

Michael C. Thorpe describes himself as a painter working in fabric and thread upon a foundation of drawing which he views as the evolved practice of mark making akin to the stitches of quilt making. Thorpe challenges himself to work with every mark he makes – “no erasing, no regrets,” he says. His compositions are born of long-term projects in which Thorpe is engaged – quilted paintings and works on paper that explore his surroundings, abstraction, letters and words as subjects; sculptural constructions created by combining found objects and quilting debris; and performance pieces emerging from the dedication to an idea. The result is a figurative and conceptual art that is as ingenious as it is uniquely contemporary.

Thorpe tells stories about his world in works composed with colorful geometric fabric shapes and textures made of stitched lines. Thorpe’s painterly quilts transport us into the richly diverse community he inhabits – recalling his time playing competitive basketball, his friends, family, inspirational figures – and endeavor to prompt a dialogue between people from all walks of life. In his art, Thorpe presents communities that live together harmoniously and with a generosity of spirit.



Thorpe came to quilting as an artistic vehicle connecting him to his bi-racial background. Quilting is a skill passed on intergenerationally by the matriarchs of Thorpe’s family who were part of the predominantly white quilting community in New England. Thorpe’s subsequent discovery of the Gee’s Bend community of African American women quilters in Alabama offered the Artist deeper personal meaning in his chosen medium and a connection to his African American lineage.

Initially, Thorpe’s compositions and artistic practice drew inspiration from Jean-Michel Basquiat’s forms, Romare Bearden’s experimental collages and Jacob Lawrence’s abstracted depictions of

black life. His interest in paring down form to a minimum and in using color as a fundamental descriptive element draws parallels to the work of Henri Matisse and David Hockney. Recently, Thorpe has studied the artistic practice of Martin Kippenberger, the German artist well known for his prolific output in a wide variety of media and stylistic approaches and to which Thorpe feels a close connection, as well as the Surrealist methodology of art-making known as automatism in which the artist suppresses conscious control over the making process allowing the unconscious mind to direct.

Today, Thorpe sees himself as a conceptual artist whose compositions emerge through the practice of automatism. Intuition, unleashing the subconscious with the belief of “first thought best thought,” spontaneity, and acceptance are quintessential to Thorpe’s approach to artmaking.

Michael C. Thorpe was raised in Newton, MA and earned his BA from Emerson College in Boston, MA where he studied photojournalism. Before his first solo exhibition, Thorpe attracted the attention of NPR, who wrote an article about his story and dedication to creating art in the medium of quilting. Press articles about Michael C. Thorpe have been published in *Artscope Magazine*, *Boston Art Review*, *The Boston Globe*, *CNN Style*, *Cultured Magazine*, *Howl*, and *PBS*, among others. Thorpe was recently featured in a Dove Men + Care television commercial and he participated in a collaboration with Nike and the NBA for the league’s 75th anniversary.

Works by Michael C. Thorpe have been added to the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and numerous private collections around the country. Thorpe was included in *Storied Strings: The Guitar in American Art*, an exhibition organized by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, that opened in October 2022 and later traveled to the Frist Art Museum in Nashville. Thorpe’s work was also included in *Fabric of a Nation: American Quilt Stories*, organized and first presented at the MFA Boston in 2021 and then at the Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, CA through March 2023. In the Spring of 2023, the Paul R. Jones Museum, University of Alabama presented a solo museum exhibition, *Michael C. Thorpe: Nonsensical Formalism*. Recently, Thorpe’s work was included in *Birds in Art*, organized by the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, WI. Michael C. Thorpe will have one person exhibitions in 2024 at four museums in four states - California Heritage Museum (Santa Monica, CA), The Delaware Contemporary (Wilmington, DE), Fuller Craft Museum (Brockton, MA), and Hickory Museum of Art (Hickory, NC).