

# BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Robert Colescott**

### **Two Drawing Sweets:**

**"Robert's Complete History of World Art" (1979) and "The Girls of the Golden West" (1980)**

**Blum & Poe, Los Angeles**

**January 23–March 6, 2021**

December 14, 2020, Los Angeles—Blum & Poe is pleased to present a solo exhibition of never before exhibited works on paper by the late artist Robert Colescott. Presenting two series respectively dating back to 1979 and 1980, the exhibition showcases the artist's well-established satirical and critical approach to cultural clichés, racial stereotypes, and tropes of beauty and the gaze.

By the mid-1970s, Colescott had created the works with which he achieved a national reputation. These paintings used the tools of parody and appropriation to remake art historical masterpieces, while satirizing and deconstructing pervasive racist attitudes. In 1979, Colescott created a series of drawings that satirized art history *itself*. Art history as an academic discipline came into being during the nineteenth century, and the earliest professional art historians viewed their primary task as similar to that of their colleagues in the academy, the natural scientists. Classification was the order of the day. Aesthetics gave way to taxonomy, to a certain extent. Art history became a history of movements, and artists became something less than individuals. The tendency of scholars and art historians to categorize artists only intensified during the twentieth century, which meant that any beginning student of art history would be taught that it is a procession of movements leading logically from one to the next, in an inevitable flow of progress. For an uncompromising individualist like Colescott, the reduction of art to broad categories or "isms" presented him with an irresistible target for satire.

The first of the twenty works of this Art History series on view at Blum & Poe Los Angeles, *ROBERT'S complete HiSTORY of WORLD ART* (1979), announces that these drawings present his personal, idiosyncratic version of the subject at hand. These works are gently mocking rather than savagely critical, and injected with a vaudeville flavor. The first four drawings represent early art historical periods, and each is portrayed by a statuesque woman wearing sexy lingerie and smoking a cigarette. These drawings are loaded with references—one symbolizing Egyptian art which had a decisive influence on the artist due to his time in Cairo in the mid-1960s; another represents Rome, borrowing the figure's pose from a famous ancient sculpture representing the death of a Trojan priest, Laocoön. Another, a parody of a medieval illuminated manuscript, turns the Christian ethos of asceticism and denial on its head by depicting naked figures engaging in various sexual activities.

The second series on view, *The Girls of the Golden West*, was created a year after the Art History drawings in 1980. Colescott had returned to the Bay Area in 1970 after having lived elsewhere for almost two decades, and it was during this time that the artist began a voyage into his past.

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Colescott takes on the social conditioning of the American '30s and '40s, exploring his own exposure to popular culture especially through advertisements. Colescott riffs on the sexually suggestive cowgirl persona employed in the commercial imagery of his youth—seductive, nostalgic illusions that insinuated one could still partake of the adventures of the frontier. Employing the narrative devices often found in his paintings such as the dream sequence, the cut-away, and the montage, Colescott depicts each state of the West with a version of this cowgirl motif, parsing the reality of the American dream. Most of the drawings in this series come across as a theatrical experience, as their protagonists act out various scenarios typical of old Westerns. One cowgirl personifying the state of Colorado wears a breathing device as she is about to descend into a mine. Another woman representing the Dakota territory is an ominous vision clad entirely in leather, while the figure representing the state of Wyoming is a mirage of sky and clouds in female form. At the end of a typical Western film, the hero rides off into the sunset, but perhaps in this case, she simply dissolves into the sky.

With gratitude to Matthew Weseley, independent art historian and co-curator of the traveling retrospective exhibition *Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott*, who generously contributed original research and scholarship on these two bodies of work, vital to this exhibition and its correlating press release.

**Robert Colescott** (b. 1925, Oakland, CA; d. 2009, Tucson, AZ) was honored as the first African American artist to represent the United States with a solo exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 1997. His work is currently the subject of a traveling retrospective curated by Lowery Stokes Sims and Matthew Weseley that began at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH in 2019; traveling to Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR; Sarasota Art Museum, Sarasota, FL; and Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL; accompanied by a comprehensive monograph published by Rizzoli Electa. Colescott's work is represented in public collections internationally, in such notable institutions as the Akron Art Museum, Akron, OH; American Research Center in Egypt, Alexandria, VA; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY; California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI; de Young Museum, San Francisco, CA; Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, WA; High Museum of Art, Atlanta GA; Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; New Museum, New York, NY; Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA; Pinault Collection, Paris, France; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; among many more.

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## About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Timothy Blum and Jeffrey Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles, together resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-six-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages that run between emerging and established practices, and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000 square foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since held museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Joan Kee, Mika Yoshitake, Sofia Gotti, and Alison M. Gingeras.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in tandem with an expansive program of exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. Blum & Poe's own publishing division focuses on sharing aspects of its program via original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, and artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.

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