

Mildred Thompson

L'Appel de la Lumière

10 May – 13 July 2023

Opening on Wednesday 10 May at 6 p.m.

13 rue de Téhéran
75008 Paris



Radiation Explorations 8, 1994

Oil on canvas, 222 x 139,5 cm

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L'Appel de la Lumière (The Call of the Light) presents paintings, assemblages, and works on paper by African American artist Mildred Thompson (1936-2003) who lived and worked in Germany and France from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. An artist who utilized a modernist visual language to interpret natural and cosmic phenomena, this exhibition celebrates Thompson's representations of light and energy, charting early influences from her time living and working in Paris in the mid-1980s to later works created upon her return to the United States. Paying homage to the "city of light" that called Thompson to Paris as a mid-career artist, Thompson's time in Paris was critical to the development of her unique visual vocabulary.

For more than five years in Paris, Thompson furthered her formal and conceptual artistic investigations. This included a remarkable ability to interpret color found in the world around her in imaginative atmospheric scapes. The exhibition takes its title from two intimately scaled 1982 collages Thompson made in Paris. The bright palettes and improvisational compositions are an indicative precursor to much of the work she created in the following two decades. *L'Appel de la Lumière* features several works on paper from the artist's time in Paris and pieces created shortly after her departure from France. Aqueous gouaches and subtle prismatic color pencil drawings demonstrate Thompson's constant personal interpretation of the universe. Also on view in the first gallery is a piece (c. 1975) from Thompson's renowned body of work in wood.

In the second gallery dynamic pastels, watercolors, and paintings from the 1990s and 2000s are characterized by energetic mark-making, profound understanding of color, and complex compositions. Works from two of her significant painting series – *Radiation Explorations* and *Advancing Impulses* – are on view and demonstrate Thompson's signature approach to abstraction. This work has received increased institutional attention in recent years as understandings of abstraction shift to become more inclusive of women artists of color.

Mildred Thompson was born in 1936 in Jacksonville, Florida, and died in 2003 in Atlanta, Georgia. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Howard University in Washington, DC in 1957, under the tutelage and mentorship of the pioneering African American art historian James A. Porter. Recently her work has been included in significant group exhibitions including *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; *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture and the Sonic Impulse*, which traveled from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, Colorado; and *Doro Olowu: Seeing Chicago* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois. 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. Thompson's work can be found in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Virginia; Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge Massachusetts; and Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., among other institutions.

Press images:



Advancing Impulses, 1997
Oil on vinyl, 127 x 127 cm
© The Estate of Mildred Thompson /
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Sans titre, 2003
Pastel on paper, 65 x 50 cm
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