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The Anansean World of Robert Colescott
Curated by Umar Rashid

BLUM Los Angeles
April 5–May 17, 2025

Saturday, April 5

4pm: Public conversation with Sandra Jackson-Dumont and Umar Rashid, moderated by JJ Strawn

5–7pm: Opening reception

March 17, 2025, Los Angeles, CA—BLUM is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings and drawings by the late artist Robert Colescott, curated by Los Angeles–based artist Umar Rashid. Rashid frames this presentation of work—ranging five decades—as an entry point into *The Anansean World of Robert Colescott*, a parallel universe that violates principles of social and natural order, blithely disrupting what once was and then reestablishing it on a new basis.

In the time of the ancient deities, the trickster was the only one who could successfully navigate the complex and morally fraught universe of power-hungry, vengeful, wickedly jealous, and ambivalent gods, as well as their equally maligned human counterparts. One can only imagine the path of Thoth, Hermes, Coyote, Dionysus, Loki, Prometheus, and the original spider-man, Ananse. Although there are far more “tricksters” woven into our collective human consciousness throughout time, I have kept the list relatively short so that I may get to the point. Despite being tasked with delivering various decrees on this and that, the messengers of the gods of old almost always had a penchant for mischief, high drama, and outright rebellion. And despite these “faults,” they managed to survive the wrath of their omnipotent masters and formed a complex relationship with their painfully mortal audience. Their legacy as “middle management” and mere couriers left an indelible mark on their human charges. With the death of the old pantheon, humanity’s hubristic and equally chaotic reign, produced its own gods, monsters, and tricksters, bringing to mind the old saying, “As above, so below.”

And thus, we enter the world of Robert Colescott, grand trickster of the ages. The appellation is incredibly apt in terms of his artistic practice, yet he was not born thus but forged through the crucible of being an African American fine artist in a time of limited opportunity for those like him and the ideas he sought to bring forth in a postindustrial world, burdened by draconian racial awareness, social lobotomization, and post-imperial, imperial war machinations. This is mid-twentieth-century America, replete with all the trappings of Mount Olympus at its zenith.

—Umar Rashid

Robert Colescott (b. 1925, Oakland, CA; d. 2009, Tucson, AZ) was a proud instigator who, over a nearly six-decade painting career, fearlessly tackled subjects of social and racial inequality, class structure, sex, and the human condition through his uniquely rhythmic and often manic style of figuration. His distinctive works, while not easily placed within any one specific school of painting, share elements of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, “Bad” Painting, Renaissance Painting, Neo-Expressionism, and Surrealism. A retrospective curated by Lowery Stokes Sims and Matthew Weseley,

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opened at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH, in 2019, and later traveled to the Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR; Sarasota Art Museum, Sarasota, FL; Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL; and New Museum, New York, NY. The exhibition was accompanied by a comprehensive monograph on the artist's life and work, published by Rizzoli Electa.

Colescott's work is represented in public collections internationally, in such notable institutions as the Akron Art Museum, Akron, OH; Art Bridges Foundation, Bentonville, AR; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY; BY ART MATTERS, Hangzhou, China; California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Crocker Museum of Art, Sacramento, CA; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Delaware Museum of Art, Wilmington, DE; Denver Museum of Art, Denver, CO; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI; de Young Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, Los Angeles, CA; Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, UC Davis, CA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA; Portland Museum of Art, Portland, OR; Pinault Collection, Paris, France; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; 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.

Umar Rashid (b. 1976, Chicago, IL) creates paintings, drawings, and sculptures that chronicle the grand historical fiction of the Frenglish Empire (1648–1880) a conceptual world he has been developing for over seventeen years. Each work represents a frozen moment from this parallel history, often recalling fraught real-world narratives—both canonized and marginalized—with familiar signifiers and iconographies. Rashid's work channels the visual lexicons of hip hop, ancient and modern pop culture, gang and prison life, and revolutionary movements throughout time. Rashid's work is represented in the public collections of the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY; Jorge Pérez Collection, Miami, FL; Mount Holyoke Art Museum, South Hadley, MA; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV; Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, Clinton, NY; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT; and the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town, South Africa, among others.

About BLUM

BLUM represents more than sixty artists and estates from twenty countries worldwide, nurturing a diverse roster of artists at all stages of their practices with a range of global perspectives. Originally opened as Blum & Poe in Santa Monica in 1994, the gallery has been a pioneer in its early commitment to Los Angeles as an international arts capital.

The gallery has been acclaimed for its groundbreaking work in championing international artists of postwar and contemporary movements, such as CoBrA, Dansaekhwa, Mono-ha, and Superflat, and for organizing museum-caliber solo presentations and historical survey exhibitions across its spaces in Los Angeles, Tokyo, and New York. Often partnering with celebrated curators and scholars such as Cecilia

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Alemaní, Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake, the gallery has produced large-scale exhibitions focusing on the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of the 1980s and 1990s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020); and a survey of portraiture through a democratic and humanist lens (2023); among others.

BLUM's wide-reaching program includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, video series, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. BLUM Books, the gallery's publishing division, democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books.

Across the three global locations, BLUM prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, it was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. BLUM is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in its physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

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