

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Robert Colescott

**Blum & Poe, New York
February 27-April 13, 2019**

Blum & Poe is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings and drawings by Robert Colescott. This is the first New York exhibition for Colescott since his passing in 2009. Focusing on recurring themes explored in the 1970s, the exhibition highlights fraught subject matter such as the peeping Tom, sex work, the caricature of the black crow as a stand-in for the artist, miscegenation, and colonialism.

In one gallery we encounter numerous depictions of black crows—for Colescott, the bird acts as a stand-in for both himself as well as a representation of a dark facet of American history (Jim Crow). The disturbing use of blackface, the popularity of minstrel shows, and golden-era Hollywood's illustration of the African American experience are satirized in this group of work. In *Old Crow - Artiste*, 1978, Colescott inserts himself into the composition as the crow—his own experience and racial identity as a prompt for this cultural critique offered in soft-hued caricatures. In another suite, we encounter the peeping Tom, often with Black men as the perpetrators, entering the window of white women, the victims. With incredible detail—the sheen of the graphite satin sheets, a lampshade casting triangular light fields that divide the picture plane—Colescott focuses on the troublesome territory of American race relations, and the false narratives that prompted fear and violence in the name of retaliation.

In an adjacent room, works explore the imagery of misogyny and explicit female objectification. Portraits of women are depicted from various walks of life—a sex worker, a beauty queen, an athlete—with storyboards of private scenes of sexual exchange that float sometimes hauntingly in the background. Frames present intimate power dynamics between men and women, with variously unwanted or violent advances, and in one case captioned with trivializing language. In a final suite, Colescott fixes on the colonial myth of the “dark continent” of Africa, focusing on the fictional character Tarzan as a universally recognized entry point into this problematic territory as perpetrated by the Hollywood film industry. Colescott pulls the caricatures and dehumanizing racist tropes from this legend to probe its misuse of evolutionary theory as justification for racist conclusions. Colescott plucks from reality painful cultural truths and visually casts them in theatrical, humorous scenes of bright color and whimsy, drawing in the viewer in order to deliver what can be an unpleasant message to process. This maneuver, which became the fulcrum of Colescott's aesthetic and practice, he called “the one-two punch.”

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. He will be the subject of a traveling retrospective curated by Lowery Stokes Sims beginning at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH in late 2019, 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, 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 Fine Arts Museums of San

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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.