

PATRON

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ART & DESIGN ISSUE

STACY JACOBSEN REVIVES A HOME
DAVID CADWALLADER & SCOTT MAREK TEAM UP
THOMA FOUNDATION INSPIRES



FRIDA FEVER AT THE DMA
HUGH HAYDEN AT THE NASHER



This page: Carl and Marilyn Thoma next to Morris Louis, *Number 2-07*, 1961, Magna acrylic on canvas; this page and opposite: Yinka Shonibare CBE, *Air Kid (Boy)*, 2020, fiberglass mannequin, Dutch wax, printed cotton textile, globe, brass, steel base plate, umbrella.

ENRICHING FOUNDATION

MARILYNN AND CARL THOMA BELIEVE THAT COMMUNITY ACCESS IS AS ESSENTIAL AS STEWARDSHIP OF THEIR EXTRAORDINARY ART COLLECTION.

BY NANCY COHEN ISRAEL
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN SMITH



The industrial elevator doors open onto Yinka Shonibare CBE's life-sized sculpture, *Air Kid (Boy)*, which seemingly staggers against rain and wind. The open umbrella points directly to Morris Louis' quiet canvas, *Number 2-07*. Welcome to the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation headquarters and exhibition space. Opened in 2023 and spanning 9,300 square feet, the space brims with a portion of the Thomas' collection of over 1,700 objects that spans four diverse collections including postwar, art of the Spanish Americas, digital and electronic media, and contemporary Japanese bamboo, which coexist beautifully.

Through the Thomas' twined commitments to art and education, the foundation maintains a robust loan program to exhibitions around the world. They are particularly keen to loan to regional institutions that may not otherwise have the opportunity to present audiences with this caliber of work. "Buying art brings with it a responsibility. You have an obligation to respect the artist, the work, and the community. Hoarding is not a positive virtue for any of us," Carl offers. Beyond the objects, the foundation is committed to providing grants for continuing scholarship.

The foundation is equally dedicated to expanding opportunities for individual students. The Thoma Scholarship Program specifically targets students from rural communities in Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. "We're trying to find communities that are under-supported. The rural environment is about seven percent of the population of the United States yet they only receive three percent of the philanthropic dollars, so we're trying to move that needle



Above: Unidentified artist, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, late 17th-century, oil and gold on canvas; unidentified artist, *Our Lady of Remedies of La Paz*, 18th century, oil and gold on canvas; unidentified artist, *Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity*, 18th century, oil and gold on canvas; unidentified artist, *The Nursing Madonna*, 18th century, possibly c. 1700-1730, oil and gold on canvas. Below: unidentified artist, *Mater Dolorosa*, 18th century, oil and gold on canvas; Juan Francisco de Rosa (active c. 1735-1771), *Saint Toribius of Mogrovejo, Saint Michael the Archangel and Saint Rose of Lima*, after 1749, tempera and gold on parchment; unidentified artist, *Saint Francis of Assisi Interceding for Mankind*, 18th century, oil on panel; Joseph Antonio Jiménez, *The Divine Shepherdess*, c. 1780, oil on canvas.



Clockwise from above left: Yinka Shonibare CBE, *Abstract Spiritual III*, 2023, patchwork, appliqué, embroidery, and Dutch wax printed cotton textile quilt work; Higashi Kiyokazu, *Awakening*, 2002, madake and rattan; Hideaki Honma, *Flowing Pattern*, 2016, madake, nemagari, rattan; Tanabe Chikuunsai IV, *Falling Star*, 2012, madake, rattan; Carlos Rojas, *Untitled*, (from the series *Horizontes*), 1976, mixed media on canvas; Honma Koichi, *Spirale*, 2021, lacquer, bamboo branches; Thomas Downing, *Untitled*, 1958-59, acrylic on canvas; Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square: Gobelín*, 1962, oil on Masonite; Tanabe Chikuunsai IV, *Connection-Life*, 2012, torachikul.



Leo Villareal, *Double Scramble*, 2013, generative custom software (color, silent), LEDs, computer, circuitry, painted wood, Plexiglas; McArthur Binion, *Modern: Ancient: Brown*, 2021, ink, oil paint stick, paper on board.

slightly,” Carl explains. The foundation also works with students on reservations to provide computers with internet access as well as secondary training, enabling students to continue their education through college.

While the Thomas are hands-on collectors, they are aided in their work by a cross-country team that includes New York-based senior advisor and curator at large Kathleen Forde, and locally by collections manager Meagan Robson and associate curator of art of the Spanish Americas, Verónica Muñoz-Nájar, among others.

Carl, a New Mexico native, focused the couple’s earliest collecting forays in the 1970s on the Taos Society of Artists and the California impressionists. An interest in Indigenous artists continues, with works by Cara Romero, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, and Jeffrey Gibson, who is representing the US at this year’s Venice Biennale.

By the 1980s, their interest expanded to include modern and contemporary painting, particularly by the Washington Color School. As Carl notes, at the time their work had fallen out of favor, making it easier to collect. In addition to the painting by Louis, the collection includes artists such as Gene Davis, Kenneth Noland, and the founder of the movement, Helen Frankenthaler. As Robson explains, “She is the reason why this group of men decided to do what they do. The Thomas didn’t want to tell the story of the Washington Color School without telling the story of the woman who started it.”

In the 1990s, a gallery encounter with viceregal paintings inspired Marilynn to begin collecting art of the Spanish Americas. Since her friends Jan and Fred Mayer focused their viceregal collecting on Mexico, she opted to concentrate on objects from South America. Having traveled extensively with the Mayers, she



Top: Spencer Finch, *Optical Study (red/blue/violet)*, 2022, alkyd paint on PET discs mounted on plastic panels on Sintra; Anne Truitt, *Sun Flower*, 1971/84, acrylic on wood; Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Thermal Drift*, 2022, generative custom software (color, silent), thermal camera, computer, monitor. Below, left: Ragnar Kjartansson, *Burning House*, 2015, single-channel digital video (color, sound), monitor; right: Ragnar Kjartansson, *Dog and Clock*, 2015, single-channel digital video (color, sound), monitor.



says, “These fascinating expeditions presented not only a unique opportunity to discover extraordinary artworks, but also allowed us to immerse ourselves in the richness of the region’s history, which was shaped by a fusion of Indigenous heritage, European culture, and the Catholic Church.”

This collection of 230 objects is noteworthy, according to Muñoz-Nájar, considering the difficulty of finding artworks with a clean provenance. Largely religiously focused, they also reflect the transfer of skills between cultures. “The Inca didn’t paint much, but they were really good in metallurgy, so they were transferring the technique and capacities from the art of metallurgy and working with gold, copper, and silver in painting,” Muñoz-Nájar explains, adding, “Their art was really abstract and focused on weaving and creating metal pieces. But it wasn’t realistic or naturalistic, so when the Spanish arrived, they trained them to paint in this capacity.”

In 2009, Carl’s interest in innovation led him to digital and electronic media. Leo Villareal’s *Big Bang* was the first acquisition in this continuously growing collection of over 500 objects, including several by Villareal. As Robson notes of his *Double Scramble*, “Villareal is creating this homage to Frank Stella and adding in contemporary techniques with LEDs, which was something that struck Carl.” Contemporary makers such as Villareal, she adds, honor the ideas conjured by these earlier artists and use them as a springboard to make something completely new.

The collection is seamlessly integrated into the Thomas’ Uptown office spaces. In a conference room, for example, Ragnar Kjartansson’s *Dog and Clock* and *Burning House*, two video sequences from *Scenes from Western Culture*, are projected onto screens that do double duty for videoconferencing.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s *Thermal Drift* and studio DRIFT’s *Coded*



Helen Frankenthaler, *White Makes Four*, 1966, acrylic on canvas.



Nature 1-3.3 are among several interactive works. Both incorporate trackers that capture the movement of the viewer. Lozano-Hemmer's work, Robson explains, deals with ideas of surveillance and safety. Conversely, *Coded Nature* "brings a sense of play back into the art," she says, adding that its joyful nature is particularly appealing to the Thomas. Daniel Canogar's *Billow I* is another responsive work. Drawing images from news feeds, it then translates them into a new kind of color field exploration, with the intensity of hues changing according to the relevance of headlines.

In 2011, the Thomas began collecting contemporary, Japanese, nonfunctional bamboo art. They have a unique pipeline, as their daughter, Margo Thoma, owns TAI Modern, a Santa Fe gallery dedicated to promoting this art form throughout the United States. Elegant works, such as Honma Koichi's *Spirale*, defy conventional ideas of bamboo weaving. "We're seeing the most contemporary versions of these really old techniques," Robson says.

Finally, Carl concludes, "As we say, we have an obligation to share this art. We don't really even own it; we're just caregivers of it for our period of time. The reason you buy art is because you're passionate about it and you want to share it with others. That has become a foundation of what we do." **P**



Jason Salavon, *Emblem (Apocalypse Now)*, 2004, digital chromogenic print on paper; Shōno Tokuzō, *Tailin (detail)*, 2014, madake, rattan.



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, *Paper Dolls for a Post-Columbian World*, 2021, acrylic, amber shellac, aluminum, and paper on wood; Ken'ichi Nagakura, (1952-2018), *Woman*, 2015 Madake, rattan, urushi, powdered polishing stone, clay; DRIFT (formed 2007) Lonneke Gordijn (1980–), and Ralph Nauta (1978–), *Coded Nature 1-3.3*, 2022, three monitors, depth sensor, computer.



Jennifer Steinkamp, *Mike Kelley 10*, 2007, generative custom software animation (color, silent), computer, projector.