

Richard C. Thompson (1945-2021)

By Carol Ann Raphael

Richard Thompson was an artist and teacher (and amateur fisherman) who grew up on a family farm near Dayton, Oregon, located eponymously on Thompson Road. Though his professional life took him to the Southwest, Texas, the East Coast, and beyond, he maintained a painting studio on his family homestead for thirty years and returned there fulltime in retirement, where he painted and continued to exhibit his work.

Thompson was born in 1945 to second-generation farmers. After graduating high school in 1963, Thompson enrolled in Oregon State University to study forestry, but instead discovered his love of the visual arts. He then moved to Albuquerque to continue his painting studies at the University of New Mexico where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in Fine Arts. Not long after, he emerged on the national art scene.

In 1975, Thompson was invited to participate in the prestigious Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City and then again in 1981. In 1978 he received an individual fellowship in painting from the National Endowment for the Arts. Numerous other accolades followed as Thompson exhibited his paintings widely in galleries and museums throughout the United States and abroad, in group shows and solo exhibitions. The William Campbell Gallery in Fort Worth has represented Thompson since 1984 and his estate since his death in 2021.

Thompson's unique style of painting was informed by his roots in and love of the Oregon countryside. With colorful, simplified shapes and precise compositions, he captured the charms and characteristic features of the natural world. Barns, plowed fields, trees, clouds in the sky, flowers, and insects populate Thompson's canvases. Thompson was also an avid fisherman, and bodies of water often replace the agricultural patchwork as settings for his paintings.

Stylistically, Thompson's artwork tends to counter the popular trends of his time. In a period when abstraction was popular, Thompson painted images which he rendered in a unique flat, though never naïve, way. Thompson described his deep observations of landscapes as "working toward some synthesis between what I see in my mind's eye and what I see in my physical eye." His visual vocabulary was at once sophisticated and nuanced, bold, and vibrant. In addition to large and small-scale oil paintings, he produced large acrylic paintings on paper, pastel drawings, and monotypes.

Parallel to his career as an artist, Thompson was an academic. He taught painting at the University of New Mexico and the University of Texas at Austin. He was a popular guest artist and lecturer at many art schools and was a Professor of Painting and Dean of the School of Art and Design at Alfred University in New York from 1997 to 2009. He married twice and had a daughter.

In 2017, a major exhibition of Thompson's paintings was held in the Governor's Gallery at the Oregon State Capitol in Salem. Within Oregon, his work can be found in the collections of the Portland Art Museum, the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum in Eugene, the University of Portland, and Maryhill Museum.

Richard Thompson passed away in 2021.

Sources

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