

# THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ART INSTITUTE OFFERS RARE PRESENTATION OF EXQUISITE WORKS BY AMERICAN PAINTER JAMES BISHOP

Solo Museum Exhibition is First Substantial Display of Work Outside of Europe

One of the most accomplished yet lesser known American artists of his generation, **James Bishop** is the subject of the Art Institute of Chicago's latest installment of the *focus* contemporary art series. His delicately rendered, relatively rare drawings and paintings—which American poet and art critic John Ashbery once called “half architecture, half air”—combine European with American traditions of postwar art. Spanning his career, more than 100 paintings on paper and three on canvas—many from the artist's personal collection—will be on display **March 13 to May 4, 2008**, in **Galleries 138–139**. This is the first solo museum exhibition in the United States for Bishop, arguably long overdue for the now 80-year-old artist.



“The exhibition of Bishop's work is a real occasion,” said James Rondeau, Frances and Thomas Dittmer Chair of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute. “His lyrical works echo the flowering of American abstraction but also look forward to a truly synthetic style of painting in which incident and emotion are distilled and reshaped in nonrepresentational terms. Bishop, working quietly in Europe since the late 1950s, has long deserved such an extensive exhibition of his work.”

This exhibition, curated by Rondeau and co-organized with the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich and the Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop, brings together roughly 60 paintings and drawings from Bishop's personal collection along with selections from private collections in Germany, Switzerland, and the United States. Additionally, the Art Institute will present a small selection of works on canvas, including two recently acquired paintings, *Early* (1967) and *Untitled* (1980). The exhibition consists of approximately 100 works.

Bishop's art emerges from early exposure to both Abstract Expressionism and a deep, sensitive study of European art. He has labeled himself an "Abstract Expressionist of the quieter branch," citing the influences of Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and Ad Reinhardt, but also, perhaps more importantly, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Cézanne, and Giorgio Morandi. Bishop also draws heavily upon his long study of Quattrocento Italian masters, including Giovanni Bellini, Francesco Cossa, Carlo Crivelli, Piero della Francesca, and Lorenzo Lotto. Working within and across these seemingly divergent schools of painting, Bishop found valuable lessons in each: from his American counterparts, the license to explore the agency and romance of pure paint; from the Italians, the qualities of depth, saturation, and luminosity. His approach to painting and drawing is marked by a poetic, reductionist tendency, with a palette that is sometimes, but not always precisely, monochromatic. Indeed Bishop's colors are always inflected by subtle shading relationships.

Early in his career, in the mid-1960s, Bishop painted his first large-format square paintings. He divided his canvases, which measure nearly six foot square, into progressively smaller units—halves, quarters, and eighths. To achieve saturated fields of color, Bishop pioneered an unorthodox method of manipulating paint. After putting down pencil guidelines, the artist applied, with great precision, luminous skeins and pools of paint thinned with turpentine onto a stretched canvas laid flat on the floor, tilting them to control the flow of paint. This process allowed him to achieve subtle structure—often architectural, suggestive of a house or a building—within veils of finely saturated pigment. Over the years, the artist has shifted from working with large-scale canvas to mostly small paper supports. These works—often painted on irregular-size sheets of paper, with no fixed date assigned to their creation—continue Bishop's subtle explorations of color and structure, allowing material and process to shape form rather than form dictating material.

Born in 1927 in Neosho, Missouri, Bishop studied history at Syracuse University from 1946 to 1950, fine arts at Washington University from 1951 to 1954 (attending Black Mountain College, studying with Esteban Vicente, in 1953), and art history at Columbia University from 1955 to 1956. He has lived in Europe, full-time and intermittently, since 1957, in quiet, modest seclusion from the stresses and pressures of the international art market. This distance has allowed Bishop the intense, solitary concentration his process requires. As a result of his expatriate status and infrequent exhibitions of limited works, Bishop's powerful achievements have not yet been fully integrated within the narratives of postwar American art. At the same time, these very factors—the freedom of isolation, distance from New York, and influence of foreign aesthetics—reveal the conditions fundamental in cultivating Bishop's originality.

His work has been shown internationally in museums and galleries, notably in a solo survey exhibition with collaborating institutions Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris; and Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster, Germany (1993–94).

## **Related Events**

### **Exhibition Overviews**

#### **Noon, Gallery 100**

March 21, James Rondeau, curator

April 15, Lisa Dorin, assistant curator

April 29, Jenny Gheith, curatorial assistant

### **Gallery Talk**

March 20, 5:30 p.m.

Gallery 100

This exhibition, organized at the Art Institute of Chicago in collaboration with Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich, and Josef Albers Museum, Quadrat Bottrop, Germany, is made possible by a grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Additional support is provided by the Alfred L. McDougal and Nancy Lauter McDougal Fund for Contemporary Art.

### **IMAGE CREDIT**

James Bishop. *Tree I*, n.d., oil on paper. Collection of the artist. Courtesy Annemarie Verna Gallery, Zürich.

**MUSEUM HOURS:**

10:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Thursday

10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday

TARGET FREE EVENINGS THURSDAY AFTER 5:00 p.m.

SUMMER HOURS (from Memorial Day to Labor Day):

10:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

10:30 a.m.–9:00 p.m. Thursday, Friday

10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday

TARGET FREEE SUMMER EVENINGS THURSDAY AND FRIDAY AFTER 5:00 p.m.

FREE FEBRUARY 1 TO 29

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

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**The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park.**