

EVENTS

12 Jun, 7–8.30pm TALK:
*PLEASURE AS A RADICAL ACT:
WITH EMMA KAY, ALISON JONES
AND SALLY O'REILLY*

Longstanding friends and collaborators of Thompson, Kay, Jones and O'Reilly will discuss the scope of her life and work - paintings, graphic design, sculpture, textiles, films and an unpublished novel - and her critique of hegemonic forces, consumer capitalism and their effect on the bodies and desires of older women.

22 Jul, 6:30–9pm WORKSHOP:
*ANNIE NICHOLSON: ANGRY
WOMEN WILD BODIES*

This workshop invites participants to share honest and real experiences of what it is to be woman in 2025. Led by visual artist Annie Frost Nicholson, you are asked to bring an object to the workshop that tells a story about your experience in this world. This could be a story that is, as yet, untold, one that may break a taboo or invoke shame or humour or anger or paradox or sensuality. Participants are then invited to explore these objects and stories in both narrative and visual form, through painting and needlework. You are encouraged to think about how your choice of form expresses your experiences as women, to reflect upon the many complex embodied experiences of existing as woman in an ever policed world, such as ageing, sexuality, desire and power.

For more information on upcoming events visit
goldsmithscca.art

ARCHIVE

Milly Thompson's archive has been donated to the Women's Art Library, Special Collection & Archives, Goldsmiths, University of London, to further the study of her work.

CATALOGUE

An exhibition catalogue with commissioned essays by Sally O'Reilly and Linsey Young, and a round table conversation with Emma Kay, Alison Jones, Gareth Jones and Des Lawrence will be published on the opening of the exhibition. The publication includes full colour reproductions of the works included in the exhibition, as well as additional works. Please ask at the front desk to view a copy.

SUPPORTED BY

Generously supported by Joan Thewsey's Legacy Gift to the Women's Art Library.
Also supported by the Estate of Milly Thompson.

LENDERS

With thanks to the generous lenders to this exhibition; Collection of Gillian Anderson, Amanda Cattle, Shezad Dawood, Kate Hopkins, Laura Hopkins, Emma Kay, Rob Jacobs, Alison Jones, Soraya Smithson, Sarah Woodford, Linsey Young, The Estate of Milly Thompson and Amanda Wilkinson Gallery, London, Women's Art Library, Special Collection & Archives, Goldsmiths, University of London.

TOURING

My Body Temperature is Feeling Good will tour to Baltic Gateshead in 2026.

EXHIBITION GUIDE

MILLY THOMPSON

My Body Temperature is Feeling Good

'*Pleasure is a very interesting political space to reside in...*' Milly Thompson, 2021

My Body Temperature is Feeling Good presents the work of British artist Milly Thompson (1964–2022). Milly was a prolific painter, sculptor, video artist and writer, and a member of the renowned artist group BANK from 1994-2003. This exhibition presents works from 2010 onwards, in which she irreverently lampooned the hegemonic force of luxury consumer culture on women and celebrated the middle-aged female body for its libidinal power. Across the exhibition a strongly rendered sense of the female gaze is established, privileging female desire, glamour, and a purposeful slipperiness of artistic voice and persona that constantly questions the stakes of making art.

1. Stairwell

The exhibition captures the combination of irony and sincerity that characterised Thompson's most recent work, which explored romantic novels and sun-drenched summer holidays as spaces for escapism and sensual self-reinvention. The audio piece *My Body Temperature is Feeling Good (Hydra Lux MIX 1/2/3)* (2017) is installed in the entrance stairwell alongside three suspended sarong works from the series *Still Same Sexy*. Thompson's lyrics pitch menopausal hot flushes and 'slouch thighs' against the whispered exotic wellness keywords that might feature in a perfume advert, set to a Balearic inspired score by musician Cliff Charles. The sarongs gently stir in an artificial breeze and incorporate motifs from other works. Feedback loops of forms between works run throughout the exhibition. Thompson's craft in making these pieces cuts against their sense of humour. As curator Jennifer Thatcher notes, 'Thompson takes women's right to pleasure seriously. That doesn't mean that pleasure needs to be depicted seriously.'

2. Clerestory Gallery

This gallery features paintings made between 2015-18, that follow the spirit of Thompson's manifesto *I Choose Painting* (2016) in which she grapples with the loaded art history of the medium to declare that her 'thoughts are only of escape, simplicity and sensuality.' The manifesto (on display in the Tank Gallery) is a typical exercise in Thompson's assertion and simultaneous refutation of gender politics, through semi-serious calls to romance and resistance. The paintings here show the evolution of her style and subject matter as a painter, with a focus on the middle-aged body, escapism,

glamour, food, sensual consumption, and female desire, drenched in sorbet colours. Many of the women in the paintings are friends who posed for Thompson, they recline in their own worlds, never holding the gaze of the viewer.

The sculpture series *Desert Sirens* is inspired by Bottega Veneta's fall collection from 2012 and Ralph Lauren adverts which feature models in a desert, parsing orientalist fantasies to sell designer clothing. Draped fabric clings to impossible anatomies, the figure absent, a skin of desire remaining. This gallery also includes the video work *5000 years ritual VOLCANIC* (2013), whose soundtrack suffuses the room with the sound of waves. An older woman – observed by Thompson and captured as the epitome of glamour - potters on a beach, her hair wrapped and twisted on top of her head, the sea lapping at her feet in an almost mythic scene. Here, as in so much of Thompson's work, the female gaze is active.

3. Daskalopoulos Tank Gallery

This gallery celebrates Thompson's graphic work, in the form of artist books, posters and drawings. Her practice was inherently interdisciplinary, with cross-fertilizations between projects, and a curatorial approach that drew in numerous collaborators and platforms. The large gold painted structure in the center of the space quotes on Thompson's exhibition *Savoir Faire* at Focal Point Gallery, Southend (2009), in which several 'flawed' plinths bore *W* magazine pages and *Anxiety Knots*; soft sculptures that nod to Claes Oldenburg, are formed of tubes clad in silks that ooze bodily matter.

Behind the facade of the structure, *Basking in the Melodrama of my Own Consciousness* plays out; a work that featured in *Late Entry*, Thompson's exhibition at Peer, London (2008). It was made just after her departure from BANK, and was part of Thompson's knowing self-dramatisation of emerging as a solo artist in middle age – a time at which western society invisibilises women. A procession of images edited together interpose avant-garde women dancers such as Isadora Duncan, with objects associated with women - such as ceramic pots and gems - and secretly filmed footage of a woman Thompson observed sitting outside a cafe, cutting an isolated and increasingly anxious figure. An emotive cue is provided by 'Wild is the Wind' as the soundtrack. This video marks the beginning of Thompson's interest in the psychology and status of middle-aged women.

FLOORPLAN

Posters adorn the walls of the structure, including those made by Thompson for exhibitions, her manifesto *I Choose Painting*, and a poster for Focal Point Gallery that riffs on a fictitious campaign to save a British local library. Also included are a series of from her last exhibition *The Moon, The Sea & The Matriarch* (2019) at Helmsdale, which Thompson called mythmaking posters, collaged from previous works, magazines, logos, and photos, that establish a new graphic lexicon for the empowerment of older women.

Also included are various artist books and the magazine project *VOUTO* (2012) (meaning empty in Italian). Made with Alison Jones, *VUOTO* lampoons *Vogue* magazine with Nicole Wermer's empty adverts for luxury brands like Dior, Jones' paintings, and fake adverts for artists such as Tracey Emin and Andrea Rosen. *Opera* (2008), her semi-fictionalised interview, is a slippery text which collages other artist and writers' voices, blending fantasy and reality to underline the performative aspect of artist interviews.

A series of drawings from 2017 evidence her interest in Francis Picabia – some are direct copies of figures from his paintings – as a painter modelling bad taste. They have a beautiful graphic line that bears out in her later paintings, and a tangible relationship to beauty and the edges of kitsch.

The *Shatavari* perfume series are each titled to resonate with menopausal women; *Volatile*, *Proposition* and *Invisible*. Each is a category imposed on women, but also a potential source of power. Thompson worked with perfumer Eliza Douglas to create specific scents that speak to those values; *Invisible* includes rare natural green note of Violet Leaf Absolute for tranquillity. *Proposition* contains Buddha wood and an amber base 'to keep you in your groove', and *Volatile* features Jasmine, 'with an undertow of animal attraction'.

4. RODEN COURTYARD GALLERY

Outside, a billboard looms large, bearing the work *Near Witches*, originally devised from Timespan, Helmsdale (2021). The work triumphantly cuts against the invisibility perpetuated on older women, and was inspired Jeff Koon's *Aqualung* (1985) and an advert for Lamb's Navy Rum featuring Farrah Fawcett wearing scuba gear. For Thompson, scuba combines the body-con quality of athleisurewear with scuba diving as the ultimate aspirational middle-class pastime. It was originally displayed in the village of Helmsdale, a rural location in Scotland.

5. RILEY GALLERY

'we, as female painters, are creating our history as we go'

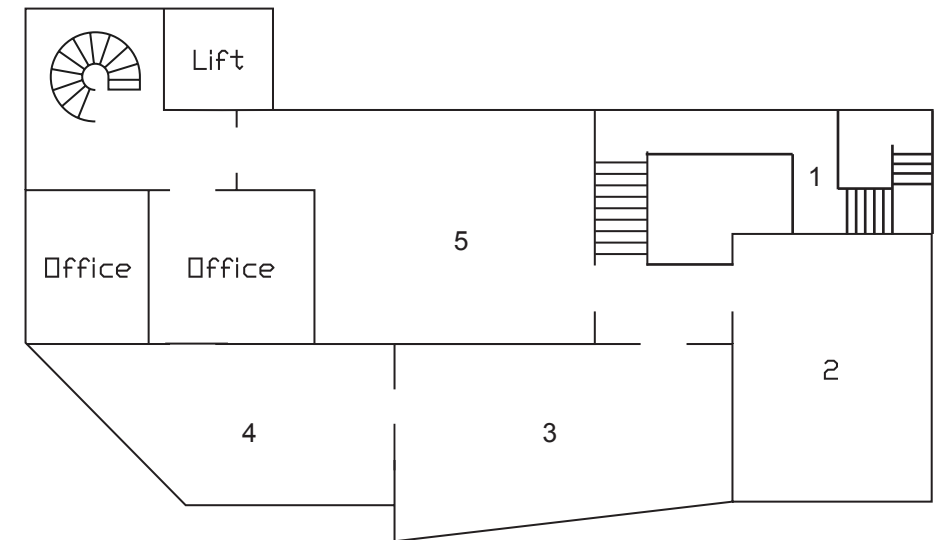
This gallery hosts paintings from the latter part of Thompson's career after her diagnosis with cancer in 2019, in which she moved into a larger scale, with looser confident brushwork, ink washes and stitched together canvases. Here Milly's paintings come into proximity to her graphic and drawing practices, with forms reduced to singular flowing lines. There is a tension across all Thompson's paintings, between a skill and talent for rendering form, and a wish to remain untasteful and imperfect, in true reflection of the subject matter she addresses.

Worship the Sun (2019) and *Night, Club* (2019) are works connected by a specific approach to building form through vibrating line. The former evokes the works of Paul Gauguin, whose renderings of exoticized women are part of an art history that Thompson directly addresses in her work and whose iconography of desire and the tropics, she repurposes and subverts.

Thompson became drawn to the economy of line and washes of ink used in Japanese woodcuts, and Ikebana; a form of flower arranging that emphasizes idealised forms viewed from a specific frontal viewpoint. This directly influenced *Deep Vogueing* (2020) whose size puts the viewer in direct confrontation with the contorted body of a women concertinaed in to the pictorial plane, her folds of flesh and body hair unavoidable. The title refers to the fashion magazine, whose purveyance of idealised forms of beauty force women's contortions, and whose photoshoots are a specifically composed image orientated toward a singular viewpoint. For Thompson, the austerity applied to flowers in Sogetsu and traditions like Bonsai, are equivalent to the control applied to women's bodies in the pursuit of youthful beauty. These are referenced in vases and organic forms in *Temple Creation* (2020), *Rare Positioning* (2020) and *Niche Definitions* (2021). The latter show her use of emojis as a new lexicon that could carry emotional and social meanings; an exploding head and cloud might refer to the menopausal symptom of brain fog, for example.

In the two *Scuba Sauvage* (2021) paintings the women in *Near Witches* reappear, morphed into even more mythical creatures with palpable libidinal energy. There is a pure joy and anti-taste to these works, an apogee of Thompson's combination of pattern, colour, and subject matter to create a new aesthetic language for middle aged female visibility and empowerment.

First Floor



1. Stairwell

2. Clerestory Gallery

3. Daskalopoulos Tank Gallery

4. Roden Courtyard Gallery

5. Bridget Riley Gallery