FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HEROINES OF THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT CELEBRATED IN NEW EXHIBITION ON VIEW AT THE MONTGOMERY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

On view, April 29 through July 24, Lava Thomas: Homecoming empowers and amplifies the stories of those who have faced oppression and erasure.

Montgomery, AL, March 28, 2022 – Lava Thomas: Homecoming, on view April 29 through July 24, is the most comprehensive exhibition to date of this contemporary artist’s drawings and installation works that address the relevance of African American history to our current moment. Using a variety of drawing techniques, Thomas creates large portraits inspired by photographs of remarkable African American people in order to tackle issues of representation and memorialization. Her multidisciplinary practice includes painting, photography, sculpture, and site-specific installations. Across media, Thomas focuses on ideas that amplify visibility, healing, and empowerment in the face of erasure, trauma, and oppression.

The exhibition centers on three bodies of work, including Looking Back (2015) and Decatur (2022), a new set of drawings and prints that will debut in the exhibition. Of particular resonance to Montgomerians are thirteen drawings from Thomas’ revelatory series Mugshot Portraits: Women of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (2018–). To pay tribute to the women in Mugshot Portraits and recognize members of the depicted women’s extended families, the exhibition will also include an online component that features the women’s family members speaking about their relatives.

Regarding the exhibition, MMFA Curator of Art Jennifer Jankauskas says, “Thomas’s images not only shine a light on the strength and character of many women who changed the course of our country’s history but also provide a guiding light to future generations, demonstrating that our voices and actions can change the world.”
Director Angie Dodson continues, “Lava Thomas: Homecoming is one of a series of exhibitions presented by the Museum to create a place for individual and collective memory and reckoning. We take to heart our responsibility to be a place where art and artists are recognized for their capacity transform the thoughts and actions of people and communities. Our hope is that time spent in the Homecoming galleries will both be a time for honoring the past and sorting out what is each of ours to do as we move together towards a more inclusive and opportunity-filled today and tomorrow.”

Board President Cathy Martin adds, “We are delighted to have Dr. Bridget Cooks—a female, African American scholar—guest curating this exhibition and sharing the stories of these remarkable women of color—the artist, Lava Thomas, and the heroines of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Also important is the inclusion of the voices of the descendants of these remarkable women in history. It is important to bring this exhibition ‘home’ to our community. And, we could not be more pleased that members of this community have invested both in the presentation of Homecoming here in Montgomery this spring and summer but also in its presentation at Atlanta’s Spelman College Museum of Fine Art this fall.”

As Martin noted, the exhibition is curated by Dr. Bridget R. Cooks, Associate Professor of African American Studies and Art History at the University of California, Irvine. The presentation is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalog edited and designed by Vivian Sming of Sming Sming Books and including essays by exhibition curator Dr. Bridget R. Cooks, Dr. Jennifer Jankauskas, Curator at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, and Dr. Bertis English, Professor of History, Alabama State University.

The MMFA is grateful for the generous support of this exhibition by lead foundation sponsors The Ford Foundation and Alabama Power Foundation. Additional support was provided by lead sponsors David and Pamela Hornik, Southern Poverty Law Center, Lamar, and The Reparations Project; sponsors Mr. Will Hill Tankersley and Dr. Kristin Tankersley; and co-sponsors AmeriFirst Bank; Ronnie and Gwen Anderson; ASE Credit Union; Balch & Bingham, LLP; Lori and LaBarron Boone; Judge (ret.) Delores R. Boyd; Mr. and Mrs. Marvin H. Campbell II; Dr. Myrtle E. Goore and Mr. Milton D. Davis; Ms. Camille Elebash-Hill and Mr. W. Inge Hill, Jr.; Mr. Octavius Jackson; Samuel and Cathy R. Martin; Mr. and Mrs. L. Daniel Morris, Jr.; Dr. and Mrs. Alfred J. Newman, Jr.; Mayor and Mrs. Steven L. Reed; River Bank & Trust; Dr. Patricia
After debuting at the MMFA, the exhibition will travel to the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, GA, in Fall 2022.

**About the Artist**

Lava Thomas was born in Los Angeles, CA, and studied at UCLA’s School of Art Practice, where she received a BFA from California College of the Arts. She is a recipient of the 2020 San Francisco Artadia Award and a 2019–2021 Lucas Artists Fellowship Award at Montalvo Arts Center. Thomas has participated in artist residencies at Facebook Los Angeles (2020), Headlands Center for the Arts (2018), and the Djerassi Resident Artist Program. In 2015 she received the Joan Mitchell Grant for Painters and Sculptors. Her work is included in the National Portrait Gallery’s triennial exhibition, *The Outwin 2019: American Portraiture Today.* It has been exhibited in various institutions, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; the International Print Center, New York, NY; the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA; the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, CA; and the California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA. It is held in the permanent collections of the United States Consulate General in Johannesburg, South Africa; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA; the M.H. de Young Museum, San Francisco, CA, and the Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, CA. Thomas’s work has been written about in *Artforum, Hyperallergic, SF Chronicle, The Guardian, KQED Arts, The Art Newspaper*, and *LA Weekly.*

**RELATED PROGRAMS**

**Art+Letters: Exhibiting Blackness**

Saturday, May 7; 10 AM
In Person at MMFA
Free

Come take part in the Museum’s art-inspired reading group, Art+Letters, as we discuss *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* by art historian Bridget R. Cooks. In this book, Cooks analyzes the curatorial strategies, challenges, and critical receptions of the most significant museum exhibitions of African American art.

**Art After Five**

Tuesday, June 14; 5:30 PM
In Person at MMFA
Free; Registration Requested
Young professionals are invited to join artist Sharon Sample as she leads a portrait-drawing class inspired by the materials and techniques used in Lava Thomas: Homecoming. Food provided by Verde.

**Second Tuesdays: Artmaking**
Tuesday, June 14; 6 PM
In Person at MMFA
Free
Families are invited to take part in this artmaking studio inspired by the materials and techniques used in Lava Thomas: Homecoming.

**Second Tuesdays: Gallery Talk**
Tuesday, June 14; 7 PM
In Person at MMFA
Free
Join MMFA curator Jennifer Jankauskas in the galleries for a look at the themes on view in Lava Thomas: Homecoming.

**RELATED EXHIBITION**
**Portraits from the Student Art Collection**
May 14 through June 26, 2022
ArtWorks Gallery, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
The MMFA has been collecting student art work since the mid-1990s; this exhibition will feature a powerful display of portraits from the collection inspired by Lava Thomas: Homecoming.

**FOR YOUR SAFETY | COVID-19**
The MMFA remains committed to serving our members and visitors in a safe and responsible manner, especially during the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. According to your comfort level, all Museum visitors are welcome to mask and encouraged to practice social distancing during their visit. If you are feeling ill or have recently been exposed to COVID-19, please refer to CDC quarantine guidelines before visiting the Museum.

**MMFA BACKGROUND**
The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts was founded in 1930 by a group of local artists as a place for both exhibiting art and space for art education. The original intentions of our founders—to exhibit and teach—continue to inspire and inform every action and activity here at the Museum which, since 1988, has shared the 277-acre Blount Cultural Park with our partners across the lake at the celebrated Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Today’s MMFA visitors stroll through art-studded grounds and permanent collection galleries. They see compelling changing exhibitions and learn about art by playing in our interactive gallery, ArtWorks,
making art in its bustling studios, or by participating in other engaging events and programs. And, as of late September 2018, MMFA visitors can now relax and recharge in the serenity of our stunning new three-acre sculpture garden.

While the Museum’s collection is still home to the art of many of the regional artists who first established it, over time it has become known for its strength in American art and Old Master Prints. Recent, important acquisitions of art made by African American and Asian artists and works inspired by images and themes related to the experiences of these groups represent the breadth and depth of the lives and concerns of those who now call Montgomery and the River Region home. Through the exhibition of this work as well as the programs and events that help connect our communities with it, the MMFA is recognized as a leading arts and cultural resource here in the state and Southeastern region.

The MMFA is a department of the City of Montgomery and is supported by funds from the City of Montgomery, with additional funds from the Montgomery County Commission and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Association. Programs are made possible, in part, by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

GENERAL INFORMATION

WHAT: Lava Thomas: Homecoming

WHEN: April 29 through July 24, 2022

WHERE: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park
One Museum Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117

INFORMATION: mmfa.org
334.625.4333
@MontgomeryMFA

HOURS:
Galleries, Mondays, Closed
Sculpture Garden, Tuesdays–Saturdays, 10 AM–5 PM
Terrace, and Store: Sundays, Noon to 5 PM
Last entry at 4:45 PM

Open late, until 9 PM, on the second Tuesday of each month.

ADMISSION: Free! With ample, free parking.

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MEDIA CONTACT
Stephen Hayes: shayes@mmfa.org | 334.625.4347