

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Abstract Expressionist Judith Godwin at VMFA and VCU**

Exhibitions honor respected woman artist in her home state

Concurrent exhibitions at two leading Virginia art institutions will celebrate the career of new York-based painter Judith Godwin, a Virginia native and a graduate of Richmond Professional Institute (RPI), now Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Both exhibitions will open progressively on September 7, VCUarts Anderson Gallery from 5 – 7 p.m. and VMFA from 6 – 8 p.m.

In the early 1950s, Godwin began removing representational elements from her paintings in favor of abstract approaches. She continued to push the burgeoning abstraction in her work and, over the next decade, her imagery evolved into powerful nonobjective compositions. Even now, at this stage in her long career, Godwin is still reinventing the language of abstract painting in her studio.

After graduation from RPI in 1952, Godwin moved to New York City in 1953 during a period of major growth in post-war American art. She attended the Art Students League and studied with noted artists Will Barnet, Harry Sternberg, and Vaclav Vytlacil, as well as at Hans Hofmann's schools in New York and Provincetown. As a young artist, she quickly immersed herself in the city, befriended other artists and art dealers, and eventually began to exhibit her paintings and establish her reputation. She achieved considerable success, exhibiting her works at the Stable Gallery and becoming the youngest woman ever to show at Betty Parsons.



Judith Godwin (American, born 1930), *Black Poppy*, ca. 1970, oil on canvas, 54”H x 54”W / 137.16 cm x 137.16 cm. ©Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Gift of Mrs. M. S. Chevalier.

Godwin's work has since been featured in numerous group shows and solo exhibitions, and is represented in many private and public collections, including those of the VMFA and the Anderson Gallery. Among her various awards, she received an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from VCU in 1989.

**VCUarts Anderson Gallery**

Featuring 25 paintings produced in the 1950s and 60s, *Judith Godwin: Early Abstractions* offers an in-depth exploration of a critical period in the artist's development. The muscular brushwork and aggressive line for which Godwin is known are evident in even the earliest painting included here, created in 1950 before the artist had left her home state of Virginia for New York City. A subsequent group of paintings, characterized by heightened color and thick impasto, reflect her time as a student of Hans Hofmann. The exhibition demonstrates how, later in the decade, Godwin's

brushwork became considerably looser as she experimented with pours and stains in large-scale canvases, balancing painterly spontaneity with formal structure. These works and those that followed through the mid-1960s reveal a robust physical energy and intellectual rigor that Godwin retained in the years ahead, as she continued to develop her visual vocabulary.

*Judith Godwin: Early Abstractions* was organized by René Paul Barilleaux, Chief Curator at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, Texas, where the exhibition premiered in September 2008. The exhibition traveled to the Telfair Museums' Jepson Center in Savannah, Georgia, in June 2011.

### **VMFA**

For more than 60 years, Judith Godwin explored abstract painting, recording motion and gesture with brushstrokes on canvas. *Gesture: Judith Godwin and Abstract Expressionism* features a selection of some 15 works from across the span of her career, demonstrating her remarkably persistent commitment to establishing and expanding her own abstract language. Her dynamic compositions epitomize the "action painting" of the 1950s; yet, when Godwin moved to New York in that era, few women artists had gained acceptance within the art world, let alone as abstract painters. Godwin has stated that for her as a woman, the act of painting is "an act of freedom, and a realization that images generated by the female experience can be a creative expression for all humanity." The works in the exhibition not only attest to her tenacious vision despite early challenges, but also her continued willingness to explore new territory. As her painting evolved over the decades, she introduced increasingly bold color palettes as well as elements of collage.



Judith Godwin, *Male Study*, 1954, oil on canvas, 67"H x 48"W. Photograph by Jeffrey Sturges, courtesy of McNay Art Museum.

In addition, *Gesture* places Godwin's work within the context of approximately 15 abstract, gestural paintings by a diverse group of artists in VMFA's collection, such as Adolph Gottlieb, Norman Lewis, Benjamin Wigfall, Hedda Sterne, James Brooks, Theodoros Stamos, and Joan Mitchell. By drawing attention to the multiplicity of artists who used abstraction for an array of purposes, this exhibition pushes on the traditional boundaries of Abstract Expressionism and showcases the wide reaches of its legacy.

### **Public program**

A conversation between the artist and VCUarts Dean Joe Seipel will take place Thursday, Sept. 6 at 5:30 p.m. at the Grace Street Theater, 934 W. Grace St. Admission is free.

### **About the exhibitions**

**VCU:** *Judith Godwin: Early Abstractions*

**DATE:** September 7 – December 9, 2012

**CURATOR:** Ashley Kistler, Director, VCUarts Anderson Gallery

**ADMISSION:** Free

**CATALOGUE:** *Judith Godwin: Early Abstractions*, introduction by Rene Barilleaux, essays by Lowery Stokes Sims and David Ebony, 76 pages, \$25. Published by the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas; second printing sponsored by the Office of the Dean, VCU School of the Arts. Available at both venues.

**VMFA:** *Gesture: Judith Godwin and Abstract Expressionism*

**DATE:** September 7, 2012 – January 26, 2013

**CURATOR:** Sarah Eckhart, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art

**ADMISSION:** Free

### **Anderson Gallery**

The Anderson Gallery is the exhibition facility of the VCU School of the Arts—ranked the #1 public university of arts and design in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*—and a leading venue for contemporary art in the Southeast. Well known for presenting the work of regional, national, and international artists of diverse backgrounds, the gallery mounts challenging exhibitions, offers public programs, and publishes significant catalogues to promote investigation and discovery in the field of visual art and culture. These activities extend the university's educational and scholarly mission by fostering open and ongoing engagement with the ever-changing nature of the art of today. Gallery hours: Tues-Sun, 10 am-5 pm; closed Mon. Free and open to the public. For additional information, phone 804-828-1522 or visit [www.arts.vcu.edu/andersongallery](http://www.arts.vcu.edu/andersongallery).

### **About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**

With a collection of art that spans the globe and more than 5,000 years, plus a wide array of special exhibitions, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is recognized as one of the top comprehensive art museums in the United States. The museum's permanent collection encompasses more than 24,000 works of art, including one of the nation's finest collections of American Art, Art Nouveau and Art Deco, and the largest public collection of Fabergé outside Russia. VMFA is home to acclaimed collections of English Silver and Ancient, Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British Sporting and Modern & Contemporary art, as well as renowned African, East Asian and South Asian holdings. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its 75-year history. Programs include educational activities and studio classes for all ages, plus fun after-hours events. VMFA's Statewide Partnership program includes traveling exhibitions, artist and teacher workshops, and lectures across the Commonwealth. VMFA is open 365 days a year and general admission is always free. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit [www.vmfamuseum.org](http://www.vmfamuseum.org).

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