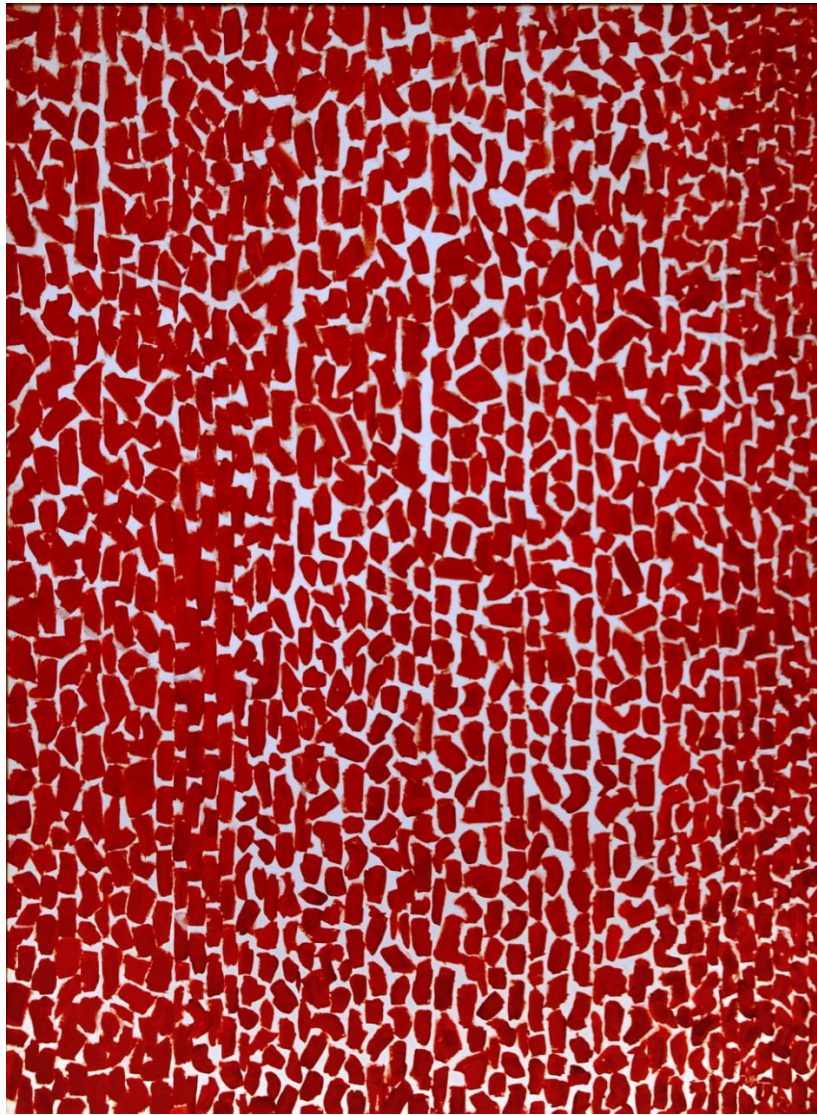


ALMA THOMAS



The unevenly spaced, staccato brushstrokes on the white canvas form a visual rhythm, as if the artist had painted a cantata, a type of musical composition. Tremendous delicacy is shown in the play of space and color, with the white "background" as important to the overall effect as the red bursts of color. The harmonic color field is no accident: the compositional and color structure of *Red Rose Cantata* derives from Alma Thomas' interest in nature and music in its linear organization with organic variations.

Thomas came into the professional art world late in life, after teaching art for thirty-five years in the Washington, DC, public schools. Her age, however, did not prevent her from gaining recognition as an artist. In 1972, one year before she painted *Red Rose Cantata*, Thomas had a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York—the museum's first solo exhibition for an African-American woman. Thomas and [Sam Gilliam](#) were the only two African-American members of the Washington Color School. She and other artists, Gilliam among them, are associated with the larger color field movement, which probed the use of solid color in abstract paintings. Thomas continued painting in her signature style, drawing on nature and music for inspiration, until her death in 1978 at age eighty-seven.