

The Courtauld

Press Release

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WAYNE THIEBAUD. AMERICAN STILL LIFE

FIRST UK MUSEUM EXHIBITION ON AMERICAN ARTIST WAYNE THIEBAUD OPENS AT THE COURTAULD

***The Griffin Catalyst Exhibition:
Wayne Thiebaud. American Still Life
10 October 2025 – 18 January 2026***



Wayne Thiebaud, *Three Machines*, 1963, Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 92.7cm, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco © Wayne Thiebaud / VAGA at ARS, NY and DACS, London 2025. Image: Photograph by Randy Dodson, courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Press images: <https://tinyurl.com/wayne-thiebaud-courtauld>

The Courtauld Gallery today unveiled the first-ever museum exhibition in the UK on the celebrated modern American artist Wayne Thiebaud (1920–2021). ***The Griffin Catalyst Exhibition: Wayne Thiebaud. American Still Life*** is on display from 10 October 2025 – 18 January 2026.

One of the most original American artists of the 20th century, Thiebaud developed a unique style of painting to express his vision of post-war American culture through its everyday objects.

The exhibition at The Courtauld Gallery focuses on Thiebaud's break-out works of the 1960s that made his reputation and brings together some of the greatest paintings the artist produced during this remarkable period – lush and captivating depictions of quintessential modern American subjects, from cherry pies, hot dogs and candy counters to gumball dispensers and pinball machines. With these works, Thiebaud recast the genre of still life for the modern era.

In 1962, Thiebaud asserted, 'Each era produces its own still life.' Steeped in art history, he considered his work as continuing the radical legacy of artists such as Jean-Siméon Chardin, Paul Cézanne and Édouard Manet. Thiebaud saw the commonplace objects of his own time – iconic features of American consumer culture – as vital subjects for contemporary art. His works transformed everyday delights such as lemon meringue pies and glossy cream cakes into the stuff of serious modern painting. Thiebaud's vibrantly coloured pictures of the offerings of American diners, bakeries and stores are painterly meditations on their subjects, which draw the viewer deep into the world they represent.

Painted during a period of American economic boom and optimism but also increasingly of dissent and change, Thiebaud's still lifes belie their direct and simple appearance. Within a single work, a sense of abundance and desire can give way to feelings of isolation and longing.

Thiebaud lived and worked most of his life in Sacramento, California, and was a longstanding teacher at nearby University of California, Davis. In the 1940s and 1950s, before becoming a painter, he worked as an illustrator, cartoonist and art director, including a summer spent in the animation department of Walt Disney Studios and a role as a graphic designer for the US army as part of his military service during the Second World War.

In 1956, Thiebaud travelled to New York to meet the avant-garde artists working there. Willem de Kooning was especially inspirational and encouraged him to find his own voice and subjects as a modern painter. Back in Sacramento, he began painting commonplace objects of American life, largely from memory, and soon crystallised his unique approach, isolating his richly painted subjects against spare backgrounds. In 1961, he took this group of modern still lifes to New York looking for a gallery to show them. Having faced rejection from most, he made a last stop at a gallery run by a young dealer, Allan Stone, who took him on. The following year, Thiebaud staged his first solo show at the Allan Stone Gallery, which was an overnight success, propelling him into the limelight. Important collectors and institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art, purchased works and the exhibition sold out. From there, Thiebaud would go on to become one of the major figures of 20th-century American art.

In that same year, 1962, Thiebaud was featured, alongside artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, in two historic shows that established the Pop Art movement. Although his work coincided with Pop Art, Thiebaud never considered himself part of the movement. Rather than being rooted in advertising graphics, methods of mass reproduction, and concerned with flat, print-like surfaces, Thiebaud's work is painterly almost to the point of exaggeration. He exploited the physical properties of paint to create an intense and captivating expression of his chosen subjects.

The exhibition features rarely lent works from major museums and private collections in the United States. Highlights include Thiebaud's epic painting *Cakes*, lent for the first time

outside the US by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and *Four Pinball Machines*, one of his most significant works in a private collection. Other major loans include works from the Whitney Museum of Art, New York; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and the Fine Art Museums of San Francisco, among others. The exhibition also benefits from generous loans from the Wayne Thiebaud Foundation in Sacramento.

An accompanying display in the Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Drawings Gallery, **Wayne Thiebaud. Delights**, focuses on the artist's celebrated 1965 portfolio of 17 exquisite etchings to offer further insight into his still-life motifs and work as a graphic artist.

In addition to holding one of the few works by Thiebaud in a UK public collection – the pen-and-ink drawing *Cake Slices* from 1963 – The Courtauld offers a rich context for the exploration of Thiebaud's remaking of the genre of still life. Most notably, it will be fascinating to consider his work in relation to Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, a painting Thiebaud greatly admired. With its counter line-up of tempting treats, from mandarins to champagne, it is the defining precursor painting of modern consumer culture and society.

The exhibition is curated by Dr Karen Serres, Senior Curator of Paintings, and Dr Barnaby Wright, Deputy Head of The Courtauld Gallery and Daniel Katz Curator of 20th-Century Art. It is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue showcasing new research on Thiebaud's still lifes, with contributions from leading scholars.

The exhibition's Title Supporter is Griffin Catalyst, the civic engagement initiative of Citadel Founder and CEO Kenneth C. Griffin. The exhibition is supported by Kenneth C. Griffin with additional support from the Wayne Thiebaud Foundation and the Wayne Thiebaud Supporters' Circle.

The Griffin Catalyst Exhibition: Wayne Thiebaud. American Still Life

Denise Coates Exhibition Galleries, Floor 3

10 October 2025 – 18 January 2026

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/exh-wayne-thiebaud-american-still-life/>

Wayne Thiebaud. Delights

Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Drawings Gallery, Floor 1

10 October 2025 – 18 January 2026

<https://courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/exh-wayne-thiebaud-delights/>

The programme of displays in the Drawings Gallery is generously supported by the International Music and Art Foundation, with additional support from James Bartos.

The Courtauld Gallery

Somerset House, Strand

London WC2R 0RN

Opening hours: 10.00 – 18.00 (last entry 17.15)

Temporary Exhibition tickets (including entry to our Permanent Collection and displays) – from £18. Friends and under-18s go free. Other concessions available.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About The Courtauld

The Courtauld works to advance how we see and understand the visual arts, as an internationally renowned centre for the teaching and research of art history and a major public gallery. Founded by collectors and philanthropists in 1932, the organisation has been at the forefront of the study of art ever since through advanced research and conservation practice, innovative teaching, the renowned collection and inspiring exhibitions of its gallery, and engaging and accessible activities, education and events.

The Courtauld cares for one of the greatest art collections in the UK, presenting these works to the public at The Courtauld Gallery in central London, as well as through loans and partnerships. The Gallery is most famous for its iconic Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces – such as Van Gogh's Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Manet's A Bar at the Folies-Bergère. It showcases these alongside an internationally renowned collection of works from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance through to the present day.

Academically, The Courtauld faculty is the largest community of art historians and conservators in the UK, teaching and carrying out research on subjects from creativity in late Antiquity to contemporary digital artforms – with an increasingly global focus. An independent college of the University of London, The Courtauld offers a range of degree programmes from BA to PhD in the History of Art, curating and the conservation of easel and wall paintings. Its alumni are leaders and innovators in the arts, culture and business worlds, helping to shape the global agenda for the arts and creative industries.

Founded on the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to engage with art, The Courtauld works to increase understanding of the role played by art throughout history, in all societies and across all geographies – as well as being a champion for the importance of art in the present day. This could be through exhibitions offering a chance to look closely at world-famous works; events bringing art history research to new audiences; accessible and

expert short courses; digital engagement, innovative school, family and community programmes; or taking a formal qualification. The Courtauld's ambition is to transform access to art history education by extending the horizons of what this is and ensuring as many people as possible can benefit from the tools to better understand the visual world around us.

The Courtauld is an exempt charity and relies on generous philanthropic support to achieve its mission of advancing the understanding of the visual arts of the past and present across the world through advanced research, innovative teaching, inspiring exhibitions, programmes and collections.

The collection cared for by The Courtauld Gallery is owned by the Samuel Courtauld Trust.

About Griffin Catalyst

Griffin Catalyst is the civic engagement initiative of Citadel founder and CEO Kenneth C. Griffin, encompassing his philanthropic and community impact efforts. Tackling the world's greatest challenges in innovative, action-oriented, and evidence-driven ways, Griffin Catalyst is dedicated to expanding opportunity and improving lives across six areas of focus: Education, Science & Medicine, Upward Mobility, Freedom & Democracy, Enterprise & Innovation, and Communities. For more information, visit griffincatalyst.org/