



EMORY

MICHAEL C.
CARLOS
MUSEUM

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***A Very Incomplete Self-Portrait:
Tom Dorsey's Chicago Portfolio opens at
the Michael C. Carlos Museum this February***

[Atlanta, Georgia, February 1, 2023]— *A Very Incomplete Self-Portrait*, on view from February 18 to July 16, 2023, presents never-before-exhibited works by celebrated photographer Thomas Dorsey. Widely known for his intimate portraits of African American families in their homes in Chicago and Atlanta, Dorsey also photographed the streets, houses, and buildings of his childhood neighborhood on Chicago's West Side. This portfolio of black and white photographs, taken while Dorsey was enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago, reveals the barren infrastructure of an underserved community and the resilience and stark beauty that can be discovered amidst bleak circumstances.

Place deeply informed Dorsey's self-identity but did not define him. As a child, he experienced isolation and felt different from his peers, which he attributes in part to a head injury sustained during his youth. He became increasingly engrossed in the mechanics of how things work—building model airplanes in grade school, later modifying cars and motorcycles and teaching himself to write music. The multiple and complex processes of photography suited Dorsey, as did its documentary potential.

Undertaking this project marked an effort to document the pervading physical and spiritual coldness that he felt during childhood. He remarks, "I did not grow up understanding my young life or feel like I was understood by those around me, which left me confused. The photographs were my attempt, at that point, to save, in a visual form, my feelings for interpretation later in life." The photographs in *A Very Incomplete Self-Portrait* are deeply personal; for Dorsey, they are preserved memories and emotions that he revisited, re-interpreted, and made useful over time. They are also extraordinary historical documents of 1971 Chicago. In 2022, the artist gifted the portfolio to the Carlos Museum with the hope that others might find the images useful.

This exhibition has been made possible through generous support from the Daniel Schulz Works on Paper Support Fund, the Massey Charitable Trust, and the Daniel Schulz Internship Endowment.

About the Michael C. Carlos Museum

Set in the heart of Emory's Atlanta campus, the Michael C. Carlos Museum is a dynamic, interdisciplinary center for study of art and culture, with collections from Africa; ancient Egypt; Nubia, and the Near East; ancient Greece and Rome; the Indigenous Americas; and South Asia; as well as American and European Works on Paper.

Through our permanent collection galleries, engaging special exhibitions, and innovative programs for audiences of all ages, the Carlos Museum connects the past with the present and the campus with the community.

Curators and faculty develop original exhibitions, engage in interdisciplinary research and teaching, and host touring exhibitions that complement our collections and support the teaching mission of the university. The museum's conservators collaborate with staff, faculty, and students to conduct research and manage preventive care on the museum's varied collections. Museum educators reach across the museum, campus, and city to develop opportunities to engage the intellect and the imagination of university students and faculty, preK-12 students and teachers, and the larger Atlanta community.

The Michael C. Carlos Museum is open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sunday: noon – 5 p.m. For more information, visit carlos.emory.edu/visit, call 404.727.4282, or follow @CarlosMuseum on social media.

carlos.emory.edu

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