

# Justin Thompson

## maybe it runs in the family

September 6 - November 1, 2008



*Palms*, installation detail, 2008. Metal armatures and recycled quilts.

Justin Thompson, in his installation *Palms*, creates a forest of trees that appear simultaneously aged and languid, yet strong and enduring. The structures may be drooping here or looking old and tattered there, but they radiate a depth akin to the knowledge and understanding of a wise elder. It is no accident on the part of Thompson that these trees exude the past while being firmly rooted in the pres-

ent, as much of this effect comes from the very material that he uses. He creates and welds together metal armatures that form the shape of these objects. The metal skeletal like structure is exclusively Thompson in its creation, as he alone conceptualizes and models the metal forms. The forms are then covered with second-hand quilts, which the artist sews together to create the outer most layer of the sculpture. The recycled quilts have been touched by hundreds of hands before his and have been part of the lives of numerous individuals whose names and stories we will never know. But Thompson revives these worn pieces giving them a second life, and giving his sculptures the characteristics of strength and resilience.

The quilts embody not only the pasts of many, but more specifically the quilt is a significant element of the African American heritage, and enables



*Palms*, Installation at the Cattedrale della Pieve del Vescovo, Corciano, Italy, 2006. Metal armatures and recycled quilts.

Thompson to represent this heritage through its use. The quilts act, as the artist explains, "as a metaphor for the patchwork of African American cultural makeup," which is in itself complex and multi-dimensional. Thompson himself is a resident of Florence, Italy, and the development of his sculptures are also influenced by studying images and ideas of Italian art history. Juxtaposing cultures and eras that are often conflicting, Thompson is able to create a distinctive view of not only African American culture, but also the African presence in Europe. While some parts of Thompson's sculptures may seem bent and tilting, the limbs of these Palms appear to move

and writhe with an inextinguishable force. A force that could be the past fighting to remain understood and acknowledged for its ability to shed light on the human condition of the present.

-Brooke Fitzpatrick



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