Andrew Kreps
Gallery

22 Cortlandt Alley,
New York, NY 10013

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OLIVER LEE JACKSON: OVERVIEW

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Oliver Lee Jackson

Over the span of five decades, Oliver Lee Jackson has developed a singular body of work, creating complex and layered paintings in which figural forms meld with abstract fields of vivid color. While tightly composed, Jackson's paintings feel improvisational in approach, as gestural marks become intertwined with vivid swaths of paint and color. Building over time, each work becomes a synthesis of references that may span from the Renaissance to Modernism, filtered through what Jackson terms his 'African sensibility.' The resulting works eschew a single narrative or reading and instead seek to encourage the viewer to form their own emotional response. Creating multiple points of entry within each painting, Jackson states that his work is "for anybody's eyes; any eyes will do."

Oliver Lee Jackson lives and works in Oakland. Originally from St. Louis, Jackson was affiliated with the Black Artists Group, which was founded in St. Louis in 1968 as an interdisciplinary collective of musicians, actors, and visual artists. Earlier this year, Jackson's work was the subject of solo exhibitions at the Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO, and the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, CA. Other past institutional exhibitions of Jackson's work include the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2019, Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO, 2012, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, 2002, University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1985, University of California Art Museum, Berkeley, 1983, Seattle Art Museum, 1982, St. Louis Art Museum, 1980, among others. His works are held in the public collections of The Metropolitan Museum, New York, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Museum of Modern Art, New York, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Portland Art Museum, Oregon, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art,San Jose Museum of Art, Seattle Art Museum, St. Louis Art Museum, Detroit Institute of the Arts, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, among others.

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Works On Paper
394 Broadway, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York
February 24 – March 25, 2023

Andrew Kreps Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of works of paper by Oliver Lee Jackson, spanning the 1980s to the present, at the gallery's 394 Broadway location.

Since the 1970s, drawing has been an integral part of Jackson's practice as he freely incorporates watercolor, collage, charcoal, and printmaking techniques to create layered compositions. Drawing on a wide range of references, from music, dance, renaissance paintings to Jackson's own studies of African cultures, the resulting works blend figurative forms with improvisational marks. Moving between legibility and abstraction, Jackson creates various points of entry within each work, seeking to open his work to a multitude of readings.

Oliver Lee Jackson
Installation view
Works On Paper, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York
February 24 – March 25, 2023

Andrew Kreps
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Oliver Lee Jackson
Composite (8.14.06), 2006
Intaglio print collage, Printer's ink, mixed media on paper
38 x 26 inches (96.5 x 66 cm);
41 13/16 x 29 13/16 x 2 inches (106.2 x 75.7 x 5.1 cm) framed

Andrew Kreps
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Oliver Lee Jackson
Drawing (5.27.84-IV), 1984
Graphite on paper
48 x 42 1/4 inches (121.9 x 107.3 cm);
52 x 46 5/16 x 2 1/4 inches (132.1 x 117.6 x 5.7 cm) framed

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

Oliver Lee Jackson
Installation view
Works On Paper, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York
February 24 – March 25, 2023

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

Oliver Lee Jackson
Drawing (6.15.84), 1984
Ink and acrylic paint on paper
48 1/8 x 42 1/4 inches (122.2 x 107.3 cm);
52 1/16 x 46 5/16 x 2 5/16 inches (132.2 x 117.6 x 5.9 cm) framed

Oliver Lee Jackson
Installation view
Works On Paper, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York
February 24 – March 25, 2023

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

Oliver Lee Jackson
Watercolor (8.22.89-I), 1989
Watercolor on paper
48 1/4 x 42 1/4 inches (122.6 x 107.2 cm);
52 1/16 x 46 5/16 x 2 5/16 inches (132.2 x 117.6 x 5.9 cm) framed

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

Oliver Lee Jackson
22 Cortlandt Alley
Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
March 25 – May 7, 2022

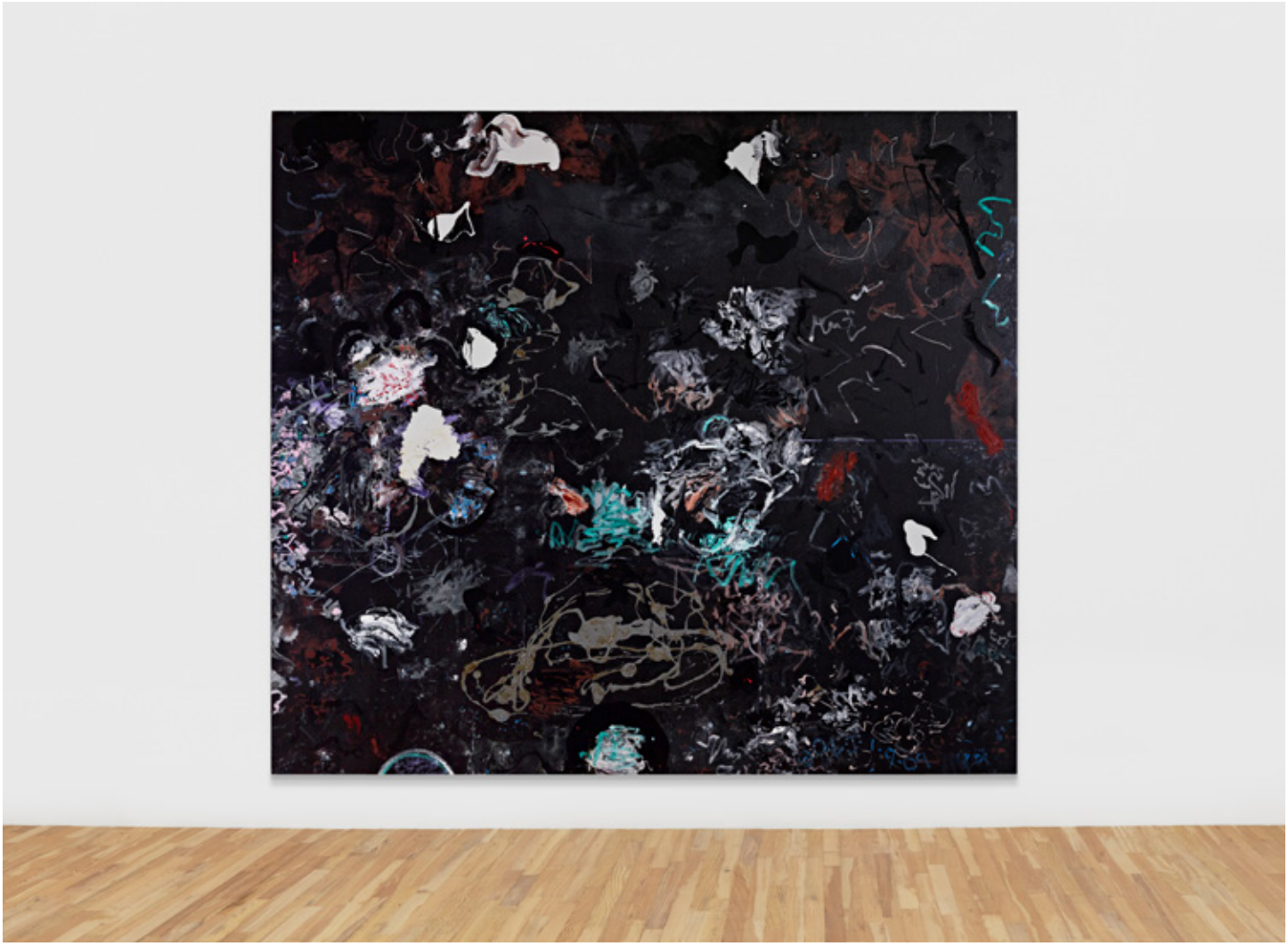
Andrew Kreps Gallery is pleased to announce the gallery's first exhibition with Oliver Lee Jackson (b. 1935, St. Louis, Missouri), opening March 25 at the gallery's 22 Cortlandt Alley Location.

Spanning five decades of Jackson's work, the exhibition includes paintings made between the 1970s and the present. Jackson has developed a singular body of work over the course of his career, creating complex and layered images in which suggestions of the figure emerge from abstract fields of vivid color. Heavily influenced by American Jazz, Jackson's paintings are improvisational in approach, as gestural marks become intertwined with vivid swaths of paint and color. Building over time, each work becomes a synthesis of disparate references, spanning from Rennaissance painting to Modernism, as well as Jackson's own studies of African cultures. The resulting compositions eschew a single narrative or reading and instead seek to encourage the viewer to form their own emotional response. Creating multiple points of entry within each painting, Jackson states that his work is "for anybody’s eyes. any eyes will do.”

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

Oliver Lee Jackson
Installation view
Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
March 25 – May 7, 2022

Andrew Kreps
Gallery



Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting (1.9.09), 2009
Oil-based paints on linen
96 1/4 x 108 3/4 inches (244.5 x 276.2 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Installation view
Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
March 25 – May 7, 2022

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting No. 2, 2021 (5.20.21), 2021
Oil-based paints, mixed media on panel
97 x 74 inches
(246.4 x 188 cm)

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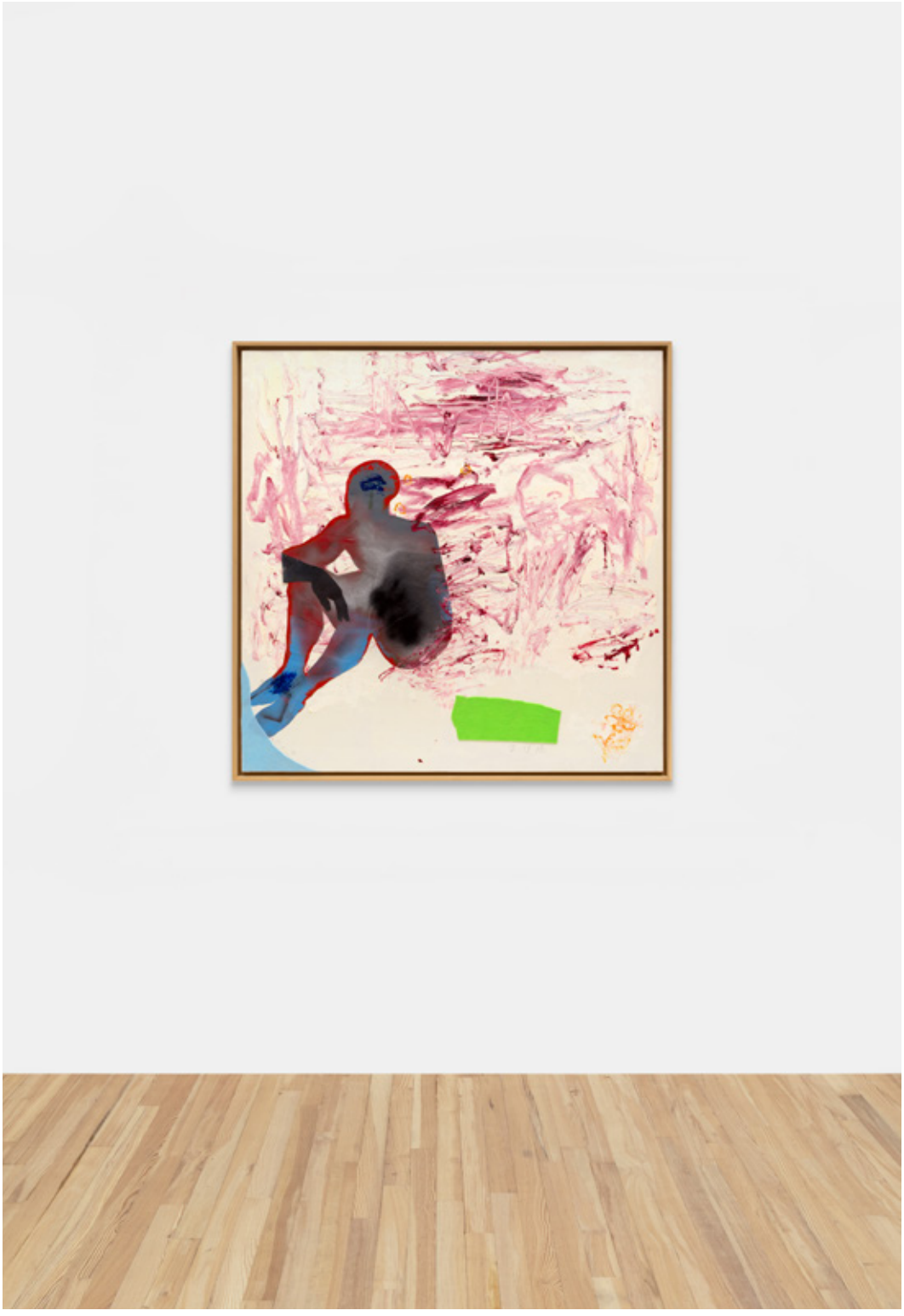
Oliver Lee Jackson
8.20.18, 2018
Signed on recto
Mixed media on gessoed panel
96 x 72 inches (243.8 x 182.9 cm)

Oliver Lee Jackson
Installation view
Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
March 25 – May 7, 2022

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

Oliver Lee Jackson
7.31.18, 2018
Signed on recto Mixed media on panel
96 x 72 inches (243.8 x 182.9 cm)

Andrew Kreps
Gallery



Oliver Lee Jackson
No. 4, 2018 (2.3.18), 2018
Oil-based paints on panel
48 x 48 inches (121.9 x 121.9 cm)

Andrew Kreps
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Oliver Lee Jackson
Installation view
Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
March 25 – May 7, 2022

Andrew Kreps
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Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting (4.78-II), 1978
Oil-based enamel on cotton canvas
120 x 87 1/8 inches (304.8 x 221.3 cm)

Andrew Kreps
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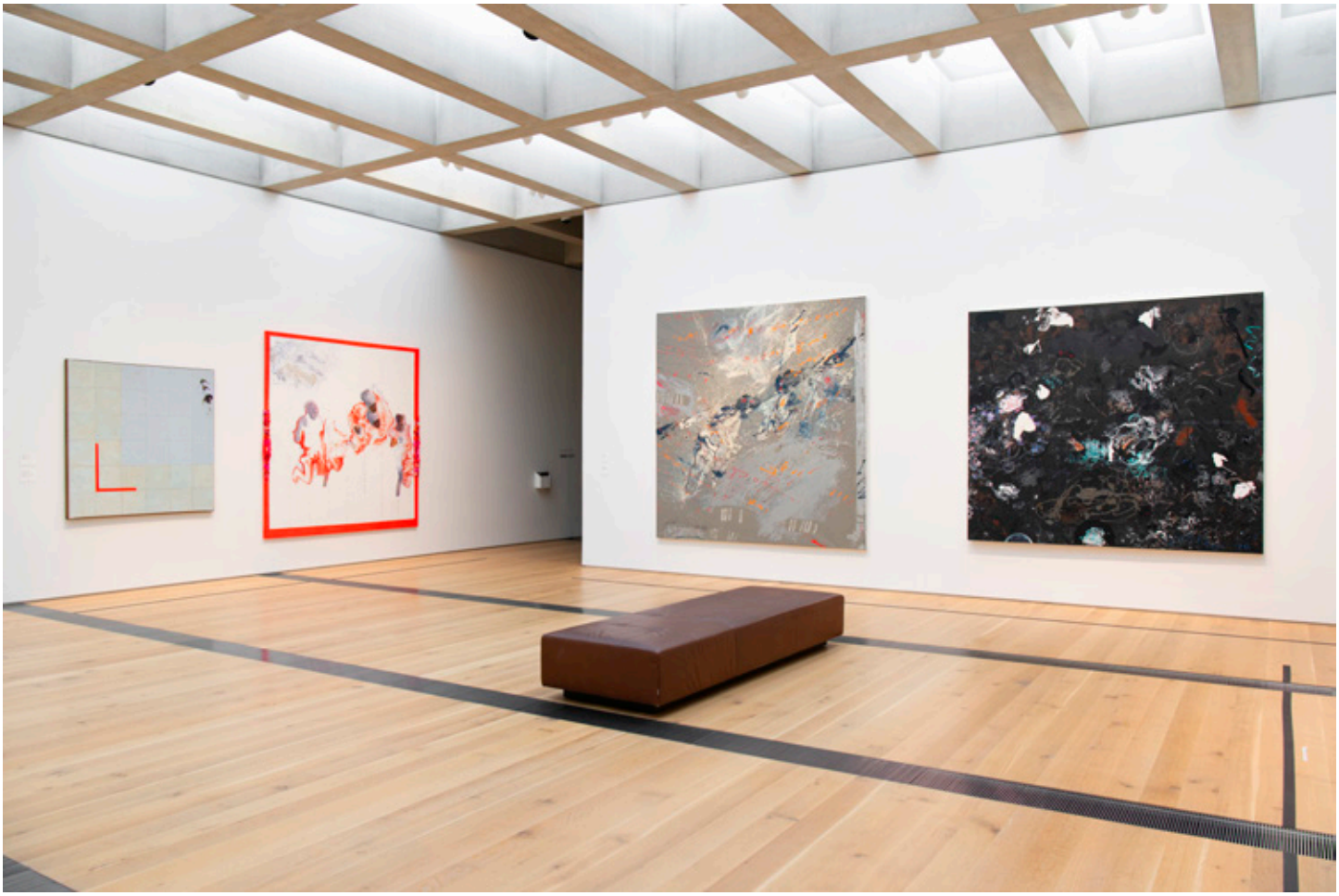
Oliver Lee Jackson
Installation view
Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
March 25 – May 7, 2022

Oliver Lee Jackson
Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
July 16, 2021–February 22, 2022

Oliver Lee Jackson is known for creating complex and layered images in which figurative elements—or what he calls "paint people"—emerge from abstract fields of vibrant color. Jackson's practice is informed by a deep understanding of global art history—from early modern European painting to African art. Yet his works do not aim to elevate a single message, narrative, or meaning. Rather, the works serve as an open invitation to slow and close looking, encouraging viewers to stake emotional claim on the paintings and not wait for instructions on what to see.

The 12 paintings, drawings, and prints presented in this exhibition were created from the mid-1960s through 2020, tracing Jackson's aesthetic evolution over five decades and demonstrating his significance as a highly experimental artist working across a range of media.

Jackson was associated with the Black Artists Group, which was founded in St. Louis in 1968, and a close friend of comember and jazz saxophonist Julius Hemphill. The improvisational nature of Jackson's work relates closely to his love of the spontaneity and freedom of jazz. Many of the works on view are loans from Donald M. Suggs, a local collector and close friend of Jackson's.



Oliver Lee Jackson
Exhibition view
Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
July 16, 2021–February 22, 2022

Oliver Lee Jackson
Exhibition view
Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
July 16, 2021–February 22, 2022

Oliver Lee Jackson
Exhibition view
Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
July 16, 2021–February 22, 2022

Oliver Lee Jackson
Exhibition view
Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
July 16, 2021–February 22, 2022

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Oliver Lee Jackson
No. 1, 2020 (6.14.20), 2020
Oil-based paints, mixed media on panel
96 x 96 inches (243.8 x 243.8 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
7.6.18, 2018
Signed on recto
Mixed media on gessoed panel
96 x 72 inches (243.8 x 182.9 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
8.20.18, 2018
Signed on recto
Mixed media on gessoed panel
96 x 72 inches (243.8 x 182.9 cm)

Andrew Kreps
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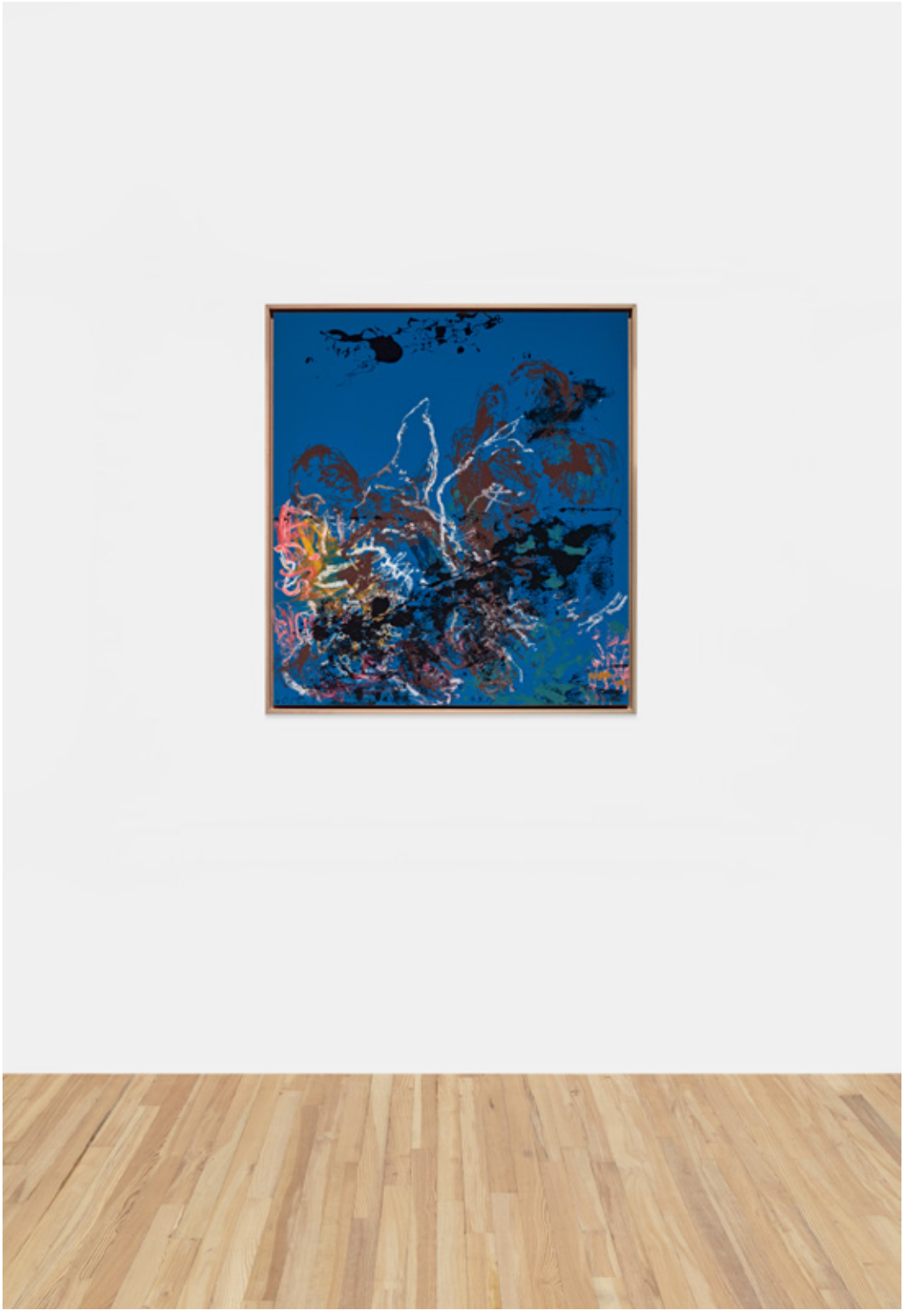

Oliver Lee Jackson
No. 10, 2017 (9.5.17), 2017
Oil enamels, artist oils on 3/8" panel
44 x 40 inches (111.8 x 101.6 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting (8.16.96), 1996
Oil-based pigments, mixed media on linen
84 x 96 inches (213.4 x 243.8 cm)

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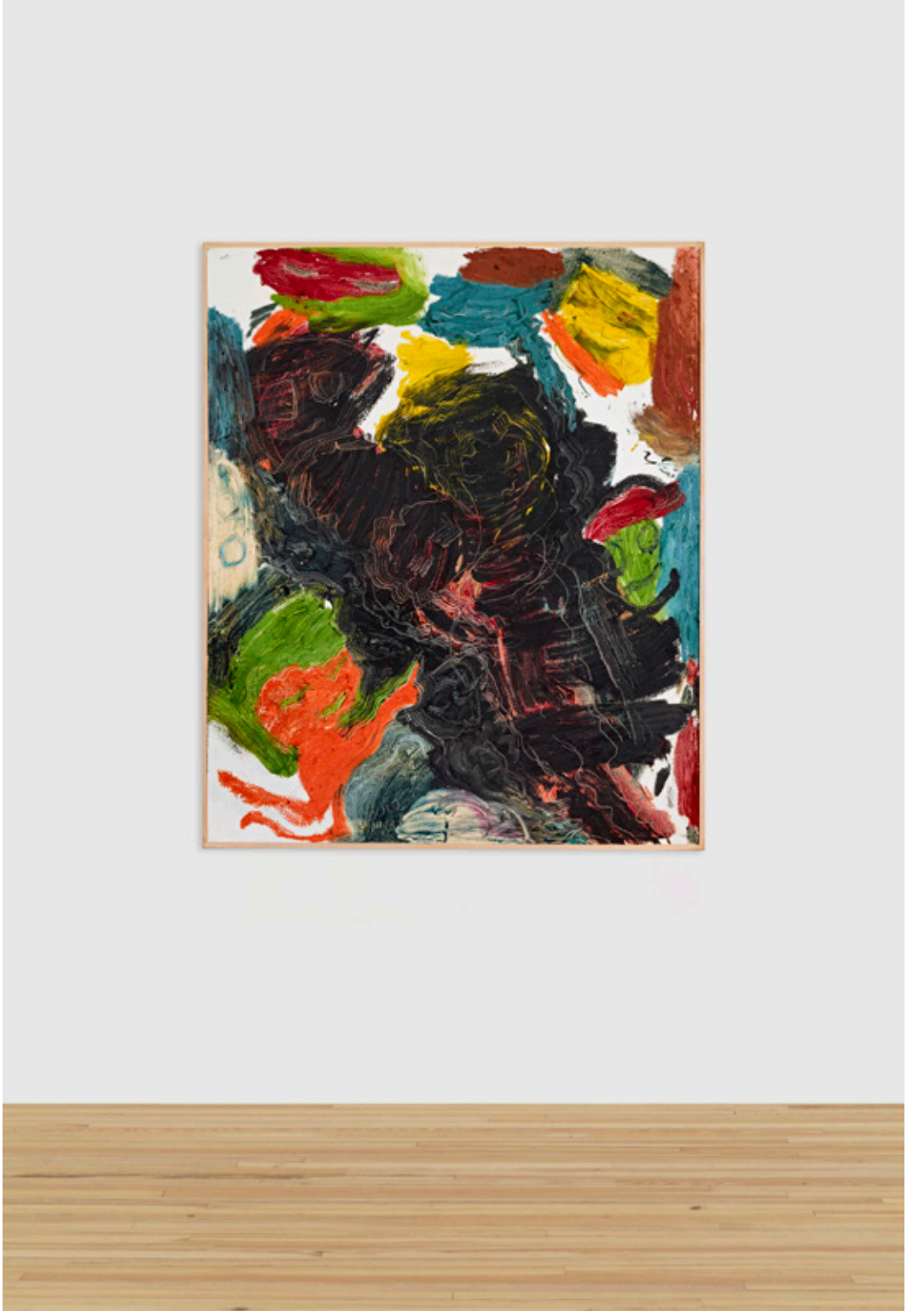
Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting (8.3.96), 1996
Oil-based pigments, mixed media on linen
84 x 96 inches (213.4 x 243.8 cm)

Andrew Kreps
Gallery



Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting (8.3.96), 1996
Oil-based pigments, mixed media on linen
84 x 96 inches (213.4 x 243.8 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting (4.15.86), 1986
Oil-based pigments on gessoed linen
95 3/4 x 108 inches (243.2 x 274.3 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting (11.30.80), 1980
Oil-based enamel and duct tape on cotton canvas
83 3/4 x 119 inches (212.7 x 302.3 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting (4.78-II), 1978
Oil-based enamel on cotton canvas
120 x 87 1/8 inches (304.8 x 221.3 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Alchemy Series I, 1975
Oil-based enamels on cotton canvas
113 x 111 inches (287 x 281.9 cm)

Oliver Lee Jackson
Sharpeville Series VIII, 1973
Acrylic paints, mixed media on cotton canvas
103 x 101 3/8 inches (261.6 x 257.5 cm)

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Oliver Lee Jackson
Painting II, 1969
Acrylic paints, mixed media on cotton canvas
66 1/2 x 66 1/2 inches (168.9 x 168.9 cm)

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OLIVER LEE JACKSON:
SELECTED PRESS

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National
Gallery of Art

Produced by the department of exhibition programs, National Gallery of Art, Washington, in conjunction with the exhibition “Oliver Lee Jackson: Recent Paintings,” National Gallery of Art, 2019

Click above to hear the interview with Oliver Lee Jackson.

HYPERALLERGIC

Art Reviews

The Figural Ghosts of Oliver Lee Jackson's Expressive Abstraction

Jackson's two-dimensional surfaces lead us into a maze of shapes and visual gestures, yet tease us into recognizing the figures hidden within.

Oliver Lee Jackson (American, born 1935) "No. 1, 2020 (6.14.20)" (2020), oil-based paints, chalk, fixative on gessoed panel, 96 x 96 inches (courtesy the artist 2021.92; © Oliver Lee Jackson, photo by M. Lee Fatherree)

Two silver birds above a thick pink sunset, a quiet smile from a lone cloud, a woman's eyelids, a glimpse of a sleeping boy's foot, two hands interlocked on a walk through a vertiginous meadow, a saffron skyline exploding on the wall.

To experience the work of artist Oliver Lee Jackson, born in 1935, is to pull at the seams of perception so as to see ourselves for the very first time. His two-dimensional surfaces lead us into a maze of shapes and visual gestures, yet tease us into recognizing the figures hidden within. Is that an azure ellipse or a man's shoulder blade? An egg cracked into a void or a veil lifted by aged fingers? A beating heart or a crowded womb? Within each work emerge unbidden characters, the abstract haunted by the figural.

Curated by Simon Kelly and Hannah Klemm, and on view at the Saint

Louis Art Museum through February 20, Oliver Lee Jackson presents over a half century of the artist's oeuvre on luminous display — as tender as it is imposing, as unabashedly splashy as it is often subdued. In these 12 paintings, drawings, and prints from 1966 to 2020, Jackson's early career is juxtaposed with his output from the past 15 years, evidencing his evolving experiments with color, shape, and the tension between figuration and abstraction. Organized thematically and stylistically rather than chronologically, the exhibition honors this living Black American artist as a groundbreaking contributor to the story of abstraction.

Upon entering the first gallery, we are greeted on the right by a 96 by 96

Oliver Lee Jackson (American, born 1935), "Untitled (Sharpeville Series)" (c. 1966), graphite on paper, approx. 30 x 40 inches. Collection of Donald M. Suggs 2021.85 (© Oliver Lee Jackson)

inch blazing yellow canvas painted with a combination of oil, chalk, and fixative on gessoed panel. The painting radiates with the intensity of its pigments: peony juts from a bottom corner, crimson squiggles swirl and collide, misty blue blotches float to the left. Titled "No. 1, 2020 (6.14.20)" after its date of completion, this most recent work on display erupts with the energy of early summer — in warm contrast to a bitter winter and ongoing pandemic. Two human figures on the left seem to move into the painting's unseen depths, the brow of the taller one leaning into the journey. Next to "No. 1," an even larger painting, mostly white, depicts a tornado-like rupture of vibrant color; greens, blacks, and reds cluster, while two poofs of bright yellow appear toward the center.

On the wall to the south, the largest work in the room — "Painting (12.15.04)," a 108 inch by 12 foot 1/8 inch linen canvas — is over two inches thick, a mirthful cacophony of oil, enamel, and mixed media. Strips of torn linen are affixed to the surface with heavy splotches of paint, itself taking on the tactility of fabric. The oldest, and smallest, works in the first gallery — "Sharpeville Series I, 1970" and "Sharpeville Series VIII, 1973," both taking the form of a grid and rendered predominantly in a muted gray-green — reference the 1960 slaughter of peaceful protestors in Sharpeville, South Africa. "Sharpeville Series VIII" is framed with a flamingo pink festooned on either side with magenta tassels; in its center, the silhouettes of four running figures emerge from the blank background, with varying degrees of representational detail. In "Sharpeville Series I"

Oliver Lee Jackson (American, born 1935), "Sharpeville Series VIII" (c. 1973), acrylic paint, applied fabric, mixed media on cotton canvas, approx. 84 x 84 inches. Collection of Donald M. Suggs 2021.84 (© Oliver Lee Jackson)

the same shade of pink forms an L-shape in its bottom left corner; on the upper right of the grid, a tiny hand holds a white blanket that nuzzles, in the square below, the likeness of a child's face.

A similar grid appears in the second gallery in Jackson's drawing "Untitled (Sharpeville Series)," circa 1966, this time dominated by graphite figures of human victims lying prone, parts of their bodies erased by partially or fully empty squares. In all three of these works, the precision of the grid visually imposes a type of order on a catastrophically violent event. Across the room, an eerie watercolor, "Untitled (8-22-89 II)," speaks to Jackson's

virtuosity across media; the amorphous outlines of seven human forms — pointing, crouching, and lying face down — hover on a beige plane. Pastel blue, green, and bright pink lend a sense of childhood innocence, one subtly disrupted by an upside-down skull grinning to the left.

Abstract expressionism has long had the reputation of being all white, all male, and almighty, but Jackson is one of many Black artists to contribute to the history of American abstraction. Born in St. Louis and based in Oakland, California, he was associated with the artists, dancers, poets, and musicians comprising St. Louis's Black Artist Group (BAG) of the late 1960s and early '70s, a multidisciplinary cooperative that traveled throughout the nation, and around the globe, to promote what Jackson called an "African sensibility" alongside the European avant-garde. "To speak of one's art was not to describe what should be seen in it," argues Darby English in 1971: A Year in the Life of Color, on the spirit of two seminal American exhibitions of Black modernism. "It was to describe one's hope that the work would find itself, as it were, in a serious relationship, one in which the work could become more than what it — objectively — was by being seen for exactly what it was."

Oliver Lee Jackson (American, born 1935) "Sharpeville Series I" (1970), acrylic paints on cotton canvas, 72 x 72 inches. Collection of Donald M. Suggs 2021.83 (© Oliver Lee Jackson)

For Jackson — whose work did not appear in either of these shows, and whose artistic evolution over a half century is only now on display — what is visually at stake seems to morph as one approaches and retreats. We are rewarded for how deeply we inspect, then introspect, in response to these creations, which blur the line between abstraction and figuration, categories that Jackson himself has dismissed. What "exactly" we see is not what's most important. In each of his reveries of color and line, we are gifted a generous hint of what was, is, and may suddenly be.

Oliver Lee Jackson continues at the Saint Louis Art Museum (One Fine Arts Drive, Forest Park, St. Louis, Missouri) through February 20. The exhibition was curated by Simon Kelly and Hannah Klemm, with Molly Moog.

Seeing / Dreaming / Intimacy

HANNAH KLEMM

Oliver Lee Jackson begins his artworks from an interior feeling—the starting point from which the composition springs. At once conceptual and visceral, this feeling is expressed as a drawn line or a painted stroke, and guides the composition in the process of making. Jackson's artworks may provoke viewers to look deeply in contemplating the work as it stands before them. This vital act of contemplating the artwork, Jackson says, allows for intimacy between the art object and the person looking at it.

According to Jackson, "I'm asking people simply to look for contemplative reasons, and the rea- sons are not outside the work." A contemplative reason is not didactic, but rather experiential. The content of Jackson's work is not tethered to any specific space or time, but rather creates a phenomenological site for visual inquiry. The works are often not realistic depictions, but bring to my mind what the poet Wallace Stevens articulated in his 1945 poem, "Description Without Place." For Stevens, our individual experiences of the world are influenced by shifting perceptions—rather than a "true" fixed reality—that characterize visual art, poetry, and music, through which an artist opens up an experience for the viewer. Yet, Jackson asserts, the experience, and the artwork itself, are "true" realities.
The French philosopher Alain Badiou builds on Stevens' notion of a "description without a place" in his work on the fine arts, Drawing, in which he claims that the work of art is a description that has no immediate relationship with a reality outside of that description. Therefore such artistic description "is not a sign for something that lies outside its form," rather art can exist as "[t]he material visibility of invisibility." According to Badiou's reading of Stevens, "in the description without place you have a sort of fusion of being and existence." In other words, art extracts from what we think of as "reality" to create something new for the viewer, something complete as it is.

The act of viewing may take place in an instant, or may deepen over time, as the work presents itself through the eyes. Jackson's work asks the viewer only to be present before it, open to the experience. For Jackson, there is no one way to experience a work, nor is there one way to build a composition. The feeling that gives rise to the work determines the medium or methods used, and the composition comes forth from a sensitivity to the demands of the chosen materials.

Jackson pushes the boundaries of what any artistic medium can do to produce desired visual effects. He has created paintings that vibrate with energy through methods of cutting the canvas, attaching materials from metal studs to fabric strips to the surface, and layering, pouring, or scumbling different paints. Yet, painting is far from the only medium that Jackson employs. Throughout

his career, Jackson has created a multifaceted, complex body of work that also extends into printmaking, sculpture, and drawing.

I will focus in particular on Jackson's works on paper—prints, drawings, and watercolors. I will examine these works in terms of medium, process, and production, showing how Jackson embraces latent qualities and unique characteristics of drawing and printmaking to create powerful visual experiences.

PRINTING

Jackson has always employed printmaking techniques to achieve a desired effect: he sees printmaking as a form of drawing, in which the quality of lines cannot be duplicated by other methods. Badiou sees contemporary drawing as a unique aesthetic action, explaining that "a drawing is the fragmentary trace of a gesture, much more than a static result of this gesture." For Badiou, drawing captures the acts of movement and creation within the confines of the material support. For Jackson, however, drawing is a practiced skill, and the gesture is a means to make a thing that exists apart from the artist as a vehicle for contemplation.

Jackson approaches making prints as a drawing process, in which he makes marks on a copper plate or a wood block. The technically intricate medium of printmaking often involves multiple processes—from drafting images directly on copper to construction of the composition through carving or biting into a block or plate. The technical elements of printing, including its specialized skills, mate- rials, and technologies, contribute to our understanding of its role in Jackson's artistic practice, and in art making of the last several decades.

Jackson began to engage with printmaking when he took a class as an undergraduate art student at Illinois Wesleyan University. Among his earliest prints is an Untitled woodblock from 1956, in which a group of figures emerges from a busy constellation of incised marks. Figures occupy the central axis of the print and are surrounded by small bright dots and deep rays, as if a light source emanated from the upper left corner, creating a celestial atmosphere in the space around the figural images.

After his early work with woodcut, Jackson worked with intaglio printing, a process that may comprise engraving, etching, drypoint, and aquatint. Engraving, etching, and drypoint were originally employed in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries as reproductive linear techniques, and were developed further in the 17th and 18th centuries as methods for shading and tonal variation were introduced. In contrast to a woodcut, where the artist carves away material, leaving uncarved areas to be inked, intaglio methods achieve prints through a process of incising marks into a metal plate and rubbing ink over its surface; the ink is then wiped from the plate, remaining in the grooves.

The print is made by placing dampened paper over the plate and rolling it through a press under immense pressure, with the resulting image a reversal of that constructed by the artist.

Jackson made his first editioned intaglios in San Francisco in 1985 with master printer Timothy Berry of Teaberry Press. Over the years, he has worked with various printers; more recently, his printing is done almost exclusively by Paul Mullowney/Mullowney Printing. Jackson works on his own intaglio plates, and develops the prints through successive proof runs, employing techniques of etching, drypoint, and aquatint. Drypoint is the method of using a pointed tool to incise directly into the metal plate to achieve a particular quality of line. With etching, Jackson draws into a ground—a coating applied on the surface of the plate that is resistant to acid, leaving only the incised lines to be etched. The plate is then placed in an acid bath that eats into the exposed marks, so that the lines will hold ink for printing. In order to add tonal range, Jackson often uses aquatint, in which swaths of acid-resistant material, such as powdered resin—or more often for Jackson, spray enamels—bind to a printing plate. When the plate is immersed in the acid bath, acid eats into the metal around the solidified particles, resulting in dot patterns that read as tonal variation.

Jackson's use of intaglio printmaking processes is seen in this exhibition in Intaglio Drypoint VIII (Diptych) (4/15), 1993. Made using techniques of drypoint and etching, the print exhibits a wonderfully varied array of graphic marks. The print was created with two plates printed on a single sheet of paper, separated by ¼-inch of space. In each plate, figural forms emerge from marks in various tones that pull the eye across the paper. At upper left, a wide-brimmed hat is visible on a crouched figure seen from behind, constructed of sketchy lines of different tones. To achieve this effect, Jackson incised the plate to create different tonal effects, and used selective bur- nishing, rubbing with a tool to soften some of the lines. The figure has a naturalistic/recognizable appearance and bleeds into a more amorphous figural shape, where identifiers such as a head, eyes, and torso are in constant tension with abstract gestures, curves, and lines. These figural images, which are central to Jackson's practice, are not narrative elements; instead, for Jackson they are a form of vocabulary that gives rise to the composition. According to the artist, "the use of fig- ural imagery is a source for visual thinking." The images serve to lead the viewer's eye and indicate an ambiguous space in a constant state of flux between figural and non-figural forms. While rooted in figuration, Jackson's work dismantles any art historical false binary between abstraction and figuration.

This fluidity of figure and field can be seen in the lower plate of Intaglio Drypoint VIII (Diptych), 1993. While at first it may seem that the activity is primarily in the curves, tones, and interlocking figural elements on the right side of the sheet, an area of open field—the white of the paper—is punctuated on the left by a small, densely worked dark area that balances the composition. In this work, Jackson deftly used processes inherent to drawing and printmaking

to achieve compositional harmony.

Each of Jackson's works creates its own world, its own internal space for contemplation. In composing, he is "[i]nterested in the images relating to one another in such a way that they call up and create tension. The tension between them activates the viewer." Whether at a monumental scale, or the more intimate size of a print, Jackson's works draw us in; they may provoke in us an experience that is meant to be personal, perhaps giving rise to feelings of recognition, comfort, ambivalence, or even unease. While the compositions may at times seem to verge on the chaotic, they are nonetheless carefully controlled and rigorously structured.

Intaglio Print XXXVII (Hilo I-1.15.12) (TP-II), also in this exhibition, is the first of a series of four prints that Jackson made in 2012 when he was in residence at the University of Hawaii, Hilo, and were printed there by Wayne Miyamoto. In the lower part of this print, brushstrokes made in the etching ground flow across the paper, and gather to form a central seated figure. At bottom left an abstracted reclining figure emerges from the swirling composition as leg, torso, and arm forms dissipate into lines or come together to form clusters of figures. The stark white of the paper stands in contrast to the dark tone of the printer's ink, showing a dimensionality and sharpness that are achieved through the intaglio processes.

In Composite (12.3.12), 2012, Jackson combines elements of drawing, intaglio printing, and applied materials, as figures constructed from torn drawings and prints seem to dance, lounge, and walk within an atmospheric ground, itself a print. This base intaglio print anchors the scene, while swirling lines from pencils and markers contrast with the etched lines of the printed elements. Jackson explains that "when you are pursuing a particular goal, the materials are making demands, and if you acquiesce to the material demands, they will change the work." Here the utilization of several mediums creates layers of depth in a fluid spatial field that holds the composition in dynamic tension.

DRAWING

A skilled draftsman, Jackson has been making drawings and watercolors since the 1950s. Drawing is in some ways a starting point for all of Jackson's work. One of Jackson's early graphite drawings, Untitled (Sharpeville Series), 1966, was made before the series of paintings that he titled similarly. The title makes reference to a historical event—the Sharpeville massacre that occurred on March 21, 1960, in Composite (12.3.12), 2012 the township of Sharpeville, South Africa, when police opened fire into an unarmed crowd of Black demonstrators who had marched to Sharpeville's police station to protest that country's system of colonial apartheid. Sixty-nine people were killed and 180 were wounded, including children. This brutal violence was captured by

photographer Ian Berry in horrific images that were seen around the world, as the event became symbolic of the struggle for dignity, freedom, equality, and justice against racist oppression and brutality. According to the artist, the desperate gestures of the victims became a springboard for developing his work. Jackson was impressed by the way that the gestures of the figures captured in the photographs conveyed a state of being of people under duress, and he made numerous drawings and paintings with forms derived from those photographs. He has said that while images from that event became a potent source for him, it was the gestures—of running, fleeing, falling—that motivated him in the work; the resulting works give no indication of any specific event or history, other than the series title.

While Untitled (Sharpeville Series), 1966, registers Jackson's response to images from the Sharpeville massacre, he was interested in the universality of violence, rather than the history of this specific event. He explains that "beauty and violence often hang out together. That's why people can't help looking." In this carefully rendered drawing, the abstracted and amorphous bodies, disconnected from any specific act, still have the power to provoke a visceral response from the viewer, because of their desperate postures. This can be seen in artworks across history, from Francisco Goya's Disasters of War to Pablo Picasso's Guernica. In works from this series, Jackson regards what Slavoj Žižek has termed "systemic violence," or the ubiquitous violence that emerges from interconnected systems of power in the world, casting what Žižek would call a "sideways glance" at global violence. In not ascribing a historical or didactic reading to the work, Jackson, instead, manages to articulate nebulous feelings of anxiety provoked by violence, disenfranchisement, and inequality.

A discussion of Jackson's works on paper would not be complete without looking particular quality of line. With etching, Jackson draws into a ground—a coating applied on the surface of the plate that is resistant to acid, leaving only the incised lines to be etched. The plate is then placed in an acid bath that eats into the exposed marks, so that the lines will hold ink for printing. In order to add tonal range, Jackson often uses aquatint, in which swaths of acid-resistant material, such as powdered resin—or more often for Jackson, spray enamels—bind to a printing plate. When the plate is immersed in the acid bath, acid eats into the metal around the solidified particles, resulting in dot patterns that read as tonal variation.

Jackson's use of intaglio printmaking processes is seen in this exhibition in Intaglio Drypoint VIII (Diptych) (4/15), 1993. Made using techniques of drypoint and etching, the print exhibits a wonderfully varied array of graphic marks. The print was created with two plates printed on a single sheet of paper, separated by ¼-inch of space. In each plate, figural forms emerge from marks in various tones that pull the eye across the paper. At upper left, a wide-brimmed hat is visible on a crouched figure seen from behind, constructed of sketchy lines of different tones. To achieve this effect, Jackson incised the plate to create

different tonal effects, and used selective bur- nishing, rubbing with a tool to soften some of the lines. The figure has a naturalistic/recognizable appearance and bleeds into a more amorphous figural shape, where identifiers such as a head, eyes, and torso are in constant tension with abstract gestures, curves, and lines. These figural images, which are central to Jackson's practice, are not narrative elements; instead, for Jackson they are a form of vocabulary that gives rise to the composition. According to the artist, "the use of fig- ural imagery is a source for visual thinking." The images serve to lead the viewer's eye and indicate an ambiguous space in a constant state of flux between figural and non-figural forms. While rooted in figuration, Jackson's work dismantles any art historical false binary between abstraction and figuration.

This fluidity of figure and field can be seen in the lower plate of Intaglio Drypoint VIII (Diptych), 1993. While at first it may seem that the activity is primarily in the curves, tones, and interlocking figural elements on the right side of the sheet, an area of open field—the white of the paper—is punctuated on the left by a small, densely worked dark area that balances the composition. In this work, Jackson deftly used processes inherent to drawing and printmaking to achieve compositional harmony.

Each of Jackson's works creates its own world, its own internal space for contemplation. In composing, he is "[i]nterested in the images relating to one another in such a way that they call up and create tension. The tension between them activates the viewer." Whether at a monumental scale, or the more intimate size of a print, Jackson's works draw us in; they may provoke in us an experience that is meant to be personal, perhaps giving rise to feelings of recognition, comfort, ambivalence, or even unease. While the compositions may at times seem to verge on the chaotic, they are nonetheless carefully controlled and rigorously structured.

Intaglio Print XXXVII (Hilo I-1.15.12) (TP-II), also in this exhibition, is the first of a series of four prints that Jackson made in 2012 when he was in residence at the University of Hawaii, Hilo, and were printed there by Wayne Miyamoto. In the lower part of this print, brushstrokes made in the etching ground flow across the paper, and gather to form a central seated figure. At bottom left an abstracted reclining figure emerges from the swirling composition as leg, torso, and arm forms dissipate into lines or come together to form clusters of figures. The stark white of the paper stands in contrast to the dark tone of the printer's ink, showing a dimensionality and sharpness that are achieved through the intaglio processes.

In Composite (12.3.12), 2012, Jackson combines elements of drawing, intaglio printing, and applied materials, as figures constructed from torn drawings and prints seem to dance, lounge, and walk within an atmospheric ground, itself a print. This base intaglio print anchors the scene, while swirling lines from pencils and markers contrast with the etched lines of the printed

elements. Jackson explains that "when you are pursuing a particular goal, the materials are making demands, and if you acquiesce to the material demands, they will change the work." Here the utilization of several mediums creates layers of depth in a fluid spatial field that holds the composition in dynamic tension.

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A discussion of Jackson's works on paper would not be complete without

looking at his use of watercolor, which he has embraced for its translucence, fluidity, and unique effects of illumination. In Watercolor (8.22.89-II), 1989, from the Saint Louis Art Museum's collection, multiple figures of different colors float in the lower half of the paper in varying degrees of transparency or opacity, the unpainted areas creating a sense of space and volume. The gestures of the figural images convey an intimacy: several figures appear to crouch, clustered around a reclined figure at lower center, their arched backs echoing curvilinear forms repeated throughout the composition. Layered forms and colors bleed into each other, pulling the eye toward the corners. At the left, figures flow upward and downward, pointing towards forms at the right. A seated figure faces outward, as if acknowledging the viewer, inviting entry into the work.

Jackson's figures are not trying to become something else; they seem to exist between states of being and becoming, living and dead, dreaming and awake. His works do not assert a particular message, narrative, or meaning at the heart of our experience, but rather enable an encounter that may allow a lasting aesthetic experience. He is not interested in singular ways of seeing: his work is informed by a deep understanding of global art history, a sensitivity to chosen materials, and the demands of the work in the making process. Jackson is not concerned with "style," but rather with phenomenological moments, which are expressed in his paintings and graphic works through his use of materiality and medium. He would encourage viewers to give themselves time, in viewing, for possible intimacy with the work. This resonance, as Jackson calls it, within the viewer is in essence a form of experience.

Scholars have often discussed the poetry of Wallace Stevens as an exploration of the function of imagination, and I would like to extend that to Jackson's work. The imaginary is a place of human intimacy, connecting otherwise disconnected realities. As Steven writes in his poem, "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour": "Out of this same light, out of the central mind, / We make a dwelling in the evening air, / In which being there together is enough." Jackson's works give us a place to be, together, and to dream, whether as makers or as viewers.

— Hannah Klemm, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Saint Louis Art Museum

Listening to the Undertone

NIJAH CUNNINGHAM

Stranded in someone else's neighborhood Listening to the undertone
Lord! Sure makes it a blessing to know you got your own
—Curtis Mayfield, "When Seasons Change"

On February 26, 1971, Oliver Lee Jackson, poet Michael S. Harper, jazz musician and composer Julius Hemphill, and members the Black Artists' Group staged a "concert-ritual prayer" entitled Images: Sons/Ancestors at the Powell Symphony Hall in St. Louis. In the concert program Jackson writes: "Tonight you will be witness to a ceremony of Ancestors and Sons—a calling forth of the spiritually dynamic forces and powers of the cosmos, to revitalize, re-strengthen across space and time, that harmonious existence which perpetuates itself as the African Continuum."2 On the level of both con- tent and form, the concert was an embodied critique of the western sensibility physically enshrined in the newly renovated concert hall.3 Unlike the symphony orchestras that usually graced the prosce- nium stage, musicians in Images: Sons/Ancestors performed alongside African sculptures in an ensemble that ran up against the foundational opposition of subjects and objects—or, to be more precise, the necessary subordination of objects by the subject as a rational being—that grounds western thought. The ensemble enacted a form of harmony through the correspondence or interanimation of musicians and sculptures that affirmed a spiritual connection between past and present, sons and ancestors. "The spiritual continuum never breaks down," Jackson writes in the program notes, "even when violated on the human plane to the extent of causing unharmonious consequences in the world of men. It is the nature of the cosmos to seek harmony, but the cosmic harmony of the universe is not fully compre- hensible to men in its totality."4 Curtis Mayfield talks about a similar harmony that escapes our com- prehension when he talks about listening to the undertone. Like Mayfield, Jackson's art calls for a certain attunement to the knowledges that persist at a low frequency almost like a quiet hum and res- onate across space and time as an ongoing reminder that despite the brutalities of the world we have been given we still got our own.

For the past five decades, Oliver Lee Jackson has continuously developed and refined the idea of the African Continuum that was at the heart of the 1971 concert-ritual prayer. For me, what makes Images: Sons/Ancestors both remarkable and a useful starting point for a consideration of Jackson's aesthetic has everything to do with the harmony that he elaborates on in the program notes. We can think about the African Continuum as a subharmonic field or a low frequency vibration that persists despite the violent enclosure and ongoing negation of black life in the modern world. However, Jackson's aim is not to represent an enduring link to an African past. To be sure, this is what makes his collaborations with members of the Black Artists' Group and his approach

to art making more gener- ally stand out from some of the more well-known instantiations of a black aesthetics that came out of the sixties and seventies. From the outset, Jackson's art did more than just critique western notions of beauty and creativity. His artistic approach, I want to suggest, proceeds from a reconstruction of visual experience that opens aesthetic possibilities that escape the grasps of reason and understanding aesthetics that came out of the sixties and seventies. From the outset, Jackson's art did more than just critique western notions of beauty and creativity. His artistic approach, I want to suggest, proceeds from a reconstruction of visual experience that opens aesthetic possibilities that escape the grasps of reason and understanding.

When we look at Jackson's art we must listen to the undertone. It is crucial to remember that sounds are fundamentally vibrations that touch us and resonate in our bodies. Perhaps this is what Jackson aims after in his assertions that "you don't really know it until it resonates you" during a recent interview with Harry Cooper, senior curator of modern art at the National Gallery of Art. 5 Cooper does his part to further elaborate on this assertion when he invokes the figure of the "resonated beholder" as a way of explaining how the viewer can be "deeply, irresistibly affected by the objects an artist makes."6 In this way, listening to the undertone is a way of reorientating ourselves to art objects, to yield to the beauty of things, and open ourselves to the knowledges that art objects convey at the level of affect and sensation.

This reorientation is perhaps most apparent in Alchemy I, 1975. Here red and orange pigment dance across the canvas as two figures emerge out of the overlay of black and white paint splattered against a gray backdrop. It is difficult not be reminded of Jackson Pollock's Alchemy, 1947, one of his earliest executions of his so-called "drip technique" that has been celebrated for transforming the tra- ditional relationship between the artist and the canvas while, at the same time, it has contributed to modern art's valorization of spontaneity as the expression of "authentic individuality."

However, whereas abstract expressionism views spontaneity as an index of an artist's singular genius, for Oliver Lee Jackson spontaneity refers to an "absolute intimacy with the materials."7 In Alchemy I, 1975, the placement of the figures, color distribution, and the sense of depth established by the nebulous forms in the background are not the outcome of a psychically strenuous activity of the artist. Rather, Jackson equates the process of making to "an ongoing enlightenment and intimacy" in which the artist attends to the demands of the materials. This displacement of artist as agent is carried out by the two figures that emerge from the interplay of the dripping, splattering, and other painting techniques. "What I had to understand," Jackson explains, "is that there is no dictionary in the visual—there is not. So, it's freedom, but it is also an extraordinary difficulty because you need a guide but there is none, so you end up making one." The two figures are like guides that orient us to the visual field. Throughout many of Jackson's artworks, we find figures that

are neither illustrations of ideas nor representations of something that resides elsewhere but, instead, convey feelings and intensities through their ges- tures and formal relationships. In Alchemy I, the tension between the figures conveys a yearning that affectively charges the surface of the painting. For Jackson, the visual plane is a potent field where artist and viewer alike are affected by what is brought forth.

Painting (11.30.80), 1980, invites us to further contemplate what is brought forth by art objects. Faces float above a rectangle at the center of a pink expanse that marks the distance between two fig- ures with their arms extended outwards. This gesture of reaching out is further distilled by an open hand in the middle of the expanse. That reach turns into a call as markings spell out "my sol heard me cal" and the numbers "7635118801." Here, however, the slanted angle of the two 8s alters the visual encounter and disrupts any attempt to derive linguistic and numerical meaning from the markings in the painting. What initially comes across as a moment of self-recognition suddenly conveys a sense of infinity that the viewer experiences as a kind of dawning (note the ambivalence between "sol" as a homophone for "soul" and the Spanish word for "sun") or enlightenment. Like the rectangle made of duct tape in the center of the composition, the "true meaning" of Painting (11.30.80), 1980, is not what it represents or makes visible but, instead, what it brings forth. Viewers are invited to open themselves up to the infinite possibilities that emanate out from under what is seen on the surface.

Time and space get rearranged once we start listening to the undertone. Such is the case with Jackson's Sharpeville Series. His response to the 1960 massacre of black demonstrators in the township of Sharpeville in apartheid South Africa flirts with aspects of history painting only to disrupt the dis- tancing effect produced by the genre's monumental depictions of past events. Take, for instance, Jackson's engagement with the grid in his graphite drawing Untitled (Sharpeville Series), 1966. The viewer is denied access to the scene of atrocity by a set of vertical and horizontal lines that order the visual plane. Instead, the artwork compels the viewer to bear witness to the ways black suffering is systematically obscured and falls under the erasure of objectivity's distant gaze, which Jackson's long- time friend and collaborator Michael S. Harper aptly called "Apollo Vision." Listen to how Jackson's painting echoes with Harper's poem:

This grid, ideal, intersecting squares, system, thought, western wall, migrating phoenix, death to all. Harper's poetic imagery associates the worldview propagated by western enlightenment (notably, Apollo is the Greek god of sun, light, poetry, order, and beauty) with the world-destructive forces of slavery, empire, and colonial domination. Untitled (Sharpeville Series) demands the viewer to linger in the space of negation and attend to what history obscures and refuses to make knowable. To be sure, we are not talking about hidden or repressed knowledges but a knowing that is felt, a knowing that resonates and

affects us when we yield to the demands of Jackson's art.

Both Sharpeville Series I, 1969-70, and Sharpeville Series VIII, 1973, trace the bleeding edge where the distinctions between here and there, past and present, begin to fade. The prominence of red in both works evokes bloodshed as well as the "bleed" which in printmaking refers to the area that exceeds the edge of the image. Red brings forth all these things at once. Listen as Jackson gives us an overview of his theory of color:

Color in painting for me is form. That's like sound for Julius [Hemphill]. And this is it: An apple and its skin color and its interior is one thing. That is the "apple." So the form of the apple is not in its shape more than its color. But we know it in recognition by its color. And its color is not a patina put upon it. It is the growth of how it presents itself for everything: the birds, the bees. "This is what I am. My form is here contained in the very acute." Now, in painting, the use of color is extraordinary, and its extraordinariness is so difficult to deal with if you recognize it for all of the things that it does simultaneously.

Red simultaneously evokes the blood spilled during the massacre and how this event bleeds across the conceptual boundaries that relegate it to the past. In Sharpeville Series I, 1969-70, the bleeding edge appears within the compositional field. It is as if the entire image is slightly offset to the upper right corner as the sole figure in the painting falls outside of the field of vision. Whereas his- tory paintings seek to capture the significance of a particular moment in time, Jackson's work commemorates aspects of the Sharpeville mas- sacre that cannot be contained within a con- ceptual frame of a historical event. Similarly, in Sharpeville Series VIII, 1973, the red fabric that Jackson incorporates into the red border breaks the visual plane as if reaching out from the past into the present. Both paintings refuse to represent the Sharpeville massacre as a his- torical event and relegate racial violence to the past. Instead, the redness of both works drags the violence and terror that the world wit- nessed on March 21, 1960, into the present as ongoing conditions that continue to shape black life in the modern world.

In the face of the unending violence and forms of racial subordination that shape this world, it is crucial that we attend to the ways tenderness and care constantly appear throughout Jackson's art. Even within the spaces of negation that we encounter in the Sharpeville Series, we find figures caught in a protective embrace or bearing the weight of another. In Untitled (Sharpeville Series), 1966, a child's head gently presses against the partially visible torso of another human figure in a manner that is both beautiful and terrifying. Although the sense of tranquility that this portion of the image conveys does not redress the brutality of the massacre, and while it is impossible to discern whether these figures are alive, the weight of the small head against the body of another indexes to a form of intimacy and togetherness that unfolds in the face of death. A similar tenderness is found in Jackson's Watercolor (8.22.89-

II), 1989, where a figure framed by a green halo lovingly holds the head of another to its face while, to the left, a figure of authority stands upright and commands those crouched before it. Perhaps tenderness is a term of sociality that signifies the forms of care, regard, and togetherness that unfold within the context of violence and oppression. Perhaps tenderness is the secret knowledge that the African Continuum carries and preserves despite the "unharmonious consequences in the world of men." That would be to suggest that the ongoing intimacy and enlightenment of Jackson's making process might also hold a lesson for our collective survival.

Wood Relief, 1986, was lost in a Christmas fire that destroyed novelist Toni Morrison's Hudson River home in 1993. Even in its absence the work still resonates in the here and now. In a photographic reproduction of the work, the torso of a human figure seems to emerge from square sheets of gold leaf applied to the upper half of the wood carving. There is a certain ambivalence bound up in the lumi- nosity and shine created by the light that hits against the sheets of this precious material. Does the gold's shine convey the inherent value of the human figure or does it approximate the market value inscribed onto black flesh within the context of new world slavery? What does the material demand? The fleeting light that once emanated from this artwork brings us back to the cosmic harmony of the universe that was at the heart of Jackson's concerns back in 1971. While listening to the undertone enables us to attend to a harmony that resonates and reorders aesthetic experience, the fleeting light that emanates from the lost art object opens up new forms of intimacy and enlightenment that exceed the limits of comprehension. Just as the light of a star can reach our eyes hundreds of years after its death, what Wood Relief, 1986, demands is brought forth through its absence like a faint memory of what was that testifies to what might be.

—Nijah Cunningham, Assistant Professor Hunter College, CUNY

Nowhereland: Oliver Lee Jackson's *Sharpeville Series*

SIMON KELLY

For a brief period of four weeks in October 1973, an exhibition of Oliver Lee Jackson's Sharpeville Series ran at the gallery of the Loretto-Hilton Center in Webster University, St. Louis. The installation comprised seven paintings, their titles referencing the 1960 police massacre of peaceful protesters in the South African township of Sharpeville. Horizontal canvases led towards the large square painting, Sharpeville Series VIII. Jackson accompanied his images with a statement which ran as follows:

The power that the images carry must have intent—the intent of struggle-violence-liberation. In that intent is the beauty of power and its modality. It is the bearing witness to this aspect of power and intent in the actual struggle of people of African descent that is noble, enduring and beautiful. It is the refusal to be subjugated that makes the African struggle for liberation a relentless, terrible and honest struggle. I am a witness to the power of that struggle: I present the image of that power.

Jackson's words situated his paintings within a wider pan-African history of opposition to State violence and colonial oppression. These were paintings of "beautiful" resistance, realized in a novel artistic language of intense color, accomplished draftsmanship, and non-conventional artistic materi- als. The show opening was accompanied by a musical performance by Jackson's close friend, the avant-garde saxophonist, Julius Hemphill. The exhibition was, indeed, an important coda to the history of The Black Artists' Group, an interdisciplinary arts collective working in St. Louis from 1968 until 1972 that provided a prominent contribution to a renaissance of Black culture across the nation, and with which Jackson and Hemphill were closely involved. Yet, with the exception of a single thoughtful review in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the show was largely ignored by the wider American artistic community beyond St. Louis, the city of Jackson's birth. Nearly fifty years later, the series has remained largely overlooked. For Jackson, however, they have remained seminal works within his output. The artist's attitude towards his paintings has, however, evolved from his charged political rhetoric of 1973 and he now emphasizes that the paintings are not rep- resentations of the specific events of Sharpeville. Instead, the gestures in these paintings—of desperation and flight from danger—constitute a general vision that does not need to be ascribed to this particular event in order to be viscerally understood by the viewer. Given his generalizing aims for his paintings, Jackson has recently expressed regret that he gave his pictures the title of the Sharpeville Series. Nonetheless, despite this, it is helpful for us to have some his- torical understanding of the events of Sharpeville that did undeniably act as a catalyst for the artist's expression of intense and personal feeling. The Sharpeville Massacre—the event that initially

inspired Jackson's title for the series in 1969–70—took place on March 21, 1960 in Sharpeville, outside of Johannesburg.

Around five to seven thousand Black men, women and children gathered to protest peacefully the most notorious emblem of the apartheid regime, the pass books that the Black population were required to carry and produce on demand for police inspection at any hour and place.5 The protesters' leader and the leader of the Pan- Africanist Congress, Robert Sobukwe, emphasized their spirit of non-violence: "We are ready to die for our cause; we are not yet ready to kill for it."6 Without warning, the South African Police opened fire on the crowd, killing sixty-nine unarmed protesters and injuring more than three hundred. Many victims were shot in the back as they fled the scene. The Rand Daily Mail, South Africa's leading English-language newspaper, reported: "Volley after volley of 303 bullets and sten gun bursts tore into…people who had surrounded the police station… scores of people fell before the hail of bullets… Bodies lay in grotesque positions on the pavement. Then came ambulances, 11 of them. Two truck- loads of bodies were taken to the mortuary." The events at Sharpeville attracted widespread outrage and would lead to a powerful international anti-apartheid movement.

Other artists have made significant responses to Sharpeville. The South African printmaker Harold Rubin was the first to do so, producing a series of six pen-and-ink drawings, Sharpeville, in 1961. Another South African, the conceptual artist, Gavin Jantjes, created A South African Colouring Book (1974–75), made up of photocollages responding to the massacre.8 No other artist has, however, made images with the ambition of Jackson's canvases. Stretched end to end, the ten works in the Sharpeville Series, dating from 1969 until 1977, would measure 102 feet in length.9 Despite his reluctance to ascribe a political reading to his paintings, Jackson has recently connected the series to the civil rights struggle in America in which he participated actively in the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s. For him, it was obvious that the imagery of Sharpeville resonated with the violence against the Black population in Mississippi, Los Angeles (Watts) and throughout the U.S. during this same period. To represent scenes in the United States would have been too close and "intimate" but the distance of South Africa gave his work a "clarity" of vision. The series thus offered a way of addressing pan-African issues present in the United States without the personal trauma and bias of treating an American subject. Jackson, who at that time had not yet visited South Africa, used the photojournalist Ian Berry's iconic photographs of the massacre, published in LIFE magazine in 1960, as source material, as well as other photographs, including those by South African photojournalist Ernest Cole from his 1967 book House of Bondage (which focused on the township of Soweto). He transformed these images, creating a personal vocab- ulary of gesturing forms, floating within expansive fields of color. As with all of Jackson's works, these images demand close looking. Paintings which look beautiful from a distance, with pastel colors and a paraphernalia of reflective surfaces—shiny ribbons,

iridescent discs and sequins—are filled with intense urgency: gestures of fleeing in terror, of laying helpless or frozen in death, of clenching fists or holding knives. As we shall see, Jackson's gestural language powerfully evokes the poignancy of flight, of what the artist has called the "state of being of fleeing."

GHOSTLY BODIES

In the Sharpeville Series, Jackson focused on developing his own personal language of gestures that evoke intense universal emotions of urgency. In Sharpeville Series II, which he has described as "one of my favorite paintings," the dark mass of a running figure is silhouetted against a rectangle of yellow ochre, the diaphanous quality of which is achieved by several layers of watered-down acrylic paint. This figure is derived from Ian Berry's photograph of a fleeing boy holding his jacket above his head in a futile effort to protect himself from bullets. Jackson has altered his source image, adding a red hat, and evoking a suddenly threatening image with a knife in a clenched fist. The artist has repeatedly spoken of the mysterious, spectral nature of the figures in the series and this boyish figure is a "ghostly image" whose otherworldliness is enhanced by three eyes, a veil of silvery ribbons, and passages of shimmering light and dark sequins glued to the form, as the figure moves in suspension.

In Sharpeville Series VIII, the most obviously figurative painting in the series, the same source photograph is the starting point for a very different treatment of the figure, now rendered as if desper- ately fleeing some terror. Placed at the center of the composition, the outline of the boy's coat seen in the photograph is clearly visible, now flame-like, painted in bright red, and the face twice repeated. Repetition is a strategy that Jackson has often used to animate his canvases. The three other figures in Sharpeville Series VIII are also modified from the same source photograph. The figure at far left is now painted without a lower leg, and yet appears to be running. The figure next to it is heartbreakingly headless. At right, the bent leg of a running body merges into the blood-like red paint border around the painting's edge. For Jackson, this painting represents a grave and "urgent tragic dance" and he is intent on emphasizing the "desperateness" of the scene.

Images of the male body predominate in the series but Jackson has also explored the female form. His interest in studying gestures of fleeing female bodies is evident in several related powerful drawings. The most intensely poignant female body painted by Jackson in the series is based on a press photograph of a murdered Black woman lying face down in the dust. This prone figure appears in Sharpeville Series V as an evanescent and floating wraith-like presence, the upturned soles of her feet and exposure of her intimate anatomy the most visible trace of her helplessness and separateness, as the figure lies in an ambiguous space "in medias res." In Sharpeville Series IX, this figure re-emerges, repeated three times in barely visible outline at the base of the canvas. For Jackson, each painting in the series represents a "place" which is

an indeterminate space of flight, alienation, and terror, a space which is not South Africa per se. Jackson has described this strange and disquieting location as “nowhereland,” neither here nor there, without any defined geographical coordinates and inhabited by ghostly figures. To be clear, Jackson thus argues today that his paintings remove his figures from the fraught political arena of 1960 South Africa (Sharpeville), instead placing them within a wider generalized, universal and more apolitical realm.

FRAGMENTATION

Perhaps the most notable strategy that Jackson has used in his gestural language is that of fragmenta- tion. Throughout the series, he employs salient elements of the figural form as a means of communicating intense feeling. Hands, in particular, function as carriers of meaning. As he has noted, fists are “enough to say anger or violence,” ensuring that there is no need to represent the whole figure.18 This approach is immediately evident in the clenched fists, at top right, of Sharpeville Series I. These can be read as a transnational symbol of resistance, one associated most prominently for us with the Black Power movement in America. In Sharpeville Series III, two knife-bearing fists thrust forward, at top left, signifying, in the artist’s elliptical words, the “rising up of a strange kind of reality.”

In Sharpeville Series VI, blue outstretched hands are the only bodily trace, ambiguously appearing from the base of the canvas as an open palm (of supplication?) or fingers pointing (in accusation or offering direction?). At the top of Sharpeville Series VIII is a beautifully painted passage of diaphanous and limp blue arms that act as a synecdoche for fallen figures.

Jackson also represents disembodied heads that create a surreal, dream-like atmosphere. In Sharpeville Series IV, fields of yellow and lilac are counterbalanced by a passage of massed shapes at top right. On close inspection, an angular face, with bared teeth, is clearly visible, and twice repeated, and is clearly seen in a preparatory drawing. The form of this face may be derived from that of an African mask. Jackson has described the face as “ancestral figuration…another realm entirely.” In so doing, he references the importance of the tradition of the living presence of ancestors within the “African con- tinuum”, a tradition of which he is very much aware. Jackson’s interest in African works is evident from his own personal collection, including a Wé style mask from Liberia or the Côte d’Ivoire. With its cylindrical eyes and accumulation of power matter (including antelope horns, warthog tusks, cowrie shells, and hair), this mask could have been worn, and performed, in a ritualistic dance. One senses that Jackson understands the power of such masks in his approach to his own work.

“ONENESS”

It is crucial for Jackson that he situates the figural images he paints within the wider pictorial field. In his canvases, forms advance and recede in space in a constant process of shifting and change, creating a dynamic space. Jackson's visual language is indebted to the transformative impact of two visits to Africa in 1965 and 1968. On these trips, he traveled to Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. On the 1968 visit, he also went to Kenya. Jackson was deeply impressed by the way in which African artists used materials, such as cloth, shells, and mud—what he has described as "materials that I had always discounted"—and has praised their art as "masterpieces of the use of materiality." The kind of African art that inspired him is evident from his own later collecting prac- tice. For example, he has acquired a sculpture, inspired by a power figure in the Kongo style, with nails driven into the torso (for purposes of healing and protection) and a palm fiber skirt. Jackson admires the way in which such various materials combine to create a "oneness" in this sculpture that is greater than the sum of its parts and he seeks the same quality within his own work. This aspiration was expressed in the late 1970s in his series of sculptures built around chair forms, which intrin- sically suggest the sitting human form. Jackson, whose artistic project has a decidedly anti-academic aspect, argues that this quality of "oneness" is lacking within the European academic tradition, embod- ied for him, for example, by the work of the nineteenth-century French painter, William Bouguereau.

In response to his African trips, Jackson began to apply a wide range of three-dimensional mate- rials including clusters of ribbons, beads, iridescent discs, sequins, aluminum pull tabs, fasteners, studs, and canvas and lead foil shapes. Sharpeville Series II was the first painting in the series to which Jackson added such materials. Here he even added tiny hanging bells to suggest the passage of sound across the canvas. In Sharpeville Series III he applied a veil of West African indigo cloth strips, hiding the image of a face. Sharpeville Series V is the canvas from the series where Jackson's use of materials is the most complex. In this vibrant work, the artist has placed, at top left, a huge assemblage of pink and red ribbons, silver pull tabs and fasteners, and glinting red bike lights. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Jackson has spoken of his admiration for the pioneering artist Thornton Dial, who also used a wide range of non-conventional materials in his large-scale assemblages. Jackson's addi- tions help the artist to explore space and volume. In Sharpeville Series V, the material mass acts as counterpoint to a figure which lunges leftwards and upwards in a movement that invests the scene with dynamism. This figure is repeated three times across the canvas space, almost like time-lapse frame captures, the hand holding a glinting knife.

In Jackson's early series, compositional components are often unified by the format of the grid. From the 1960s, Jackson had used the grid as an organizing structure to both orchestrate and animate the pictorial field (he had used lined paper in his drawings in a similar fashion). This grid is clearly evident in Sharpeville Series I, where the space between figural elements and a red right-

angled L shape is a "field full of tension," mediating between dark forms that recede into space and intense color that advances. As Jackson's familiarity grew with the iconographic elements of the Sharpeville Series, the grid became less evident but it remained a subtle presence. Grid axes are suggested, for example, by tiny red crosses in Sharpeville Series VIII and small patches of pink cloth across Sharpeville Series V. Sharpeville Series I is a painting which is as much an end as a beginning in Jackson's artistic practice. In its smaller square format and two-dimensional painting surface, it looks back to Jackson's 1960s square paintings that also included figures informed by Sharpeville photographs by Ian Berry and others. These earlier paintings are a distinct body of work but the artist has also noted that "they are part of that [i.e. the Sharpeville Series]," to the extent that they draw on the same photographs. The paintings from Sharpeville II onwards are generally rectangular, much larger, and with a wider range of media.

Jackson's visits to Africa also encouraged him to apply paint in a more varied way. This is perhaps most notable in the intensely colored Sharpeville Series VI, the first work in the series in which the artist used oil rather than acrylic paint. Jackson used impastoed effects, building up his surfaces, particularly in the upper part of the painting, with viscous oil paint. He emphasizes the importance of the "mode" in each of his canvases, the overall ambience that "governs everything" in the picture. Here the strong reds and oranges form a kind of barrier to the spectator, indicating that this is a picture "to be viewed but not walked into." Jackson also began to slash his canvases, sometimes adding illumination from behind. In Sharpeville Series VII, hat-wearing ghostly forms advance in space, their spectral effect enhanced by the passage of light through cut-out areas of the canvas.

"SOLEMNITY AND GRAVITY"

Jackson's images in the Sharpeville paintings deal with urgency and the momentum of that urgency. The artist is well versed in the global history of art and the the Sharpeville Series can be related to African art and to twentieth-century modernism. Jackson has spoken about seeking a quality of "intimacy" which he sees as embodied, for example, by Henri Matisse's repeated treatment of the humble motif of goldfish. Most pertinently, Jackson has a deep admiration for Picasso's Guernica, arguably the greatest protest painting in recent history. Guernica represented a destructive air raid by the German Luftwaffe against the ancient Basque town of Guernica in 1937. Picasso spoke of the "ocean of pain and death" resulting from the actions of the "military caste" of General Francisco Franco and he tried to give visual form to these sentiments in his own distinctive Cubist language. Although there is no formal influence on the Sharpeville Series, Jackson has praised the "solemnity and gravity" of Picasso's picture. For him, Guernica succeeds in making a wider anti-war and anti-violence statement that "transcends its time." He has sought the same qualities and same transcendent aim in his series.

The final image in Jackson's series, Untitled, 1977 (Sharpeville Series), is a work with which Jackson struggled for a long time. No longer does this picture have the same urgency as the others in the series. The gestures of the figures are no longer fraught, the atmosphere of the painting no longer challenging with an air of imminent threat. Instead, this picture has a hopeful underpinning, suggested by the staring red eyes of the rising figure at the base of the canvas. For Jackson, this painting no longer had the "gravity that is intimidating" of the earlier works, but rather effects a solemn resolution. Untitled, 1977 (Sharpeville Series) brought an end to the series.

CONCLUSION

How then can we conclude with Jackson's Sharpeville Series? Viewed as a whole, the series can be seen as the most potent artistic response to the Sharpeville Massacre. For Jackson, the series quickly tran- scended any specific historical event, opening a door for the development of a personal visual language and approach to materials. As Jackson has noted, this series unites "beauty and violence." He has stated, "Everything is beautiful…everything that looks terrible can be beautiful." The "beauty" is often in the color, ranging from intense reds and oranges to subtle yellows and muted greys. It is also pres- ent in the figural forms that appear throughout, binding together the series as a whole: running and lunging, prone, with clenched fists or pointing fingers. Not only does Jackson foreground pain and despair as a response to force, but he also recasts the figures he paints, with knives, in an act of histor- ical reimagining. He revisited this latter theme in a 1978 painting now in the collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, as well as later works. His is a highly personal response to a pivotal historic event that goes beyond this event. Informed by the photographs that initially inspired him, Jackson's iconography of commonplace figural gestures tells a universal story of urgent desperation, of a state of emergency that resonates across the ages.

—SIMON KELLY, Curator and Head of Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, Saint Louis Art Museum

Parallel Processing

HARRY COOPER

Art is a harmony par-
allel to nature.
—Paul Cézanne to
Joachim Gasquet

It really doesn't matter where we start, since there is no place to start. "I'm not ever interested in stories; they have a beginning, middle, and end." And yet we have to start somewhere, but where? "Let the painting lead you."

I will start a little less than halfway up the right side of No. 8, 2017 (8.8.17), where a network of thickly painted pink lines floats over a bruised and scraped ground. There is something satisfying about this pretzel-like configuration enclosing seven voids, this self-contained interlace that keeps turning back on itself along countless paths like a piece of Hiberno-Saxon decoration. I could look at it forever. And yet the way the lines do not quite intersect suggests that this is not simply a flat linear invention but the trace of an encounter between the artist and the details of the visible world. The configuration will not sit still as an abstraction, much as I might like it to. So I keep looking, and then I get it—a pair of shoes, clogs to be exact, the front one seen more or less in profile, the one behind pointing back into space. Experience helps: I know these clogs from other paintings by the artist. In Painting (8.20.03) and Painting (11.23.00), they sit near the bottom edge, slightly separated, angled away from the beholder and into the picture space, as if inviting entry.

There are moments like this in every Jackson painting, moments when what had attracted us for its formal or material qualities snaps into focus as a suggestion of something else, a depiction. Of course, this experience is nothing new; it is fundamental to modern painting, whether we are looking at a patchwork of colors by Paul Cézanne titled Mont Sainte-Victoire or an Attendant painting by Brice Marden whose looping lines were inspired by Chinese funerary figures, to take two examples at oppo- site ends of the spectrum of fidelity to an observed subject. Jackson's work ranges all over this spec- trum, often within a single painting.

In No. 8, 2017 (8.8.17), the main event is not the shoes but a seated nude seen from behind, the mass and muscle of her (?) back conveyed by implication of the silhouette alone, by the external con- tours that the artist has quickly yet carefully found (note the redrawing in several places). This is masterly old-school draughtsmanship, really an underdrawing left visible, as the traditional choice of a thin bistre-colored pigment suggests, and it has none of the abstract-figurative equivocation that we observed in the shoes. or does recognizing the pink brushstrokes as a pair of shoes help reconcile them with the back,

for the shoes imply a ground plane that is higher and closer to us than the one on which the figure would be squatting. And yet, in classic Jacksonian fashion, these two very different modes and spaces have been jammed together like neighbors in parallel universes: in fact, an abandoned contour of the figure's right buttock even touches the tip of the right-hand clog. Is this a humorous reference to the opposition I have been tracing? Or a bit of bragging about a kick-ass painting?

And what of the left side of the canvas, which seizes our attention with its thick twists of red, black, and brown paint interrupted by slabs of blue and white? With some effort I can detect a figure playing a saxophone and another wearing a hat, but it would take too long to spell this out, and even for someone familiar with Jackson's storehouse of motifs this recognition is uncertain. We are back in a quandary, on the knife-edge between abstraction and figuration. It is an interesting, ambivalent place to be.

What happens once recognition takes place? In gaining new information do we lose the pleasure of the abstraction? To answer, let us consider what perceptual psychologists call multistable images— optical illusions that flip back and forth between two readings, the best known of which is the so-called "duck-rabbit" illusion. Thinkers as different as E. H. Gombrich and Ludwig Wittgenstein have consid- ered how this illusion works and what it means. The standard view, which Gombrich accepts, is that "we cannot experience alternate readings … at the same time." First we see the rabbit or the duck, and then with practice we can toggle back and forth between them more quickly, duck/rabbit/duck/rabbit, but we can never see a "duck-rabbit." Jackson's pair of shoes/pink network—his "shoes-network" illu- sion, if you will—is just such an image, with the difference that one of the two readings is a pure pat- tern, and that does make a difference, for our perceptual apparatus (though not our eye itself) is biased against abstraction. Skilled from an early age at identifying recognizable images, we separate "figures" from their noisy visual "ground" and sometimes, in an operation known as pareidolia, even fabricate figures out of whole cloth. This means that once we have seen the "shoes-network" as a pair of shoes, it may not be easy to un-see it.

Unlike Gombrich, Wittgenstein believed that it was possible to see both aspects of a multistable image at once, to report honestly "It's a duck-rabbit."4 I would like to believe this more generous account of vision, but I have stared long and hard at our furry-or-feathered friend and the closest I can get to seeing both of them at once is to focus on the single eye that they share. However, a painting is not an optical illusion carefully crafted to force a perceptual choice. My experience of Jackson's work is one of "suspended vibrato," to borrow a phrase from art historian Yve-Alain Bois.5 Whether I am primarily seeing "shoes" or "network," I am still experiencing these marks, simultaneously and with- out loss, as both.

The best I can do in describing this Jackson vibrato-effect is to grasp at models or metaphors. One is the notion of counterfactual thinking, that cognitive ability, which develops during adoles- cence, to imagine alternate realities and hold them together in mind. Great musicians have this in spades, whether it is J.S. Bach composing a fugue or Charlie Parker writing a counterfact—a melody (e.g., Ornithology) based on the chords of another song entirely (How High the Moon). Another helpful model is John Keats's notion of "negative capability"—the ability, which he attributed above all to William Shakespeare, to rest content "in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reach- ing after fact and reason."6 A third is that of parallel processing, a term in both psychology and com- puter science that refers to the ability of a brain or a machine to work on two or more sets of stimuli or parts of a problem at once (something that quantum computing has now advanced exponentially). These are our superpowers, and they are Jackson's too.

It is Jackson's achievement to keep the vibrato going. This is not a goal in itself for him, I feel sure, but a result of the equal intensity with which he approaches his medium (painting) and our shared medium (the world).7 And it explains why the artist objects vehemently to our lazy habit of talking about figures in paintings when in fact the only things in paintings besides paint and other materials are allusions and suggestions: figuration or (better figurality. Jackson came to prominence in the 1970s for works that included "paint-people," stick-figures made from strokes of paint. Just as the epithet "rabbit-duck" or "duck-rabbit" captures the non-hierarchical doubleness of that illusion, so Jackson's term "paint-people" conveys the level playing field of matter and allusion, of abstractness and figur- ality, in his work.

Thus armed with ambiguity and steeled with simultaneity, let us begin again. I will deal with three paintings in the present exhibition that correspond respectively, if loosely, to Wassily Kandinsky's three categories for his own work: Impressions, which remain faithful to an original stimulus, whether visible or (often) musical; Improvisations, which emphasize spontaneous invention; and Compositions, which combine elements of the two preceding types into something monu- mental and symphonic.

IMPRESSION

The deep connection in Jackson's work between physical gesture and dominant feeling (a key word in his thinking and speaking about art) is clear in one of the earliest paintings in the exhibition, Sharpeville Series VIII, 19739. The actions depicted are fairly legible—running at right, kneeling at left, hugging at cen- ter—but those words are too pale. The running is effortful, not easy; the kneeling suggests captivity, hands behind back; and the embracing, of a smaller figure by a larger, is a full-bodied act of sheltering. At upper left, as if from a corner of the heavens, arms reach out urgently from a welter of strokes and a shower of gold. We do not need the title, with its reference to the 1960 police

massacre in a South African township (an event that touched Jackson deeply and inspired a series of paintings based on photographs of fleeing civilians), nor even these sensitively depicted faces, to know that something terrible is in motion. That knowledge is body knowledge. Nor can these bodies be separated from their pictorial means: the figures are framed, haloed really, in crimson, just as the whole image is. In this fraught context, the color suggests both streaming blood and dissolving fire.

IMPROVISATION

The most abstract-looking painting in the present exhibition is Painting (1.9.09), an arresting fabric of strokes, scrapes, pours, puddles, and imprints of red, turquoise, white, pink, blue, violet, and enam- el-gray paint on a nearly black ground. My dominant experience of this painting is one of pure paint- erly gusto, right down to the artist's blue initials spotted with white at lower right. But then a duck-rabbit (or rather a shoes-network) rears its head, a configuration of white lines just right of cen- ter that seems to want to be something. Upon inspection, I recognize another squatting figure, here facing right and (in one of Jackson's favorite motifs) holding a small stick or stylus in its hand. It is a degree-zero image of the maker at work. Suddenly the painting is not just an improvisation but a reflection on painting itself, one that reminds me of Barnett Newman's declaration, "The first man was an artist."10 Now I imagine this central figure as the local genius of the scene, the fictive source of all the surrounding abstract, gestural marks—but that does not last long either.

The artist is behind me (literally: we are standing in his exhibition at the National Gallery), his hand on my elbow, urging me to keep looking and above all (but how?) to relax. I start to see what looks like a foot here, the crown of a head there. It is not easy, as these image-traces are often inter- rupted or overwritten by patches of color and squiggles of paint (with simultaneity comes layering). Or do those m-shaped marks suggest flying birds? Jackson draws beautifully from life and yet he is not afraid to deploy the simplest, most childlike of icons. He points me to the gray pouring at lower center and there I detect, after a moment, another figure of a maker, now seen from above, bent to his task, tracing a circle. The instruction to relax, to let go, has been key: Jackson believes that as beholders we have a deep kinesthetic knowledge of gestures and their emotional implications, if only we will trust ourselves. Having seen these poses and presences, I experience the painting differently once again, and not just because it is no longer "abstract." The work's dominant feeling has shifted. All the paint- erly fireworks are still there, but the emotional register has darkened, become one of intensity, con- centration, and inwardness.

COMPOSITION

At 9 × 12 feet, Painting (12.15.04) is one of Jackson's largest and most ambitious paintings to date, and it took him most of a year to complete. Here

we can see the full range of materials and techniques at his disposal, from thickly layered paint and applied pieces of material (handy scraps of canvas) to thinned drawing on areas of exposed white ground, from labored passages to lucid figures. At lower center, offering us a way into the composition, two figures face each other, one above the other, arms extended in the act of drawing circles. (They are cousins to the maker-figures that we met before.) The lower one is seen from above and behind; we look straight down on the upper one. Above them sits a third figure, seen straight on, one arm clutching a knee. With these quick Picasso-like shifts in viewpoint, a complex space is created that both draws us in and keeps us off balance.11 From this central spine, more figures, drawn in the same brushy, orangey wash, tumble away to left and right, recalling the great circulatory mechanism of a Last Judgement or (thinking once again of The Thinker) of Rodin's Gates of Hell. In the upper right corner, four disjointed scraps of canvas suggest a head, torso, and limbs coming together or flying apart.

To the right of center, an oblong white shape silhouetted in red proj- ects from the central spine: within it, three pieces of added canvas, outlined with oozing paint that the artist has employed as glue for the scraps of fabric, suggest a smiley face with a wide-open mouth—a childish icon located, appropriately enough, inside what appears to be a fetal body with large head and fledgling limbs. This light and airy area is balanced on the other side of the central spine by a dark, dense amalgam that seems to function as a form in its own right as well as deep shadow between forms. Its tangled darkness is relieved by pieces of applied canvas, some of them cut to resemble plant forms, which suggests in turn that the area they punctuate and from which they emerge is a region of fertility, a kind of soil. That is the beginning of a reading; I will leave the rest to the reader/viewer and conclude on a more general note.

As with most works by Jackson, or even more than most, it is possible to trace various figural suggestions and pathways through this work. The overall effect, however, is one of great forces and movements, the sharpest possible contrasts and the most abrupt shifts of viewpoint, all held or con- ducted in unlikely balance. If this were music, it would be Beethoven (whose music is often playing in Jackson's studio), late Beethoven in particular. As Theodor Adorno writes about the Ninth Symphony and the Missa Solemnis, "It is subjectivity that forcibly brings the extremes together in the moment, fills the dense polyphony with its tensions, breaks it apart with the unisons, and disengages itself, leaving the naked tone behind."12 And when Adorno marvels at the conjunction of "unabashedly primitive" figures like conventional trills with Beethoven's most complex orchestration, I cannot help but think of the smiley faces and stick-figures that inhabit or emerge from the densest passages of Jackson's work. Yet while Adorno sees the internal tensions of Beethoven's Spätstil (late style) as a reflection of impending doom, both individual and societal, I find no such Adornian "catastrophe" in Jackson's work, no matter how dark some of its references may be. Perhaps we have become accustomed by now to new kinds of unity, to

the idea of a style tolerant of rupture and inclusive of parallel worlds, modes, and spaces that will never come together, that have no need to come together except in that complex unity of feeling that gives the work its unspeakable logic. Certainly we should consider (another time) Jackson's critique of the very notion of Western aesthetics on which Adornos's work was based, as well as the joyfully physical and improvisational aspect of Jackson's practice in relation to his lifelong involvement with jazz, a music to which Adorno was willfully blind.

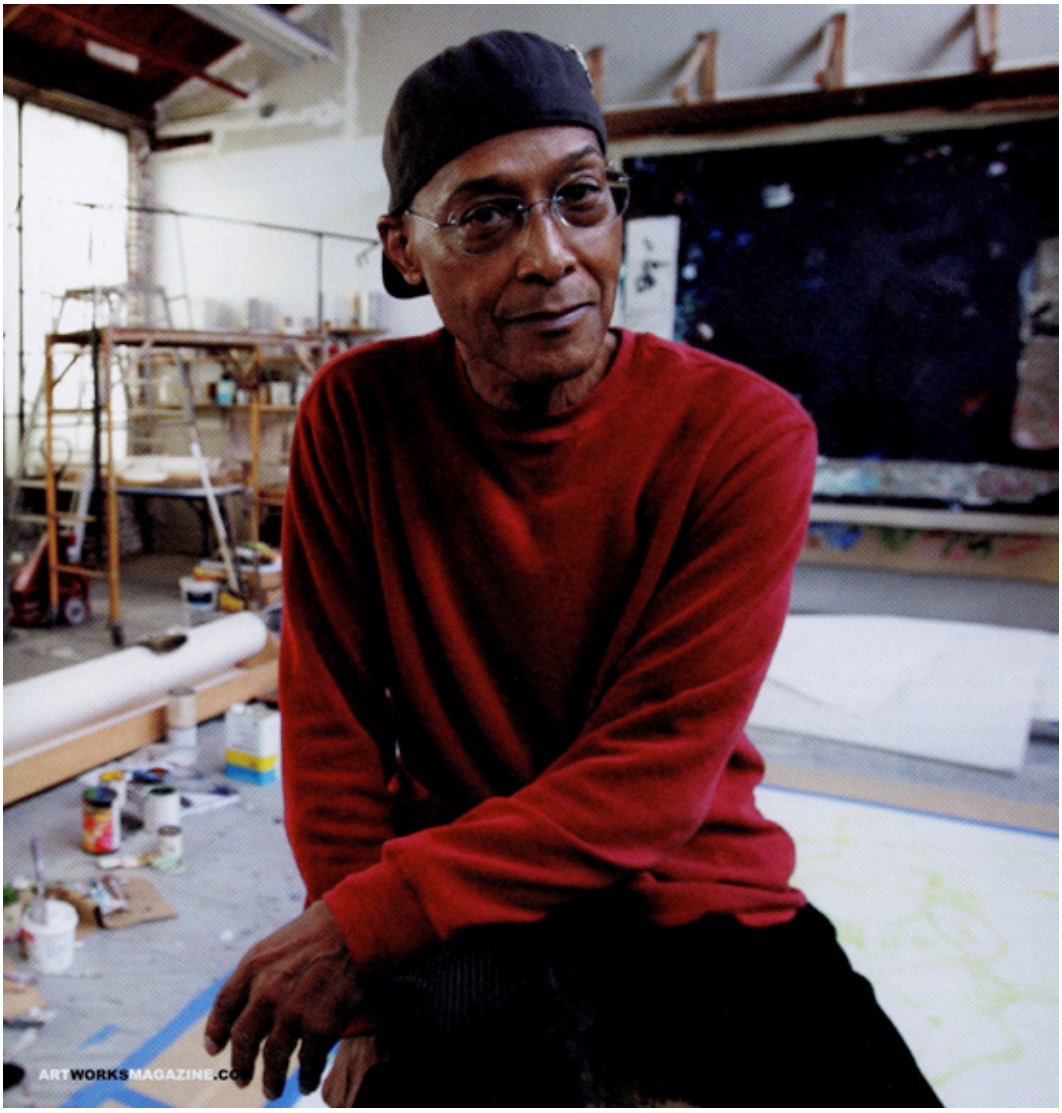
Jackson likes to say that his paintings are "for anyone who has eyes"—and, I would add, for any- one who has a body. This may help to explain the multitude of shoes and hats in his paintings. Shoes are for anyone who has feet. Hats are for anyone who has a head. As with Jackson's paintings them- selves, all you have to do is check them out and try them on. Walk a mile in those shoes and see where they take you. They might change your life.

— Harry Cooper, Senior Curator of Modern Art,
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

ARTWORKS

Summer 2008, pp. 24-35



Written by ERIN CLARK
Photographed by RANDY TUNNEL

Oliver Jackson blindsided me. Setting up our interview on the phone, he was polite and seemingly mild-mannered. Driving up to Oakland, I somehow avoided the infamous traffic on Interstate 880. I located Oliver's place - a cool live/work space in on industrial building on the city's busy north side - with no problem at all. I even found a parking space right out front. So you con forgive me for thinking that somehow the cosmic forces were lined up in my favor that day. Well, the universe, as always, got the last laugh.

IMAGE: Oliver Jackson in his studio, Oakland. CA

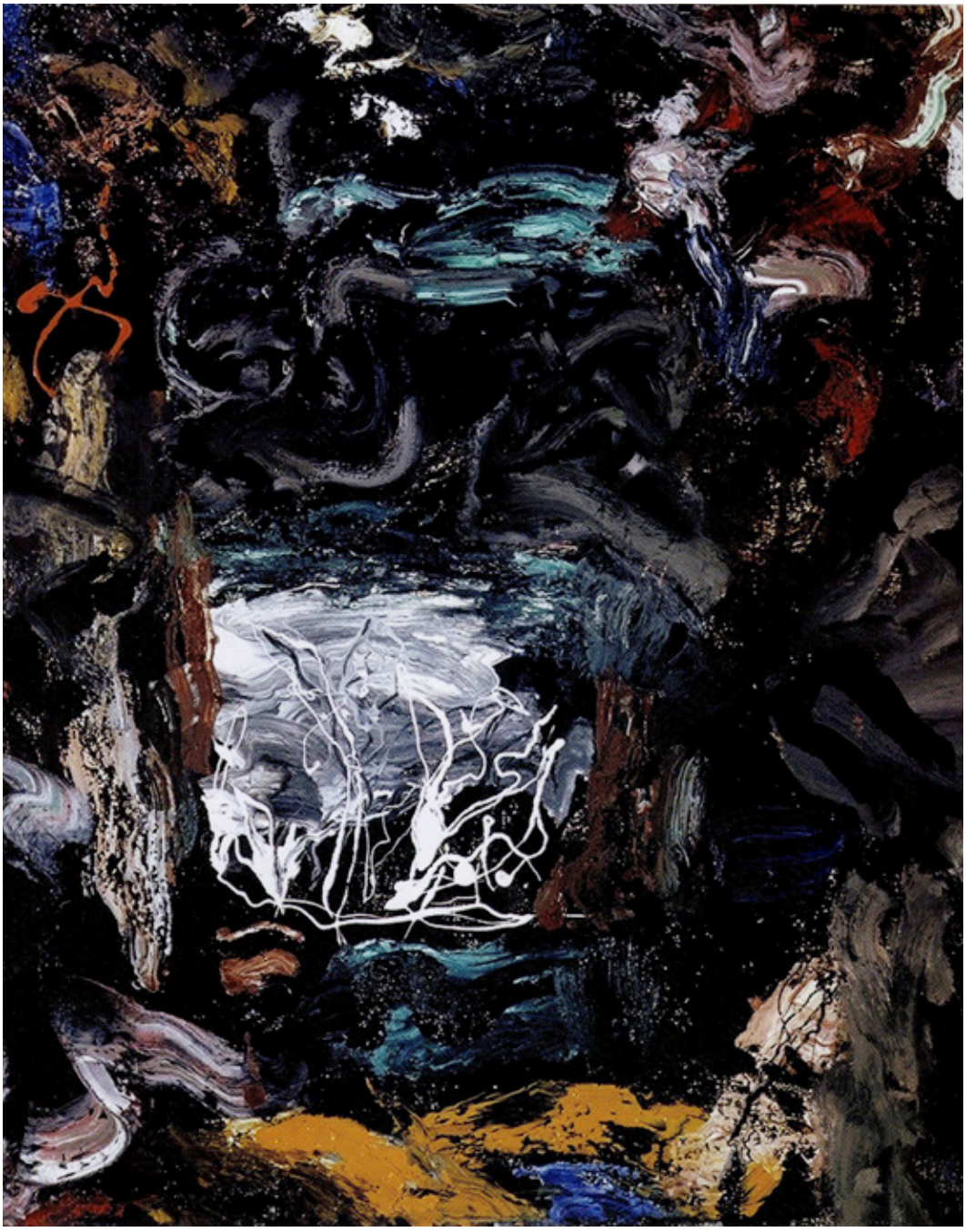
IMAGE: Untitled (12.15.04) 2004, Oil-based pigments, mixed media on linen 108 x 144 inches. At right, Until/eel (5.16.02) 2002, Oil-based pigments on linen, 34 1/4 x 34 1/4 inches. Private Collection. St. Louis, MO.

Jackson is one tough interview. He is 72 years old, but looks easily 25 years younger. As a prolific pointer, sculptor and printmaker, he has secured his place among the best in the Bay Area over the last half-century. But his intellectual intensity can be scorching, especially if you aren't ready for it. With piercing dark eyes, he quickly makes his assessment of me. It's not personal, but it's clear he is not especially fond of writers - or magazines, for that matter. He acknowledges that interviews and articles are a necessary part of the art business, but he's not happy about it.

"The public has it backwards," he says. "The cult of personality is one thing. The work is another. Many people love the idea of magazines and being photographed because it's about them. That's cool. But if it's about the work, I don't wont to interfere. I don't wont to get in the way. I understand the cult of personality in the market-place. It's ironic that you have to do that {put yourself out there} to have them take the work seriously." For Oliver, it is all about the work.

It's telling that of Jackson's 5,700 square feet of living and workspace, about 5,000 ore dedicated to the studio. He calls it his factory and in it, he is a different man. The mega-watt smile comes more easily, the shoulders relax just a bit and you can almost see him exhale. The sharp edges soften a bit. The studio is divided into different sections for pointing, sculpture, printmaking and storage. Jackson works all the time so there are projects scattered throughout, in various stages of development, and the storage rooms are jammed with canvases and sculpture. Every inch of the studio is used either for making art or being inspired to make art.

A human skull catches my attention and I ask Ol-



“But if it’s about the work, I don’t want to interfere. I don’t want to get in the way. I understand the cult of personality in the marketplace. It’s ironic that you have to do that {put yourself out there} to have them take the work seriously.”

IMAGE: *Intaglio Drypoint I*, 1985, Printer's ink on paper
36 x 48 inches.

iver about it. "It really is beautiful in its own way," he says almost distractedly. "Great form." Something next to the skull catches his eye. He picks up what looks like a puzzle of metal pieces woven together. It's a model for what he hopes will be a large sculpture some day, but he's not sure if it will ever get done. "Fuckin' makes people nervous," he says as he moves on to the next port of our tour. I look closer and sure enough the metal pieces do gracefully form the outline of a man and woman intertwined. It is lovely, though - nothing vulgar about it.

Jackson was born in St. Louis in 1935. He got his formal art education close by, doing his undergrad work at Illinois Wesleyan Universily and then earning his Masters of Fine Art at the Universily of Iowa. In the l 960's, he got involved with the Black Artists Group in St. Louis. BAG was an arts cooperative that brought together and nurtured African American artists of all types: actors, painters, dancers, poets, filmmakers and jazz musicians. He developed a friendship with
legendary saxophonist Julius Hemphill - a relationship he would honor years later with an exhibition at Harvard's Sert Art Gallery.

The Harvard exhibit combined the efforts of Jackson, who created six monumental canvases, and musician Marty Ehrlich, who composed and recorded on hour-long piece to be featured with the paintings. The two artists collaborated on the work while in-residence as visiting artists.

The artistic crossover was inspired by Hemphill, a musician known for his own avant-garde approach to jazz. While the years working with BAG were obviously inspirational for Jackson, he has grown weary of talking about the "black experience" in reference to his art. "The whole thing about being block, reasons for this and reasons for that ... That whole American conversation is a pain in the ass,' he says. "Write about artists and suddenly it's a black artist. No one ever says 'he's a white artist.' Ever wonder why? They are making a distinction for white people to not take it in the some way they look at the work of white artists. The labels obscure. If we pretend that we can tell race or gender, then we

should be able to put up shows without names and everybody would be able to sort it out. 'Course you can't, so the culture sorts it out for you and you buy it. That's my point. You need to experience it {the art} for yourself. You need to trust your eyes and your own reaction."

The main part of Jackson's studio is dominated by a large platform where a piece of canvas is laid out on the floor. Paint cans, brushes and tools to push and pull point are scattered around the perimeter. On the far wall, two large finished pieces hung side by side. The space around the painting stage is cluttered with all the things a painter might need. It looks a bit like a creative carnival, but Oliver bristles at the thought. "People come in here and they think I'm playing. I'm not playing, " he says. "This is work."

And the work defies categories or easy explanations. Harry Cooper, a curator at the Notional Gallery of Art, discovered Jackson's work 20 years ago when he saw the cover of a Julius Hemphill album. Cooper says Jackson's art is all about space - both the paintings and sculpture. "He is a virtuoso sculptor, equally at home carving marble (which he approaches with on almost neo-classical technique) or, in a more contemporary vein, making dynamic constructions out of mixed materials," says Cooper. "Other media include drawing, printmaking, and large-scale watercolors. But painting remains his primary means of expression. Many of the canvases are very large, requiring him to paint them on the floor. This brings a physical dimension to his work reminiscent of Jackson Pollock but applied to an art that retains essential ties to the human figure, however abstracted."

That's what the expert says, but here's my conundrum: I have spent a good amount of time looking at, even studying many of Oliver's canvases and sculptures. I know what I think, and what I feel about the work, but to try to explain it or write about it would be to ignore one of the basic tenets of Oliver's philosophy. My experience with his work is mine alone. To translate for the reader would be to interfere with their experience, and he just plain hates that. "I get tired of people asking me what I think about my work," he soys. 'What am I supposed to say? I think it's great shit - I made it, why wouldn't I say that? But what weight does that have to you? Not very much. You have to experience the work and I don't won't to get in the way by telling you what I think.' So, I'm going to respect that and let you draw your own conclusions.

The sculpture area of Jackson's studio is shrouded in plastic, mostly for practical reasons. Working with marble, Jackson has to contain the dust or risk ruining a canvas or print in another section of his cavernous space, but the synthetic curtain also isolates the work inside giving the space its own feel - very different from the rest of the studio. The monochromatic palate inside the bubble is cool and quiet. A fine layer of dust covers everything, including the floor, the plastic, the tools and the large chucks of marble that dominate the space.

Figures and forms emerge from the hard stone with a gracefulness that is extraordinory. For his sculpture, Jackson does not work exclusively with marble. He sometimes mixes his materials, and has been known to use just about anything to create a sculpture, but in recent years, marble has been his material of choice. In the l 980's, Jackson spent extended periods working on marble sculptures in Corraro, Italy, at the studio of the celebrated Bay Area sculptor Monuel Neri. And in 1986, Jackson was commissioned to create a large marble sculpture for the Federal Courthouse in Oakland, which was installed in 1993.

A teaching job at CSU Sacramento brought Jackson to California in 1971. He stayed at the college for 31 years before retiring in 2002. Continuing education - his and others' - has always been a port of Jocksons' life. He has served as a Visiting Artist in Residence at numerous institutions, including: Chicago Art Institute, Wake Forest University, North Carolina School of Arts,

University of Washington, University of Iowa, Aix-en-Provence in Fronce and the California College of Arts and Crofts Summer Institute in Paris. He also teaches workshops across the country, but is clearly happiest in his own studio, making stuff every day. Although healthy, he is feeling the pressure of time. There is so much in his head that he wants to translate into art. He doesn't like wasting time.

Oliver is also a very private man. Through the course of our converson,on he reveals enough for me to figure out that there hove been great loves in his life, found and perhaps lost, but he's not going into any detail. Those stories will stay close to his heart. His studio is clearly a one-person place. The art - the making of the art - is a good outlet for his passion. He lives the "aha!" moment and thinks we all should, too. Jackson says such moments require no explanatioin; you just know it when they happen.

"The 'aha' moment is completely pure," he says. "You encounter this thing and this thing resonates with you in a way you've never experienced before. It's being completely alive. You can try to categorize it or dominate it by putting it in some kind of order, ut that is a losing proposition. If something like a painting can move you like that, why would you want off the hook?"

"Paintings require a set of eyes," he says. "They don't require a group. They are contemplative because they don't require you to do shit. They don't require you to applaud, they don't require you to agree or disagree. They only require that you look at them. It's not a communal experience and that appears to be uncomfortable for many people. We, as a culture, don't encourage people tomull things over and we should."

Jackson says the creative process is like having a child. You bring it into the world, do the best you can and then let it go. Sure, he says, an artist puts everything into a piece, but in the end the work stands alone.

My four-hour conversation with Oliver has been simultaneously exuasting and exhilarating. Very

OLIVER JACKSON

IMAGE: *Untitled Marble Sculpture* (8.85) (recto and verso) 1985, Marble, crayon, stainless steel 88 x 44 x 24 1/2 inches. Collection of the San Jose Museum of Art. Below, *Garden Series IV*, 2000, Oil-based pigments on linen, 108 x 120 inches. At right, various shots from Jackson's Oakland studio.

much like his work, his philosophy pulls you into a world that is not clearly defined or understood, and sometimes out of our comfort zone. But it's also a pretty provocative place. It makes you think. We have come to a point of mutual respect. I understand his reluctance to --as he puts it -- "get in the way" of the art. In return, Jackson trusts me to get it right. We've come a long way in a short tie.

Maybe the cosmic forces were lined up in my favor that day after all.

IMAGE: Untitted(10.14.06), 2006, Oil-based pigments on linen, 96 x 108 Inches.

"If we pretend that we can tell race or gender, then we should be able to put up show without names and everybody would be able to sort it out"

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

sculpture

June 2008, pp. 51-56

The Order of Making

OLIVER JACKSON

By Bruce Nixon

Chair People No. 10, 1985. Mixed media, 33.25 x 16.25 x 37.4 in.

As a sculptor, Oliver Jackson is almost free of what we typically call "style:·His work frustrates attempts to establish an overall order based on appearance alone. In many instances, his production begins from a specific mode of resistance, and as these change, so does the work. That, at least, is characteristic. He might, for example, undertake a series based on the formal concept of a head mounted atop a column. It is an art historical cliche, but the familiarity of the motif poses resistance because the concept will not sustain the work, thus forcing the artist toward extremes of imagination and invention as he builds. Jackson does not allow himself to repeat solutions. That, too, is characteristic. How many pieces will he make before his invention flattens out and the original idea no longer engages him? This particular series of untitled works, approximately 10 pieces constructed in 1990 and 1991, incorporated a tremendous array of materials and formal solutions.

But resistance might be found in a stack of marble sheets, some the length of a standing person, but none more than an inch thick-broken cast-offs at the quarry after large blocks have been trimmed to size. How many figural pieces can he build from this trim before he arrives at a point of repetition or, once again, the concept goes flat? Trips to Carrara in 1983 and 1985 led to a figural series in which Jackson shaped the sheets into roughly human forms, incised the surfaces, inked the incisions, and then applied simple, evocative materials: a rusty ring, twine, rusty wire, rope, and hanks of faded, colored cloth. For all the simplicity of the initial idea and the apparent roughness of form, these pieces exercised immense presence, yet they could still be elegant, even delicate at times, or vigorous in their associations. Jackson responds in immediate, concrete ways to the specificity of

materials, yet it would be misleading to suggest that he is oriented primarily toward them. He takes materials up as he finds them, as they suggest ideas, or as he needs them.

In order to illuminate Jackson's sculptural procedures, we might turn to an idea formulated by the French medievalist Etienne Gilson: art is not a kind of knowledge or a way of knowing; it belongs, instead, to an order other than that of knowledge, which is the order of making. What is not directly relevant to the making of a work is about art, but it is not art itself.*

Though such ideas are not current in art theory, they continue to provide spacious room for contemplation. For our purposes, they can be distilled to an essential conception of the artist as maker. Nothing else overcomes this fact, and it is absolutely crucial to any understanding of Jackson's work. Familiarity with his work leads to a point where we intuitively feel the sensibility of the maker come forth as the force that brought the materials to form, something more than "imagination" or "invention" alone. It is a quality of mind, manifested through the materials, whatever they happen to be. We learn the artist through his making.

Jackson, it goes without saying, is much concerned with problems of essence and being, the movement of form from the absence that precedes the idea into possibility and then to completion, problems that open themselves to a concrete, yet deeply personal investigation through the process of making: making, that is, as experience.

In this realm, no material possesses an intrinsic "art" meaning prior to the maker's use of it. All simply· make themselves available.

From Gilson once again: "There is art only when the operation, essentially and in its very substance, does not consist of knowing ... but of making. Although it requires knowledge and action, man's ability to make derives directly from his act of being. Man as capable of naking is first a making being, because his activity as a craftsman is like an outer manifestation of his act of existing:' What Gilson calls the "outer manifestation" is that form which makes the sculpture accessible. Access, then, is our ability to recognize the inner image of the work, which is the sensibility of the maker, received as sculptural form but inseparable from the making of it.

Oliver Jackson was born in 1935 in St. Louis. During the late 1960s, he became involved with the Black Artist Group (BAG) in St. Louis, an intriguing aspect of his early artistic maturity. He participated in a number of collective projects involving theater, dance, and music, and he worked with BAG musicians, including his close friend Julius Hemphill. To say that this experience invested his work with an "improvisational" or jazz-like component would be, once again, misleading. The quality of relationship is not that simplistic. Still, it is difficult to imagine that the experience o' collective, interdisciplinary production did not affect his thinking about the varieties of making and how different modes of art achieve form. BAG ensembles were characterized by the absence of a complete rhythm section, and one sees in

Untitled No. 3, 1983. Marble and mixed media, 76.5 x 31.5 x 12 in.

Jackson's work analogous ideas related to the innate qualities of available materials: selfimposed restrictions, an instinct for working against traditions that govern how things "should" be together, and the ability of artists to create and authenticate their own standards. In 1971, he took a teaching position in the San Francisco Bay Area, and in the intervening years, he has become associated with the scene in Oakland, where he is a familiar presence.

The problem, always, is how to make something that has not been made. It is in series that Jackson shows a vivid and expansive making consciousness. An early, fairly straightforward example is a set of some 10 assemblage pieces called the "Chair People," built between 1978 and 1986. A chair is a design product, and its function is always apparent. It is figural to the extent that it evokes a seated position, one of the basic human postures. Consequently, the sources of resistance are several. First. its formal scaffolding-continuous, readily apparent, referentially utilitarian. Then, its challenge as an externally imposed form, not one of the artist's devising. Sitting is a posture of rest or, in an urban context, of the waiting enforced by social bureaucracies on the needy. It is also a posture of authority, of kings on their thrones.

Jackson worked with the stripped-down metal frames, although he reinforced the figural element by placing a "head" on the upper back. The works are characterized, again, by an intense material specificity, each being radically different from the others, each establishing an internal or inner image based on the capacity of material to generate a unity harmonious with the frame. From this unity, we feel the work's effect. Choir People No. 1 (1978) is loosely fetishistic: a black, skull-like mask sprouts a dense cluster of objects, including a small skull. The frame is encrusted in black, and repeating orange dot motifs mark the "shoulders" or "arms" of the figure; it has a "spine" and nestles two other small skulls like infants.

The "fetish" motif is extended in Choir People No. 3 (1979) and Choir People No. 6 (1980). both wrapped in cloth,

the latter being thick and textured, almost musclebound, yet with the springy softness of cushions. No. 6 incorporates the yellow vinyl of the original back, whose tacking is echoed with an arch of emblems across the "chest"; a kind of crown rests on the head. Choir People No. 3 is tightly wrapped in brightly colored cloth, while the head is a flat, golden mask facing directly upward. A fetishism is sustained in Choir People No. 9 (1980), an all white female form. Its tiny head seems encased in a helmet; the chest and torso extrude clusters of jagged, spiky projections, like a hedgehog's quills. Choir People No. 10 (1986), in a much different mood, is austere. Part of the frame is missing, the chair drops backward, and the head, a rectangle of rusted metal, has an ambiguous "expression:· Otherwise there is only a tangle of rusted wire, a rusty can, an old bell, all of which infer a particular kind of poverty. The can hangs like a monk's begging bowl.

From the first, a term as loaded as "fetish" is corruptive, because it assumes the artist's intentionality preliminary to making, or a deliberate effort to determine reception. Yet how do we escape associalions? How do we remain "in" experience, allowing the work to work, and not evoke the easy, familiar associations of a reflexive, solely cultural nature? We must step back to reconsider everything.

In the "Chair People" series-and this also applies to the presentation heads and the sheet marble figures-the "fixed" armature is ultimately the source of variety. The pieces succeed both individually and as members of a series because Jackson's consistency as a maker leads toward both an individual and a collective formal harmony. At the same time. all the series are interconnected as humanesque but intensely static forms. Jackson works their kinesthetic potential from their stasis. The formal vehicle-the chair and the marble figures are excellent examples-has properties that enable the artist to leave significant elements of gesture incomplete because he knows the viewer's bodily response to the individual work will complete them.

The work says more than it speaks. Its effects may be so precise that the viewer has virtually no choice but to respond. As frames, the chairs (or the mounted heads, what might be called "presentation" heads, or the marble silhouettes) constitute a fixed, immobile pose. Though they are "alive" in their stasis, they remain contained. At times, they seem almost to tremble with tension. The viewer's physical engagement is, finally, a search for gateways into the inner image of the work, an image that will extend all the way to the internal harmony of the series itself.

If series demonstrate the range of Jackson's instincts-his sense that formal restriction leads to a limitless material freedom-individual works are more inclined to demonstrate the concentration of his imagination. These works, too, can be readily characterized by their wide range of forms and materials. An assemblage figure (Untitled, 1978-84) stands with its back hard against the wall, a bit larger than life, packed to high density with the materials and tools of an artist-spent paint tubes, ratty brushes, cans, rags, and

Untitled No. 4, 1983. Marble and mixed media, 44 x 18.75 x 22.5 in.

Untititled (8.85), 1985. Marble and mixed media, 88 x 44 x 24.5 inches

a wide, flat face like the pan of a shovel. The whole form is covered, or visually unified, by a blackish, viscous, tar-like paint. In its physical correspondences, it suggests that the artist's visceral substance is materials and tools: that the artist is what takes place in the studio. The dark surface quality generates other inferences.

One head, Untitled (1991), is assembled from pieces of cast aluminum and mounted on an antique music stand with an old-fashioned, three-footed base: a severe work, yet exuberant. The aluminum "feels" light. But how do you keep a pole from being a pole? One thinks of Picasso's bull, the combined bicycle seat and handlebars. Material transformation is always more vital than, say, a straightforward carving of the same thing. It enables us to know the sculpture in, or through, the specificity of its making. Wood from a tree limb is carved and polished to evoke the standing figure of Wood Figure No. 3 (1992). Periodic rings of transparent white imply parts of its anatomy, and at the same time, slow down the movement of the eye. It is a slender thing, graceful, with a wooden block for a head. The form leans. (A related piece was done with a bronze block head.) It exerts its harmony through the figure, as do the series: excitement lies in the transformation by which material simplicity leads to strong form and the possibility of powerful evocation.

Jackson is also interested in stacked works. In some instances, these can be relatively straightforward: Marble Sculpture (1998) is composed of a

steel pedestal, a stone base, and at the top (held upright by a wedge of lead), a rough block of gray marble with an elegant calla lily carved on one side, the stone rubbed in places with pigments. (Though his sculpture is oriented toward assemblage, Jackson is a skillful carver in stone and wood.)

Other sculptures are more complex. To take one freestanding work (Untitled, 2006), starting from the bottom: a small mount holds a heavy wood base several inches from the floor, creating both a shallow opening and a rim of shadow; the wood base itself, thick as a railroad tie, is white except for the ends, left raw to expose the rings in the wood. In the very center of the base is a circle of sheet lead hammered into the surface to make a bowl, which contains water and a block of broken red glass resembling a heart. Letters are punched into the lead. Then come two thick wooden shafts, one on each side of the bowl, which support a large, rectangular marble block in which lackson has carved a partial figure in one side, a lower body, clearly male, knees folded into the belly, as if under great duress; and on top of the marble, another large whitewashed block, raw at the ends. A circle is inscribed at top-center of this block, with blue pigment pressed into a long, vertical crack.

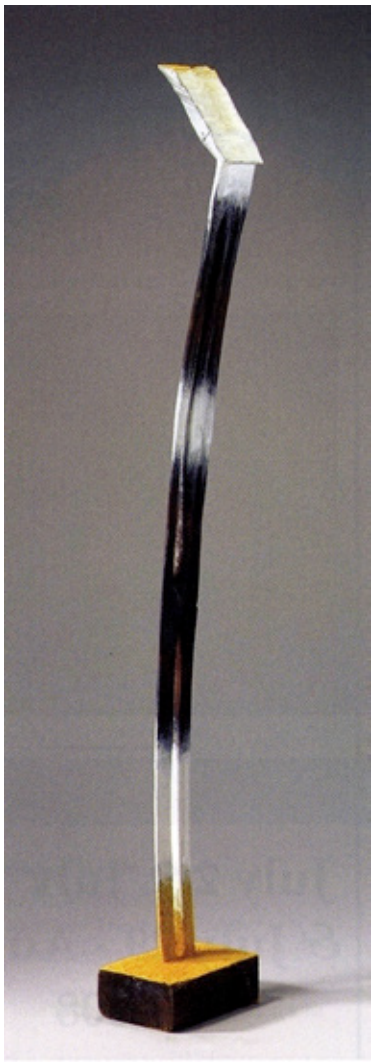
Untitled stands about waist high, yet it unequivocally exerts its verticality, emphasized formally by a pattern of shifting hue and tone at each level. And still the eye goes first to the figure. Here, Jackson has drawn on Michelangelo's concept of working from relationships of mass to mass rather than of mass to space, a formal situation that leads to effects of tremendous tension and struggle, insofar as a sequence of horizontal components is seen as a vertical form impressing its verticality on surrounding space. The figure, too, presses upward toward verticality. But you have to get down on your knees to see the bowl and heart, the dark, cool water in this cavelike space, which feels as if it is under great weight: such dynamic relationships are crucial to the experience of the work.

Another, formally related piece, Untitled II (1985; reworked 2002), is a kind of bier. A heavy pedestal of rusty steel in the shape of a horizontally stretched U supports a long, horizontal block of white marble. A partial figure is carved into the top-a lower torso, loosely sketched thighs and

groin, the legs and feet twisted in an unmistakable posture of death. It is a naturalistic form surrounded first by patterns of cuts in the long "bowl" in which it lies and then by the natural surface of the stone. The head is a large obsidian block, its carved (weeping) faced turned away, on a square of red cloth. If the obsidian and cloth are removed, a face of hammered lead is revealed below, with tiny gilt tears by one eye; remove that, and a smaller, less detailed mask of hammered lead lies below on another cloth; remove them, and in this deep, hollow bowl in the marble, a highly realistic, carved skull rises from the stone. Each level suggests a state of being. Each functions sculpturally with equal satisfaction.

Though they resist summarization, these two stacked works, the latter especially, are concerned with passages and transformations. In the latter, the passage through the levels of the face/head becomes a ritualistic, mysterious, experientially memorable experiential act. Numbers are inscribed at each end of the block, corresponding to the dates of lackson's father's life. A code is inscribed at the head of the block: FARTHE L OVIEVE-which can be translated, or intuited, in several ways.

To know these things is, however, sculpturally unimportant. Perhaps their relation to the artist is best ignored. On the other hand, we can see that while they are not rationally connected, they operate effectively together. But this fact does not rationalize the work. It becomes evident, rather, that various intriguing elements of the sculpture are not dependent on the sculpture, and their



Wood Figure No. 3, 1991. Wood and mixed media, 19 X 91 X 14 In.

removal would not alter the work sculpturally. Yet they contribute a great deal to its effect, its atmosphere.

All this just begins to account for a large and complex body of work. Its sheer physicality tends to arouse description rather than interpretation. Description inaugurates one kind of engagement with the materials and their interactions, exciting the imagination to play and dream among them. While interpretation is another

kind of engagement, it tends to remain outside, or separate from, the work in itself. Jackson, an indefatigable student of art in all its periods and forms, has come to understand the ways in which effect challenges the mechanisms of otherwise reflexive cognitive procedures. While his sculpture is not solely an art of effect, whatever else we make of it will probably start there.

Jackson is not a metaphysical artist, nor does he proceed from any informing premise beyond that of making. Because the instincts in the work move so unerringly toward direct experience, habitual interpretive positions or heavily determined ideologies may soon become entangled outside the work, a condition that only the imagination can overcome.

THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN ART

OLIVER JACKSON
On Making

By Diane Roby

"When paint comes into its own as paint they want to call it abstraction," says Oliver Jackson. Abstraction is a cultural term useful for defining the look of things, but it is of little use in painting. "The conceptual aspect of the term is at odds with the physical aspect of making the work," he explains. "It's the effect that counts and it's determined by the materials-matter acting upon matter upon matter." The artist probed the mechanics of making and consciousness during a series of conversations in his Oakland, California studio in August 1996.

He points to a separation between makers, who deal with concrete reality and "culturalists", who apply a conceptual stance after the fact in a reduction of experience that "leaves 'making' as limited as the cultural argument." To formalize a term such as "abstraction" sets up parameters that obscure relationships between the viewer and the thing-"trying to make a process that is dynamic stand still."

Jackson contends that the schism between abstraction and representation is a false dichotomy. The act of making anything involves abstracting, taking things out of a larger context for a specific transmutation-but the result is not necessarily an abstraction. The term usually carries implications of nonrepresentational as a definitive aspect, but the use of referential imagery can equally be said to be an abstraction-"from images to make images, a metamorphosis that uses aspects of a thing to make a *thing*." It is a tremendous abstraction to render in two dimensions-according to artistic conventions that have come to be recognized as realistic or representational-an illusion of a many-dimensional reality that we associate with the physical world. Conversely, works that are nonobjective appear superficially to be based not in the reality of the world, and so they are said to be abstract, although what they convey may be absolutely concrete and familiar.

Making is a process that utilizes one's full consciousness and the tools of the craft to give correct form to something that has no specific visual form. The maker, in the formation, must at all times be attendant to what is required in order to bring the thing into being, so that the thing made is absolutely correct in and of itself.

"You have to stay on your toes every time-you cannot know it ahead of time," he says.

To categorize Oliver Jackson's paintings as abstraction is to deny the fullness-and absolute concreteness--of a visual realm of paradox and flux that asserts the coexistence of contrasting views of reality. Jackson's paintings reveal potent worlds as resonant as they are unfamiliar, fluid states of being that fully assume the interaction of earthly and cosmic forces. In composing, he provides points of convergence that invite passage from the world outside the painting to an interior world that overwhelms in its vastness. It is a place of experiential effect, "a kind of exuberant space where the space itself is a force. Form is that in reality which affects you. There is a tendency to think of form as an entity, not a force. When form is a force it is elusive-but space is form and it is the kind of thing that has no parameter or

shape."

Jackson's paintings never deny their physical essence. Form and matter-the stuff of paint-unite in a seamless oneness that defies separation into component parts. Structural elements lock in tightly and yet remain in ambiguous flux. Through a series of mechanical effects, Jackson sets up experiences that move the viewer in ways that are not measurable, as the work "gets past the eyes to a place where there are no words." Anxiety or disorientation give way to an openness of perception, as the experience demands to be taken on its own terms,- a powerful alternative to a gravitational reality that keeps us fixed to the earth. "You have to approach with an openness of mind and heart, to allow the experience to work you on its terms without trying to exercise control over it."

Jackson's understanding of his craft has developed over 35 years of rigorous application. In the late 1960s, he began to organize his canvases along a grided structure, marking out a central axis and other key points in the composition. This became a way for him to approach the 15ainting from the start as a dynamic entity, removing the anonymity of the inert surface to set up a possibility of rhythmic relationships. ''I wasn't oriented too well, and needed to do that in order to understand a kind of field relationship. It was a question of mechanics, to activate the surface and to be activated in a more clear way by the canvas itself." He laid his canvas on the floor in the early 1970s, a re-orientation that forced a different reading: approached from any direction, it gave the sensation of looking into a space that opened up in new ways. The surface moved from static ground to energized space, potent and demanding.

THE CONVERSATION

There was a big transition that occurred in your work in the late 1960s and early '70s ...

I had gone to Africa, and it was there that I realized that you could do anything if you could understand the materials well-you had to understand the materials very well. A marking system is just a marking system: brushes, sticks, knives, it doesn't matter. I had started to fumble around before then with added materials, but was limited in the way that I understood it, which was in an additive way. That approach was a conceptual one that had little to do with making something. In the process of making, "adding" something is not important. The question is: Is adding a necessity? If so, that's how it's done. I wasn't freed of the concept of "adding" or the concept of "marking" because it had been removed, in the way I was taught, as though it were something in itself rather than the means to an end. For instance, the word "collage" is a kind of making. In Africa, there's no such word that I know of as "collage". There are just things that have certain things that comprise what they are. So if you can get past a concept like "collage" then you're not "adding", you're using the necessary materials to make something that needs to be made in that manner.

The need to classify threw me, because it's like trying to sort it out and not understanding the tools well, apart from what had been said by people who didn't know a lot about tools. Their disciplines had made them compartmentalize things to analyze them. In making, the analyzation process is very different. One is analyzing, but not necessarily compartmentalizing, in order to arrive at one thing. Where they're dissembling, you literally are assembling. Now if you use the word "assembly", they will say "assemblage", which is again an isolation of a making procedure in order to identify and categorize it, which has nothing to do with making the thing. The thing is what it is, and how it gets to be what it is, its necessity to be a "thing". How it operates as a thing is entirely different than how it came to be a thing. That's the kind of misunderstanding you encounter in the way you are trained. You tend to get trapped in the procedure, in how the thing comes to be, as though that defines what the thing is as an active thing, and you miss

your real objective. The maker must be strict as to whether or not the relationships that are being built are adequate. You can't rely on conceptually knowing that you're putting things on the canvas or making marks. That doesn't get you through it. So that's what I understood, looking at the approach in Africa in things that were being made, and it was very exciting.

Once I realized that the understandings I had were confusion between concept and making, I could focus-that was the one. That freed me to become intimate with the materials-see what they can do and what they can't do-rather than just being aesthetically attracted. The aesthetic attraction is, "Boy, I like those." That's a different thing, but the intimacy of what the materials permit is another kind of relationship. And you can certainly sort out the difference between "liking" something and whether it is effective or not for an objective.

You may, in the process of making something appropriately, come to find that the aesthetics that are the result of a right relationship you learn to like. That's real freeing, and it makes you doubt your taste. You know, "good taste", whatever that is, or "developed" taste or acquired taste is just that-acquired. It certainly has its place, but it may not be useful for what is being made. So you have to be open to not having "taste" as such but having a keen set of eyes for your objective and the rightness of the relationships. You shouldn't be so prejudiced about what they "should" be, in terms of "liking" them-you should be absolutely rigorous about the rightness of them for the objective. It requires that you become intimate while you're making something, that you have to pay attention to the materials. That's what I mean by intimacy.

People frequently don't think that paint is a material-it becomes an aesthetic. But you have to pay attention to paint. It is a very rigorous material. If your objective is a kind of thing, then the use of paint is demanding-how it will be used, what it lends itself to get there.

How did you come to that in the paintings?

I already had preferential thematic material, that stuff that's close to your heart. In my case, there was strong sentiment associated with the image. So I had that information, and a sense of format-how it should be seen, let us say. But I couldn't really use it well until I was freed of rather standard understandings of thematic material. In other words, I deal with figures a lot, it's comfortable for me. I can think visually fairly well with the use of figures as a basis for visual thinking. When I say visual thinking, it's like concretizing something so that it can be seen. That something is very difficult to explain, but the figurative imagery seems to suit it, it satisfies me. The point was to make it authentic-for the reference to be one-to-one to my sentiment. In other words, the gestural image is fairly commonplace, but where you place it spatially, the weights and balances, mass, volume, etc., is what makes it unique for me. The set of relationships of a figurative image, if I'm going to use descriptive or naturalistic description, how do I relate it? If it's not going to be descriptive, how do I relate it to get to this particular thing that I think-I know-is affecting me? That's a real challenge.

What I had to learn was that I was not making people, and the references were not people under any circumstances. It wasn't close to a person, in the sense that a person is an entity in our kind of reality. I had to keep that in mind,and solcall the images 'paint people' - the anatomy is totally paint. That was a way for me to stay clear. What I learned is to keep a painting a painting, and all the marks in it are marks in a painting, and all the images no matter how referential, no matter how much others respond to them and say that they' re "like" reality in air, space and time-they are not. I must remember that they are paint and the effect on a viewer is arrived at by mechanical means ....

Vermeer understood well how to make a painting even though the descriptive imagery is recognizable to a

OLIVER JACKSON, *Untitled No. 2,* 1976, Oil enamel on cotton canvas, 110 7/8" x 103 1/2"

degree that people want to argue about its authenticity, in terms of what's in our space. They are being effected by a set of mechanics in paint, and tend to find comfort in relating it to a world that makes it easy for them. Rembrandt can do the same thing - give maximum descriptive imagery but exceed it in terms of the real effect, so that the visual language is not limited to illusionism or references.

In making, that is very difficult to hold on to, because this society is so oriented to "just like" -ism. It prefers referential knowledge to stand in for real experience; it is not about the thing on its own terms. You have to work against that in order to keep making a painting. People think that if you're not representing, then you're making "Abstraction", missing the mark that the thing in front of them is concrete. It is not an abstraction, it is an aggregate mechanical process to make this one thing, and it is as concrete as the work that has referential possibilities. In many cases work that is nonrepresentational, or relies very little upon descriptive exactness, and work that is descriptively intense, are very similar in their ability to take the viewer to places where there are no words, where description or analysis of the work by referencing it to the world doesn't make any sense at all. It is rarely admitted that the use of what we call image frequently is not what the thing actually does to you.

One must avoid the tendency to make a work to be read and understood as though it were a verbal language or a 'code' that translates and makes known what the significance of the work is. As far as I'm concerned, the experience is the result of a thing and yourself, and the significance is dependent upon the visual senses.

To what degree does the maker condition the experience for the viewer?

You can resonate them with craftsman mechanics that can be used to organize the relationships to put the viewer, when it's visual, into a particular frame of experiencing. The specificity of the experience-no. It is filtered through them. The generality of the experience- by the light, and mood-you can do that easily. If you want to excite with experiences that are fresh, then you can accomplish a frame, a mode, with another set of relationships that will frame the person in a particular state of being. If it is fresh, that is, not culturally known, you can make them experience without conceptualizing for awhile.

This culture is insistent upon making equivalents. If you look at Greek tragedy, you see this problem of making a new experience dealt with in an extraordinary way. The audience knows the story well. It's a common story, culturally, so it gives a comfort zone immediately. It is the specificity of the development of the tragedy that gets the person every time, by

building a power that explodes the comfort zone. In other words, the dramatist must punch through the comfort zone of '1 know this story" and therefore uses all of the techniques of language-metaphor, imaging, conceptual reference, rhythms, sound-in a way that the level of comfort, which makes the viewer feel in control of the material, is literally swept away and they experience anew, so a catharsis is possible. In an African American church the same thing is done. A commonplace text is chosen that everybody knows, and the thematic material is solemn, or ironic or whatever. But the development of the sermon is the making of a piece in which the power level must be strong enough each time to make the experience absolutely new.

That is one of the things that "the arts" are accused of - of being almost insidious in their ability to undermine your stability and make you experience without guideposts, while appearing to give you guideposts-in other words, making you walk into an arena with joy and cheerfulness and in a sense naivete, and then pulling the rug out from under you. The point is to make you experience with a freshness that you cannot associate, and by association deny the experience.

In this culture the denial of experience is extraordinary, in the translations and stand-ins and socalled "decoding". They don't look to the work to do anything-it is supposed to refine an exterior life, but not change an interior life. In changing an interior life you have to leave the individual to himself or herself. You have to trust that the work will do its job even though you don't know quite how it does it-you know it does it.

Every exchange that we have with the world, regardless of whether we call it spiritual or not, is through the world, by the senses, absorbing things in things, exploiting things by things, always relationships with things. This understanding in composition has fallen on hard times, because it is a craft that requires that out of many you make one, and that the one is more than the sum of the parts. The parts cannot explain it as a thing, even though one can know how it came to be a thing, but not what it is as a thing-and that's the difference. When a person understands that, then they will not try to take the mystery from the thing, even though they may understand the mechanics that led to how the thing came to be. The operation of a thing is forever a mystery. It is only in being this one thing out of these aggregate parts that the person experiences it, and what one experiences is not the aggregate parts or the necessity of them for it to be a thing.

It's very much the same for a human being as an entity, apart from the component parts, down to cells and DNA. Each one has an integrity, but what we call ourselves is something that must have all these integrities working to the something. What is the something? We call it "1-ness"- the way we project ourselves on other things that makes us distinct from other things, even though we're like other things. This kind of thinking seems to be a bit too subtle. The society doesn't like this constant dissolving of a thing into a thing, while maintaining the integrity of its uniqueness. The cell has a uniqueness and an independence-while you have an independence, it has an independence. This kind of paradox is what is not liked. The hierarchical set of relationships that are developed, as we move upward, tend to deny the force of the foundation. In other words, if DNA is the code for all living things in terms we think of as living things, animate things, and its intention is clear to itself, it must be a stunning set of relationships. However, you would be hard pressed in this society for people to give it a spiritual thrust. If they did they would talk about God, and thereby wipe out the paradox we live with, of how one thing can support another thing, remain one thing, and the other thing be a thing, a consciousness in a consciousness-that's a bit much. So there's a tendency to take DNA and make it a kind of mechanics that one can't disprove, but one will make shallow its force as an entity and only recognize the

entity, let's say, of a human being as special, but not the DNA. It appears too lowly.

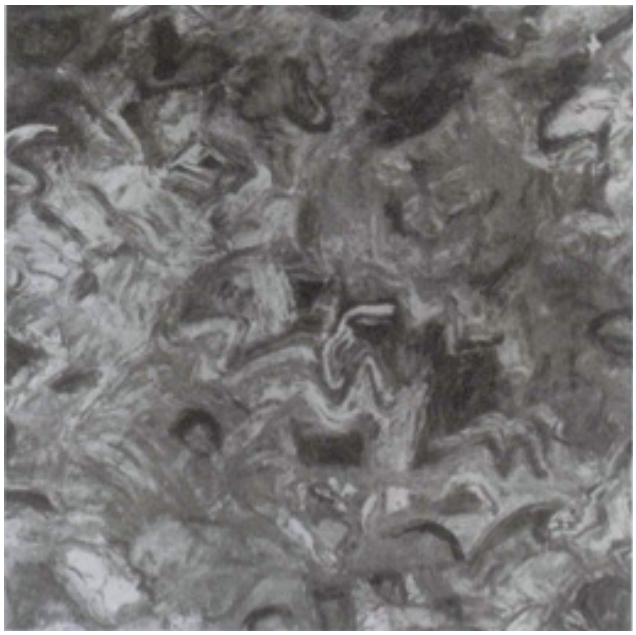
When you make relationships in a work, you have to find as best you can those relationships that lead to a oneness, and that is esoteric. You're making a painting, but it is made of things, and they have to cooperate for oneness, an indivisible effect. That's an interesting concept to think about, but in the making process it is always the point.

A painting by its name is a thing. But any maker knows that it takes many things, and all of them are crucial. The relationship you have with this bringing together of material to make a thing which will give an experience which is not material in the same sense that that is material, requires that you know how to compose the materials so that they make relationships which are not materials. In other words, a relationship is an effect that is the result of bringing material things together. For instance, if you want to make illumination in a painting you can do it in many ways. You can use red and make the sensation of illumination. It is still red simultaneously, but the effect will be illumination, and not necessarily red illumination. At the same time it can be mood as an effect, but it is always this peculiar relationship with something else, never alone. So it is a mystery to talk about this ambiguity. It is ambiguous because it is not one thing only-its realm is ambiguousness.

To have precise effects upon you as a sense organ, to resonate you, the ambiguity of the effect must be focused sharply but at the same time not pinned down by any definitive reference. It must be focused so that the experience is not vague. You can see that in the use of, say, red with blue, you can make an effect that in mood agitates, and is still red and blue. Simultaneously one sees red and blue but the anxiety is not red and blue. It is anxiety, and they occur together. It also may be illumination, it may also be space, these things that occur together; it also may be volume or mass. All that may be given simultaneously and you don't lose focus in terms of a state of being, in that the experiencing of these simultaneous effects reinforces a precise state of being. In composing, you try to become intimate with the materials so that you can make relationships do these kinds of things. You can be familiar with the physicalness of the materials-the red is a kind of physicalness, the substance of paint, the support, it is all a kind of physicalness. All these physicalnesses are different, but they all play you physically so that you get an intimacy and begin to experience the material's ambiguity. Conceptually it is ambiguous.

You have to be careful about terms that are distracting. For instance, "texture" is the separation of an effect that always occurs with something, never separate but it occurs in your mind as a word, a separate thing-that is an analyzation process. So these are the difficulties that a maker will confront because there is this constant separating out of an effect like "texture" from a "thing". When you have texture you have made a thing, always. If it has an effect of roughness, it is a thing that is rough. The word "texture" makes you assume that it is an abstraction or a concept. It is not. In that it is sensed it is a thing. What is necessary to understand is what it does to you.

Analytical reasoning that is superimposed on visual language causes complexities for makers. Africa helped me to see the integration taking place without the conceptual baggage, so that I paid attention to whether or not a cohesive thing was made. As a maker I could see that it was possible to use what the heart desired as tools or things to make something. You could say, "Well I always liked dirt. It's okay." And you didn't have to explain it to be culturally acceptable-it was just stuff you used. I had come to understand intimacy, and was freed from concerns about legitimacy and trying to find compatibility in making. In other words, you want to use earth with what to get where? So you're not arguing for the right to use it, you're trying



OLIVER JACKSON, Untitled (9.12.91) 1991, oil on canvas, 8' x 8'

to find out how to make relationships that yield something that one can experience.

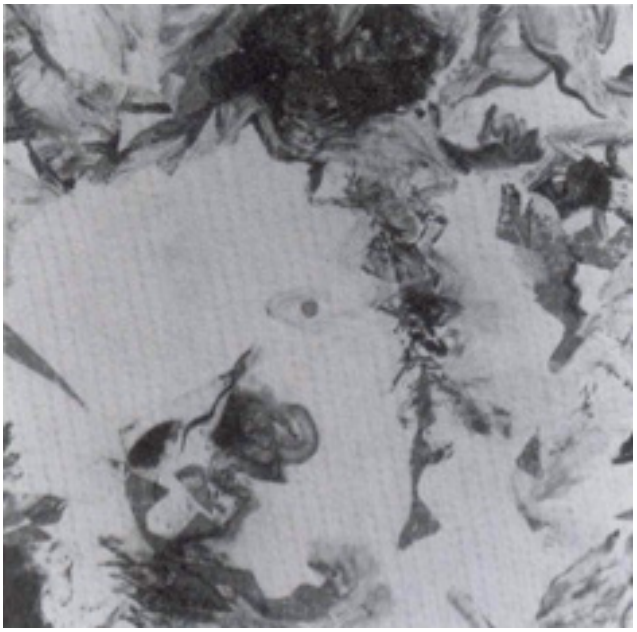
When these effects combine to create a cathartic experience, people want to make a leap back to say that your process is a cathartic process ...

That's another way of trying to make someone responsible for the experience besides you: the thing, and the experience which is not the thing. Experience is something that is not the painting but arises between you and the painting. It is an extraordinary thing, and your senses are involved. Experience is a thing in itself, but the kind of thing it is denies isolated definition. When one talks about experience one always, to make sense, wants to reference it to what causes it in time and space. Yet the experience itself is a thing, the painting is a thing, you are a thing. Again, the culture doesn't train you to be comfortable with experience. It demands that the experience must have meaning, it must tie in with cultural reinforcement. It will not permit experiences that are overwhelming to be without meaning, nor will it permit the thing to be the basis of the experience. Therefore, the maker is held responsible for the experience and the meaning. This is absurd, because the maker is the maker, the painting is the painting, and the experience is the experience. Each is a phenomenon.

How does the experience of a painting become known to you in the process of making?

The painting will inform you at a certain point and it will lead you and you have to follow. The relationships will let you know what is not right, what is right. It is a process that can be frustrating but it is so accurate you have to become intimate with what it is you've put down. It tunes you for making, so that when you put another relationship down, it may not work and you feel it. This feeling will almost make you sick. It will bother you, literally-it's like something distasteful in your mouth. And your eyes will like it and it is distasteful. It's very visceral for me. I suspect that's true for a lot of makers, it will be almost visceral, and they will argue for it. It's beautiful aesthetically, and they will argue for it mentally, conceptually, however viscerally it bothers them, and that is a clue that is brought through the eyes. Literally you are resonated.

The leadership of the work is reverberating you in the making process so that you are being led, and given good clues, and when it works you can go on, and go on more. It's so straightforward. It's like a gameyou make the right move, you go on with the game. You don't stop



OLIVER JACKSON
untitled (1. 1.93)
(right canvas of triptych)
1993, oil paint and collage on gessoed linen, 9' x 9'

and say, "Hey, I made the right move!" The game proceeds-it makes possibilities. That is as close as I can get to it, but personally, it will bother me. Sometimes I will have one relationship and it's adequate but not right, and then just like that I will find the correct harmony, and that's wonderful.

I think that's the rigor that haunts you. Whether it takes weeks, or days, or minutes, it is rigorous, and also humorous. The business about "spontaneity" is kind of a joke. Because things come quickly they call it spontaneity. It's ridiculous-how it comes is not the point. If it comes over a period of 50 years and it's right it will seem spontaneous-it will seem harmonious and effortless like your arm to your shoulder. Being able to act out of faith-that may be a better statement than spontaneity, which gives the idea of that which comes out of nowhere. If you work a long time in any field, what looks like spontaneity is just an absolute intimacy with the materials,and that you can have faith. You have this extraordinary faith.

Once you break through it puts you at odds. I'm not trying to be at odds, I'm trying to make a powerful thing. They think I'm an artist, a maker, who is trying to make a niche, that the work is unapproachable, and on my terms. That's not true,it's on the painting's terms, on the sculpture's terms, it's on the terms of the thing. I know that to be true.

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OLIVER JACKSON

Art is limitation, Stravinsky said, and for a while, in the sixties and early seventies, most painters seemed intent on proving just how limited their art could be. Following Clement Greenberg's prescription that painting should "purify" itself of whatever seemed inessential to the nature of the medium, they arrived, not surprisingly, at mere flat surfaces covered with one or two colors of paint.

Oliver Jackson has been a pioneer among a growing number of artists who are challenging this Minimalist doctrine. Since limitation exists anyway, why not strive to overcome it rather than meekly acquiesce? Everyone has to come to terms with the real restrictions of craft and material, but some artists, by seeming to defy these restrictions, manage to show that the limitations are not as confining as had been supposed. Such artists expand the dimensions not only of the medium-the languagebut also, much more important, of what it is able
to convey.

Jackson has opened up painting as few other artists have done in the past ten years. At one time or another, he has sliced holes through his canvases, attached objects of various kinds to them, fitted them with metal studs and eyelets. In recent years, Jackson has mainly just applied paint to huge sheets of canvas. But these paintings become areas in which almost anything can, and does, appear. Schematic human figures tumble through vertiginous abstract spaces; symbolic motifs-hats, rings, fingersand boldly scrawled lettering swirl like explosions of graffiti amid flurries of gestural brush strokes. And just as his individual paintings can encompass a diversity of forms, Jackson's work as a whole shows stylistic diversity. One canvas may be overwhelmingly abstract, another peppered with imagery; one may be heavy and dense, the next sparse and airy.

Yet Jackson's paintings are neither random and chaotic nor patchwork exercises in eclecticism. His canvases may burst at the seams with elemental energy, but the energy is harnessed to a rigorous substructure that makes its own peace with the picture plane, and the various components of his paintings mesh together as intricately and as solidly as the pieces of a mosaic. The primitivistic images that hurtle or dance or hang suspended in their vast, gravityless spaces clearly belong to

the same lineage, originating in African sculpture, as the figures of Expressionist painters like Kirchner, Kokoschka, and de Kooning; there are affinities to the post-war expressionism of the Cobra artists in Europe and to the late figurative painting of Philip the late figurative painting of Philip Guston. Yet Jackson's paintings do not come off as mere anthologies of influences, but are like living organisms in which each part seems necessary and vital to the functioning of the whole. Their contemporary "skin" is constructed upon a bone structure that unites them to the great family of Western painting, from Giotto to Tintoretto, El Greco, Rembrandt, and Vermeer-all artists whom Jackson deeply admires.

An erudite and uncommonly articulate student of art history (and, for the past ten years, a teacher of art at Sacramento State University), Jackson is aware of all the issues of contemporary (and traditional) painting; he is thoroughly conversant with the rules, which is why he is able to shatter the conventions without violating the underlying principles. Instead of homogeneity of style, Jackson relies on an internal consistency of vision. "If you are true to yourself," he believes, "and to the inner logic that develops with each painting, unity will take care of itself. The painting and everything in it-whether it's the 'realism' of a Vermeer or the 'abstraction' of a Pollock-is a vehicle for something beyond it. It has to be put together as perfectly as possible, like any vehicle, but it is the vision beyond that gives the painting meaning."

Jackson feels he learned many valuable things about painting from his association with jazz musicians in St. Louis, his home town. Probably most major visual artists until twenty years ago worked in surroundings where there was an intimate exchange among artists involved in many forms of expressionism: poetry, music, theater, and dance. The notion of the painter or sculptor as a kind of art specialist, aloof from the intellectual and spiritual cross-currents of his or her time and even from the work of fellow artists in other media, is, like the doctrine of Formalism, largely of recent origin, circa 1960. For reasons that may be as much ancestral as social, this notion has rarely proven as attractive to black American artists as to white ones. The close ties among painters, poets, and jazz musicians that had characterized New York during the birth of Abstract Expressionism in the forties (and the North Beach scene in San Francisco in the fifties) persisted in St. Louis in the Black Artists Group (BAG), with which Jackson was active in the late sixties and early seventies.

Like the Association for the Advancement of Creative Music in Chicago, with which it was loosely associated, BAG encouraged collaborative efforts among visual artists, musicians, poets, and dramatists, generally under the broad umbrella of theater or performance art. Many of the most important jazz artists of the past decade came out of these two groups: Julius Hemphill (still one of Jackson's close friends), Oliver Lake, John Hicks, Anthony Braxton, the Art Ensemble of Chicago.

Certain issues that tend to be blurred in the solitude of the painter's studio are brought into sharp and abrupt focus in the performing arts. "A musician knows when he is losing the attention of his audience right away," Jackson points out. "Working with musicians taught me about the whole matter of time in a painting, the need to eliminate the dead spots, the parts that don't mDve. From musicians, I learned how to get into a painting, to find an opening. And the most important thing you learn from the best musicians is: just play the tune. There are some tunes, certain thematic ideas, that call for lots of notes and speed and intricacy. Oth-

ers have to be done with very few, and very simply. The same is true of a painting."

The paintings Jackson did in the sixties and early seventies generally "called for" the inclusion of figurative images. Although there was a period in the mid-seventies when most of his paintings were predominantly abstract, Jackson has continued to think of himself as a figurative painter, in the sense that the abstract painting of Still and Pollock and de Kooning remained basically grounded in the human form. It is this conception, Jackson says, that gives rise to the immense scale of his canvases, "an environment expansive and open-ended enough for the figure to breathe and move."

The word figure must be understood here in a special way, even in Jackson's paintings of the past three or four years, in which the images tend to be more clearly defined and recognizable (ritual dancers, flying musicians blowing horns, sage elders gathered in a circle) than in his earlier canvases. The figures are not illustrations or representations of forms other than themselves, Jackson emphasizes, but exist and take on life solely within the painting. They are therefore not "distorted" human figures, but perfectly accurate "paint men and paint women." Their anatomythree legs, half-a-dozen arms, or none, as the case may be-is "in the paint."

The same is true of other motifs that appear in Jackson's work-the writing, for example, which is usually letters wrenched from a conventional verbal context and sometimes rearranged to form a series of variations, or anagrams, on the letters of Jackson's name. The letters leap in sweeping, acrobatic trajectories across and through the vast spaces ofJackson's paintings, at once a dynamic abstract calligraphy and a steely musculature inseparable from the paintings' interior skeletons. Similarly, the hats, hands, rings, and other recurring "signs" aim to tell no stories, but develop strictly out of the visual, and visionary, logic of the work itself.

Of course, a completed painting assumes an existence independent of the artist, who, like any other sensitive and informed viewer, may then read into it his own interpretations. For example, it has become clear to him over the years, Jackson says, that hats were something he associated as a child with "maleness" and" a certain age or wisdom." At least for him they have come to symbolize some of these qualities when they appear in his paintings. The rings-sometimes directly painted, sometimes implicit in the broad elliptical forms or paths or movement that anchor his compositions-Jackson associates with the sacred rings of myth and magic: universals really, he points out, for when friends gather they invariably draw together into some kind of circle as a means of expressing the intimacy, the harmony, among them.

Harmony is a word that recurs often when Jackson speaks about his art. But he does not mean an easy, simplistic harmony. "Power," "intensity," "dynamism," "structure" occur at least as frequently in Jackson's conversation-states or qualities that, on the surface, are not always compatible. At first, indeed, Jackson's paintings are apt to convey an overwhelming impression of dislocation. Shapes, colors, images, evocations of space, different methods of applying paint, all appear in configurations that are radically different from what our experience with either the real world or the conventions of contemporary painting would lead us to expect. The paintings are likely to seem at once too simple and too complex-not unlike one of Jackson's favorite pieces of contemporary music, a tune called "Bordertown" taped a couple of years ago at a concert given by Julius Hemphill and a group of other musicians at the Public Theatre in

New York. Built on a rudimentary blues riff, the music gradually piles up in layer upon layer until its elemental structure has become an extraordinary vessel containing virtually every kind of contemporary musical idea and emotional nuance, from post-Webern sound clusters and avant-garde abstraction to stray snatches of Dixieland and get-down funk.

But if Jackson's paintings work to disassociate and disorient, they also reconstitute, reconstruct, and eventually absorb us into a new, visionary order, or harmony. It is a harmony in which nothing seems permanently fixedidentified, labelled, and pinned down-yet everything, even the shape and direction of the seemingly improvisatory brush strokes, has its place, much as the various elements of a poem assume identity and significance in relation to its controlling image. In Untitled (cat. 14), for example, all the cues that one can find in the figurative images, as well as the painting's more purely abstract energy and movement, point to an overriding theme of fertility and generation-and the brush strokes, or at least many of them, seem to take the shapes of phalluses that fill and engulf the universe. Sometimes the seemingly boundless spaces of Jackson's paintings are constructed of brush marks that resemble thatchings or dense jungle foliage. In other paintings, the spaces open and breathe, activated only by a few long, intertwining ribbons and tracks of color that uncurl and extend, or tense and
knot and bunch, like sinew and ligament and bone.

Above all else in Jackson's paintings is a sense of the inseparability of positive and negative space, figure and ground, the yin and yang of painting. In the big canvases these opposites interlock, shift, and eventually become as indistinguishable from one another as the objects in a kaleidoscope are from their reflected images. The relationship between figure and ground, or portraiture and landscape, is painting's most potent metaphor for the relationship of interior to exterior worlds, of man to society, nature, and the universe. In this metaphorical sense, Jackson's paintings carry on the spirit of the Abstract Expressionist figure painters like Still and Pollock in some respects but depart from them significantly in others. In their work the figure, shattered and vastly enlarged, seems to expand to absorb the universe; in Jackson's paintings it more often multiplies into several relatively small forms. Instead of single, solitary, individualistic man, Jackson paints a plurality or community of men and women who exist in a more intimate relation to their environment: neither dominating the universe nor being overcome by it, but an integral part of the total organism, sharing in its continual flux, movement, and change, and also in whatever constants manage somehow to keep it all together.

This, at least, is so of Jackson's most successful paintings, or, sometimes, just of parts of them that seem to work. Jackson is an artist who swings for the fences, as in baseball, and like the power hitters who hit the home runs, also tends to strike out more frequently than those who specialize in dribbling singles through the infield. But that is simply to say that the efforts to realize a new, personal vision in art involves tremendous risk. "When an original and pure impulse makes its appearance," Jackson observes, "it is likely to seem strange and perhaps raw even to the artist. His natural inclination will be to step back from it, smooth off the rough edges, and polish it up until everything properly conforms again to the prevailing conventions, to contemporary taste. So we get more of the same. But when an artist feels this kind of thing occuring, he has to have the courage to let it

come out, take the risk of leaving it alone. It is the only way a new vision can enter into art."

In painting, it is finally this willingness to risk that separates the artist-the visionary-from the artisan. Success in art has never been common; the great masters throughout history have fully realized their visions only some of the time. In recent years, all too few of the countless people who now call themselves artists seem even to be making the effort. When everything comes together in Jackson's paintings, they convey a rare power and richness and fullness of vision. When it doesn't, quite, one still has to admire the largeness of the ambition and boldness of the attempt.

- Thomas Albright

INTERVIEW

It is not always comfortable to enter the world created by Oliver Jackson's paintings. Approaching them, the viewer is drawn irresistibly toward their centers as if through a waterspout or the eye of a hurricane. This power and force can be frightening at first, yet slowly, seductively, the fear gives way to fascination, and somewhere in the process a transmutation occurs: the place occupied by the painting and the place where the percipient stands are one.

The sacred grove, the burning bush, the magic circle suddenly appear, in landscapes that are not landscapes but gravityless areas of free-falling space, where rituals of every conceivable nature take place without regard for "known" reality. Magicians, judges, wise old men hold court with others of their kind, and monsters and dancing dervishes whirl and flow in a turgid atmosphere of richly colored paint that, like the eye-dazzling blankets of the Navaho, is a repository for magic. Throughout these riveting scenarios it is possible to hear the strains of unknown music, tumbling, falling, suspended in space like the forms of tiny embryos.

Circled, creating circles, the figures in these works are engaged in rituals as old as time. They appear to be receiving, sharing, giving knowledge-but what is it that they know? Fleetingly the veil is pierced, and we think we know the answer, but before we can phrase it, shape it, catch it, like a dream half-remembered on waking, the sense is gone again, and we are left with a hunger that only painting itself can satisfy. What we are seeking is a know]- edge beyond words-a sense of something part of a larger whole, embedded deep within the collective unconscious.

What is to be made of the primordial images of trum- peting angels, crouching men, hatted figures, and mon- sters that appear and disappear in Jackson's works? Standing in front of a painting, drawn into its vortex, the viewer "disappears" just as he disappears in sleep, and then feels the same curious sense of acceptance/ incredulity that pervades a dream. It is happening, it is real-perhaps more real than the place he momentarily inhabits-yet his rational senses have no way of dealing with it. If, as sometimes happens with these works, a being that was not there-or appeared not to be there in the beginning-suddenly floats up through the rich, thick paint, and takes form before his eyes, he accepts it, because he saw it happen, and he knows it to be true.

Like Jungian archetypes, images in Jackson's paintings are vehicles that allow us to travel the route of the spirit rather than the mind. If we listen, they will speak-wordlessly-and in speaking provide us with clues that can help us find the path to another reality. Knowing and not knowing, understanding and not understanding, we watch with fatal fascination while unfamiliar rites, black magic, acts of violence and terror take place before our eyes. Priapic figures lewdly dance and gesture in the firelight and secret rituals are conducted by wise men and priests.

These things are specific yet not specific at all. These beings are what Jackson terms "paint people" - they are not flesh and blood. It is the percipient who, guided by the artist's vision, gives them full shape and form. What is more, as with a dream, they are all one, and they are he.

Such figures, Jung has written, play a crucial spiritual role. "The wise old man appears in dreams in the guise of a magician, doctor, priest, teacher, professor, grandfather, or any other person possessing authority. The archetype of spirit in the shape of a man, hobgoblin, or animal always appears in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc., are needed but cannot be mustered on one's own resources. The archetype compensates this state of spiritual deficiency by contents de-

signed to fill the gap. “1

Aided and abetted by these beings that populate the paintings, both the artist and the viewer travel routes they could not conceive of alone. These “symbols of transcendence,” as Joseph Henderson has termed them, can provide “the means by which the contents of the unconscious can enter the conscious mind. “2 In so doing, they pro- vide for the viewer both a shape and a richness that did not previously exist and place him deep in unending space/time.

Jan Butterfield

C.G. Jung, “The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales,” in *Four Archetypes*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 94.
2 Joseph Henderson, “Symbols of Transcendence:
Ancient Myths and Modern Man,” in *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), p. 112.

The following is an interview of Oliver Jackson by Jan Butterfield that was conducted in June 1982.

JB: You and I have talked a lot about power in work,
and spirit, but we have not yet discussed what makes a great work.
OJ: A great work will always get past the eyes. The one thing that a visual work does if it is powerful is get past the eyes. The one thing that a great aural work does is get past the ears-like Beethoven, for instance, which we are listening to right now. If it doesn't do that, it will simply exist as a sensate possibility. But it will not be able to open you to the spirit. You must always move past the visual, and yet it is through the visual that you move. Therefore, you walk a tightrope.
JB: There are very specific images in your work that repeat themselves. There are beings-I don't know if it's all right to call them that.
OJ: You can call them beings-it doesn't matter.
JB: But these beings are in there as well as other imagesand they continue to appear in a very particular way, a very centered way. Secondly, there is another image-a magic circle-which is either implied or literally there, and in virtually all those cases there are three or more people.
OJ: Sometimes three, sometimes more.
JB: ... and usually there is one doing the speaking, or gesturing ...
OJ: ... and yes, the implications of speech, or a conversation, right!
JB: When you, in your own mind, refer to those beingshow do you refer to them?
OJ: Well, I always think of them as "paint people." There are no human beings in painting-only paint people! I call them that for my own purposes, to stay absolutely clear, because frequently they will take on a visual form that will recall us-physical flesh-and-blood people. But they are never that, they are paint people, and therefore their thrust is always different-even though they tend to engage us with familiarity (a real familiarity: you will say, "That's a head"). Sometimes the heads will have eyes in them-that is even more familiar. Sometimes they will have hands-that is even more familiar yet. And as they get more familiar-particularly in scale-that means I am talking more humanistically at that point.
JB: What do you mean humanistically?
OJ: I am not talking about humanism in terms of a philosophy; I am talking about those feelings that we grasp from within our scale-that is humanism. If you see somebody killed, it affects you within your scale-that is humanistic. If a tidal wave comes in-it is not within our scale, it's cosmic. That kind of image will require of the viewer a much more rigorous disengagement of his human stance and force him to move to a plane where he can deal with it. Look: I have paintings that get pretty rough. I say pretty rough, because they are difficult. As a human being you wouldn't walk into a situation like that.
JB: As you were saying that, I was thinking about the painting of yours in the current exhibition, *Untitled No. 7* (cat. 3), with figures and knives.
OJ: Right. You've got it-that's a rough one and the reason that it is rough is that the scale gets ...
JB: Larger than human scale?
OJ: Not larger, more powerful; but this one is also very ambiguous. The reason that this is a terrific painting is that the images, the paint people, apparently have paint arms and paint legs and paint heads, and they appear to be moving. At the same time, the power which they evidence, in their anatomies and in the way they are constructed, leaves us far behind. We make contact with them through their recognizable appendages, their paint, and because they look sort of like arms and

legs, but at the same time the power with which these images are animated-their internal structural power-is off the Richter scale for us. At that point, I have drawn you into something that is fearful, not to hurt you, but in the sense that you can see another mode. This is a forceful painting, a powerful painting in this sense: a human being would call it *aggressive*. But it is not an *aggressive* painting for paint people! *They are right in their context*. You and I would call it aggressive because the level of power intimidates. But that's where *they* belong.

JB: What about the paintings with "YES" and "NO" on them?

OJ: Right. That power is what they are about. "YES" indicates a painting that I can negotiate. I can step into that reality with them-and I can come out of it okay. "NO" means "Don't go in there like you are!" "YES" means that now I can walk in these paintings without fear of being distorted and destroyed. I now have a focus so that when I make this confrontation with power, I am in the proper form-so that I don't get blown off the map! Does that make sense?

JB: Yes!

OJ: Well, painting is exactly like that. Certain paintings ask you to stand on certain ground, and you will see people fidget in front of them. If the painting is gentle to the human being, it will put them on that ground and help them to prepare. Rembrandt does it all the time. He puts you on powerful ground, but he provides leads so that you can gently go that way. Picasso, too, although

Guemica almost pops you right in it-but there are still some gentlenesses there so that it is not destructive to the point that you get disoriented. Pollock does that too. Pollock is wonderful-he makes it so beautiful for you that you will go along with him. If he didn't do that, it would be very difficult to follow him. De Kooning does the

same thing. He does it with the sensuosity in the paint. The sensuosity helps us to come to grips with the confluences of form that set up spontaneous energy force fields that literally assault you.

The thing to know is how to take people to this powerful ground without disorienting them. If you disorient them, they can't go with you. There are painters-great ones-who take their covers off. There will be works that come out of them in which there is absolutely no deference to human beings, and then the only way to look at those works is to get to the place where they are. All of that is difficult to know. You see, part of the lopsidedness in contemporary art is that we want to go straight to the principle, and throw the sham away. But frequently we reduce the idea of the principle to those very things that make it absolutely not the principle.

JB: You don't have any of your paintings up in your studio. Why?

OJ: Because ... it is better to *remember* what your work looked like. Do you know why? ... That which impressed you, that which you will use next time, will be working on you. Therefore, you will be working out of the *dynamism* of the painting before rather

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

Untitled Drawing #4, 1976

Untitled Drawing #1, 1976

Untitled Drawing #7, 1976

Untitled Drawing #5, 1976

than the *formula* of the painting before. You will frequently go back to that painting and say, "I know exactly what it looks like" -and it will amaze you that it does not look like what it felt like. And if you have worked out of what it felt like, the paintings that grow out of that will be real fruit rather than a reflection.
JB: Those beings that come into the paintings-do you know them?
OJ: Yes.
JB: And do they come in all the time?
OJ: Sometimes. Those beings are attitudinal. .. and they have a range. For instance, you will see the paint person with the hat. Now, all I can tell you is that ... that particular image ... is a knowing kind of image. He is like a judge. But when I use the word judge, I don't mean that he is judging anything. The real point of a judge is that kind of stance. It's not judging in the sense of good and bad. I am not talking about that kind of morality. But it is that kind of separation in which one is there, and looking upon. And in some ways the fuller sense of judgment is an ordering factor.
JB: Explain that more fully.
OJ: Let me explain this way. With nature there are forms or places ... for example: if you go into the forest, you will see a huge tree, and it will give order to that forest. The other entities will form themselves around it. The same is true of a great mountain-things will form themselves around it. These forms are judgmental in the sense that order takes place around them.
JB: Now, in those paintings that have circular configurations, do you see the circle as a magical phenomenon?
OJ: I tend to see that circular area as a sacred kind of space. For example: when we are talking we never leave a circular form. Three people will take on a circular space if they are close friends, and it is always a sacred place.
JB: It seems to me that there are images in your work that are clearly archetypal images in the Jungian sense. Are you conversant with Jungian psychology, and are you comfortable with it?
OJ: ... Yes ... almost. You see, the key to an archetype is that it is not an already preconceived category. It has no form as you or I understand it. It asserts itself in every creative act, and therefore it is always in the process of becoming. And that which you consider the archetypal stasis of it is simply its past tracks. But you cannot know what it is from past tracks ...
JB: Or what it will be! We were talking about time ... *OJ:* Exactly. Time takes us places that almost have no words. We talk about spontaneity, and we believe that the spontaneity happens in the action. Our culture is very limited in that way. We believe spontaneity is closely aligned with impulse, with that which is freed from calculation. But spontaneity has nothing to do with whether the artist spends a year on a painting or a day, whether he does it slow, or fast. You see, they blew Pollock and those people out of the water talking random talk about "spontaneous action painting." So every young painter after that thought you had to move your arm quickly. And what they didn't see in de Kooning and Pollock was the intense locking in of certain things in the paint that produced an energy, time and time again, that had little to do with the fact that they painted decades ago. It had nothing to do with that time cycle. It was like growing a plant, making stuff in front of your eyes.
JB: Let's talk about your painting methods. You are painting flat, on the floor, right?
OJ: Yes. I will work on easels again, but I am painting flat now because I have started to use enamel paints and I did not want the drips. Also, the paints want to flow down, and so painting flat worked best. After I learned to paint and "see" in

these terms, the dynamism of painting flat was, for me, quite strong. I could walk into the paintingand approach it at any point. What that did was open up the sense of space and form differently. There was no place where the surface was not dynamic. I would sometimes approach it from the corner even. That was a valid place to approach it when the painting was flat. When you are standing before a painting, your sight tends to determine the viewing of the painting, because you tend to paint towards your eyesight. And the area where your hand reaches upward tends to be a less meaningful area for you. That happens a lot with painters-where the central portion of the painting will take on a gravity that frequently does violence to the conception.

JB: That is the responsibility of the artist? Do you see his role as that of holding a mirror up to society?

OJ: No. The responsibility of the artist is to give back-not a reflection, but a sense of clarity about the spiritual state. He is in a position of leadership with regard to where the spiritual state and sensibility should be moving. That is his business. And above all things it should not be reflective! The sense of reflectiveness is the most childish aspect
of art!

JB: I'm glad to hear you say that-because I don't think art can be reflective. It can't simply mirror what is "out there." It has to be representative of interior states.

OJ: Who needs a mirror! I mean, hell, I know what I am living in!

But now, the realism of Vermeer, that was not dumb at all. The last thing it did was to mirror Dutch life-that was a by-product of using the objects as a vehicle for these other principles involved. Generally speaking, we have tended to lose our understanding of subtleties ... And I don't mean deviousness. The fact that there is more to reality than the crassness of what presents itself, and I am not being derogatory or snobbish-I mean crass in the sense that that is not its fullness.

JB: ... Because it is too simplistic, too banal. ..

OJ: .. . crass in the sense that you are still standing in front of a painting in relation to its obviousness, and in this sense it is crass, but as you penetrate what the thing is in a full sense, the crassness gives way to an incredible subtlety. So that if you will simply persist, within the thing itself, something will take place which leads to places that are incredibly profound, something that was first apparent in the touching. With art sometimes we tend to stop at the place where our response limits the understanding of
the thing.

JB: ... or before we can really "see" it-out of fear of doing that or out of a fear of opening up enough to do it. OJ: I don't think opening up is our problem. Do you know what I think it is? Orientation. Just orientation. We have absolute confidence in how we are supposed to approach a rock, for example-and that confidence is incredibly narrow; we say, "Oh, I know that's a rock." We were talking about Noguchi earlier-well, look, culturally, for him, rocks possess incredible spirit force and therefore his approach to a rock is a fuller one-it is not the only one, it is just simply a fuller one. He sees it to kick, but he also sees it as other extensions. We just see it, generally speaking, to kick.

JB: When we first began to talk, you made a point about the importance of art being dynamically true. What is the difference between being intellectually true and being dynamically true?

OJ: Intellect requires only that the processes be true to it, that they logically follow according to its function. But a painting's function is to do something entirely different than to develop intellectual logic-it can do that, but that is not its function.

Its function is to become an entity on its own terms, and therefore it is not the illustration of intellectual formalism-it is an entity. As an entity it must be dynamic. Its relationships must be built out of necessitynot intell.ectual necessity, but painting necessity. They are not transferrable. They may have some relationship, but the painting is an entity-it is made up from its very beginning of certain materials. It has an effect that is very different from intellectual effect. It is visually pulled intherefore the dynamism in it is totally different from intellectual dynamism.
We miss that all the time, and the reason is that you are trained to believe that if you think an idea, and it sounds good thought-wise, it makes a good painting. But after you paint for a while you realize the discrepancy. What happens then is that intelligent painters end up illustrating intelligent ideas. Painting-wise the work will come off
in a formal way, because it is intelligent, but it is not a painting.Look, a person can stand in front of a painting, and that painting will awe him, yet he'll say, "Hey, let me go ask somebody what that's about!" What he is doing is trying to get to the motives-but he's got the painting in front of him-he can't get any closer. The attempt is to get around the painting-and to find an easier, cheaper way, so to speak. The cheaper way is very obvious: "Tell me." The painter cannot tell you. It is impossible for him to tell you about his paintings. He can tell you how they are constructed, or what his intentions were. The work is something totally different than that. It is not to be summed up by anybody. The relationship between you and those paintings is between you and the paintings.
JB: But the power that an extraordinary painting has can be very threatening!
OJ: All of this is threatening only for those who do not believe inanimate objects can change you internally. Now, the key to a painting is just that. The key to painting is that if it is powerful-it is something other-it will, like any other phenomenon, interact. But it will interact by bypassing those aesthetic sensibilities like a laser beam and go someplace else.
JB: Ah, but it is the "someplace else" that extraordinary painting goes that makes so many people uncomfortable. OJ: Well, of course. They are not familiar with that place, and yet they can feel it moving and adjusting. Art changes you-it is aform that changes you. That is why there are so many cultures that don't have a word for art. Hell, early people were not playing around with "culture" -they weren't talking about what we are talking about-something on the wall! They were talking about those things that adjust the psyche in a way that helps you to be spiritually healthy. Those things they made were forceful and direct. One of the things that you talk about when you talk about primitive art is clarity. They go right to the point-barn! They bypass all the nonsense. They never fail to use the principles, but they never fall all over their feet about their ability to use them. They make the principles do the work they are supposed to do. We fall all over our feet: "Look how he lays that paint down! Look at that color, isn't that tasty!" That's nonsense aesthetics! It really is child's play. Anybody intelligent can be taught that, but how many people can put the principles together in such a way that ...
JB: ... It really changes you ...
OJ: ... Yes! Because of the energy! What nobody under- stands is that it is possible to take inanimate things and so place them that they will make a kind of energy that will really change you. We tend to talk about aesthetics-the pleasing relationship of the triangle, the circle, and so on. But, the dynamic force of a work requires that certain shapes add up to a force which moves you.

JB: But if you are really involved, and paying attention, you sense that; no one has to tell you.
OJ: The aesthetics are the artist's vehicle. They are the syntax to get the spirit to move. You have to have them-that is crucial to you as an artist. But for the viewer-that is not his business. The business of the viewer is to have an experience (and the artist must be so good at his syntax that the experience is there) and there is nothing between him and the art-no hype, no intellectual nonsense. The power of our experience will tell us who the great artists are, and the beauty of the work will be known through its power.
JB: It is about power.
OJ: Ah ... and when you get superficial you talk about beauty devoid of power, and then what you are doing is simply making eunuchs out of the paintings.
JB: But you can't talk about beauty devoid of power! There is no such thing!
OJ: Look, painfing is not a verbal language-it bypasses understanding. It is not about pro and con, it is pure modality-it is about states of being. And paintings have a certain force, and they cut into you in certain places within your spirituality.

Rigor is the key to making good art. Absolute rigor! Spiritual rigor! And it isn't easy. Do you know why? When you first cough up you, and you look at it-it looks awful-why? You have not seen you before! And what's more, to make it into a painting you've got to work at it. It frightens you at first. You say, "I don't have any talent at all! And what's more I don't have anything to say." You never believe in what you have to say in the beginningand the reason you don't is that it doesn't look good when you first do it. It looks awful. It is usually sentimental. The tensions and resolutions have not yet been found, but you just have to stay with it. Painting is, by its very nature, ambiguous-it deals with ambivalence-but it is not ever, when it is powerful, ambivalent painting. It may be built on ambivalences, and it may cause ambiguity-but it is absolutely focused and purposeful.

OLIVER LEE JACKSON:
CV AND BIOGRAPHY

Oliver Lee Jackson

Born 1935, St. Louis, MO.
Currently lives and works in Oakland, CA.

EDUCATION

1961-63	University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, MFA
1954-58	Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, IL, BFA

AWARDS

2004	2003/2004 Awards in the Visual Arts, Flintridge Foundation, Pasadena, CA, Award for Painting and Sculpture
1993	Fleishhacker Foundation Eureka Fellowship Award
1988	Art Matters, Inc., New York, NY
1984	Nettie Marie Jones Fellowship in the Visual Arts, Lake Placid, NY
	Yaddo Residency, Saratoga Springs, NY
1980-81	National Endowment for the Arts Award in Painting

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2023	*Works On Paper 1980's - 2000's,* Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
2022	*Oliver Lee Jackson,* Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, NY
2021	*Oliver Lee Jackson: Any Eyes,* di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art
	Oliver Lee Jackson, St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
	Oliver Lee Jackson: Vibrato, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
	Oliver Lee Jackson, Malin Gallery, Aspen CO
2020	*Oliver Lee Jackson: Selected Works,* Malin Gallery East at Hangman, Claverton, NY
2019-20	*Oliver Lee Jackson: Take the House,* Malin Gallery (formerly Burning in Water), New York, NY
2019	*Force Field*, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
	Oliver Lee Jackson: Recent Paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
2018	*Oliver Lee Jackson: Untitled Original*, Burning in Water, New York, NY
	Oliver Lee Jackson: Untitled Original 2.0, Burning in Water, New York, NY

	Oliver Lee Jackson: Someplace Else, Rena Bransten Gallery, CA
2017	*Oliver Lee Jackson:* Composed- Works from 1984 to 2016, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, CA
2014	*Oliver Lee Jackson:* Paintings, Sculpture, Works on Paper, 425 Market Street, San Fransisco, CA
	Oliver Lee Jackson: Paintings and Works on Paper, 555 California Street, San Fransico, CA
2012	*Front Room: Oliver L. Jackson,* Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
2008	Univeristy Art Gallery, University of Hawaii at Hilo
	Nu-Art Series Studio, St. Louis, MO
2007	Anne Reed Gallery, Ketchum, ID
2006	*Oliver Jackson: Drawing/ The Incised Line,* Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA
2002-03	*Duo* (a collaboration with Marty Ehrlich), Sert Gallery, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
2000	Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Painting installation
	Oliver Jackson: Recent Paintings, Sculpture and Work on Paper, Fresno Art Museum, Fresno CA
	Oliver Jackson: Recent Paintings and Work on Paper, Wiegand Gallery, College of Notre Dame, Belmont, CA
1999	Porter Troupe Gallery, San Diego, CA
1998	*Oliver Jackson*-- Additions: Collage and Drawings, Artists Forum, San Francisco, CA
1997-98	*Oliver Jackson: The Figure Revealed,* 425 Market Street, San Fransisco, CA
1997	*Oliver Jackson: Paintings, Sculpture, Works on Paper,* 1978-1996, Porter Troupe Gallery, San Diego, CA
1996	*Oliver Jackson:* The Incised Line, Artists Forum, San Francisco, CA
1995	San Marco Gallery, Domincan College, San Rafael, CA
1994	*Oliver Jackson: Paintings & Sculpture,* Porter Randall Gallery, La Jolla, CA
1993-94	*Oliver Jackson: Works on Paper,* Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA
	New California Art: Oliver Jackson, Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA
1993	Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA
1992	Bomani Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1991	*Oliver Jackson: New Paintings,* J. Noblett Gallery, Boyess Hot Springs, CA
	Oliver Jackson: Paintings and Sculpture, Iannetti- Lanzone Gallery, San Francisco
1990	St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
1989	*Oliver Jackson: Painting, Drawings, and Sculpture,* Iannetti-Lanzone Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1988	Gallery Nine, University of Illinois, Champaign
	Oliver Jackson: Ten Year Survey, Iannetti-Lanzone Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1987	*Oliver Jackson: Recent Works on Paper,* De Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA
	Oliver Jackson: New Work, Liz Harris Gallery, Boston

1985	Harris-Brown Gallery, Boston, MA
	University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara
	Rena Bransten Quay Gallery, San Francisco, CA, October 8–November 2
1984	Reed College Art Gallery, Portland, OR
	Quay Gallery, San Francisco, CA
	Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA
	Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans, LA
1983	Matrix Gallery, University Art Museum, Berkeley, CA
1982	Kirk deGooyer Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
	Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA (Catalogue)
	Quay Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1981	C. N. Gorman Museum, University of California, Davis
1980	Allan Stone Gallery, New York
	Artists Contemporary Gallery, Sacramento, CA
	Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC (Catalogue)
1979	Bixby Gallery, Washington University School of Fine Art, St. Louis, MO
1977	Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA
	Artspace, Sacramento, CA
	Florida Technical College, Orlando, FL
1973	The Gallery of the Loretto-Hilton Center, Webster College, Webster, MO
1970	Compton College, Compton, CA
	Richmond Art Center, Richmond, CA
1969	Contra Costa College, San Pablo, CA
1968	South County Bank, St. Louis, MO
1967	Red Balloon Gallery, St. Louis, MO
1965	*Oliver Jackson: Paintings, Prints, Drawings,* Downstairs Gallery, St. Louis, MO

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023	*Together.*, Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, Little Rock, AR
2022	*The Cumulative Effect* curated by John Yau, Andrew Kreps Gallery at Songwon Art Center, Seoul, South Korea
	Claiming Space: Refiguring the Body in Landscape, Montalvo Arts Center, Saratoga, CA
	Lines of Thought: Gestural Abstraction in the BAMPFA Collection, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA
2021	*Our Whole, Unruly Selves*, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA
	Art Along the Rivers: A Bicentennial Celebration, St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
	Shady Beautiful, Malin Gallery, New York, NY
	The Incorrect Museum: Vignettes from the di Rosa Collection, di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, CA

2020	*Expanding Abstraction: Pushing the Boundaries of Painting in the Americas,* 1958-1983, Blanton Museum, University of Texas, Austin
2019	*American African American,* Phillips Auction House and Gallery, New York, NY
	Gallery Artists, Burning in Water, New York, NY
	Building a Different Model: Selections from the di Rosa Collection, di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art
	Five and Two Others, Creativity Explored, San Francisco, CA (curated by Mildred Howard)
	American African American, Phillips Auction House and Gallery, New York, NY
2018	*Into the Woods,* Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
	Way Bay 2, Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA
	The Portrait Show, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
	Way Bay, Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA
2017	*Connect and Collect,* San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, CA
2016-17	*Dimensions of Black: A Collaboration with the San Diego African Art Museum of Fine Art,* Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA. Travelled to: Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, University of California, Davis
2016	*Connect & Collect,* San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, CA
	Inaugural Exhibition, East Wing, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
	Master Printmakers Invitational Exhibition, East Hawaii Cultural Center/ Hawaii Museum of Contemporary Art, Hilo
2013-14	*Form and Expression: The Written Word,* Center for Book & Paper Arts, Columbia College, Chicago. Travelled to: Brunnier Museum, Iowa State University, Ames
2012	*Lee Chesney, Oliver Jackson, Albert Paley: Monoprints and Other Works,* id Space Gallery, Hilo, HI
2011	*Safety in Numbers?,* Portland Art Museum, OR
	Selections from the Smith Andersen Editions Archive, De Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA
	Beyond Tradition: Art Legacies at the Richmond Art Center, Part II, Richmond Art Center, Richmond, CA
2009	*African-American Currents,* 40 Acres Gallery, Sacramento, CA
2008	*African American Abstraction: St. Louis Connections,* St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
	Flashing Back: 1960s Works in the Permanent Collection of the de Saisset Museum, De Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA
2007	*The Drawn Line,* Portland Art Museum, OR
2005	*Africa in America,* Seattle Art Museum, WA
	The Anniversary Show, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
	The Intimate Collaboration: 25 Years of Teaberry Press, San Francisco Art Institute, CA
	Inaugural Exhibition, Jubitz Center for Modern and Contemporary Art, Portland Art Museum, OR

	Visual Politics: The Art of Engagement, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA (Catalogue)
2004-06	*Echoes of Africa,* American Adventure Pavilion, Epcot, Walt Disney World, Orlando, FL
2004-05	*Poetry and its Arts: Bay Area Interactions 1954–2004,* California Historical Society, San Francisco
2001	*Collecting Our Thoughts: The Community Responds to Art in the Permanent Collection,* San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA
2000	*Heart of the Future, Part I, Encina Art Gallery, Sacramento*, CA
1999	*Beyond the Veil: The Art of African-American Artists at Century's End,* Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL (Catalogue) *Into the 21st Century: Selections from the Permanent Collection,* San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA (Catalogue)
1998	*MATRIX/Berkeley: 20 Years,* Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA (Catalogue)
1997	The Painter's Craft, Reese Bullen Gallery, Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA (Catalogue) Civil Progress: Life in Black America, Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle, WA (Catalogue)
1996-97	*Cultural Crosscurrents,* Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA
1996	*Rapture,* San Francisco State University Art Gallery, CA
1995	*American Color,* Louis Stern Fine Arts, Los Angeles, CA. Travelled to: Porter Troupe Gallery, San Diego, CA
1994	*The Exchange Show: San Francisco/Rio de Janeiro,* Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA. Travelled to: Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Catalogue) *Odun de Odun de,* Oliver Art Center, California College of Arts & Crafts, Oakland *The Essential Gesture,* Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA (Catalogue)
1993	*Twelve Bay Area Painters: The Eureka Fellowship Winners,* San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA
1992	*Spirit Made Visible,* University of California, Davis *Casting Light, Acknowledging Shadow, W*ashington State University, Pullman
1991	*Recent Acquisitions, M.H. de Young Museum*, San Francisco, CA
1990-93	*The Intimate Collaboration: Prints from Teaberry Press,* Ewing Gallery, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Travelled through 1993 (Catalogue)
1990	*The Matter at Hand,* University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (Catalogue) *Against the Grain: Contemporary Wood Sculpture,* California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland *Toward the Future: Contemporary Art in Content,* Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL *Hilo International Exhibition: Works on Paper,* University of Hawaii, Hilo (Catalogue)
1989-90	*The Appropriate Object,* Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY. Travelled to: Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI; San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA; J.B. Speed Art

	Museum, Louisville, KY (Catalogue)
1989	*Marble: A Contemporary Aesthetic* (Sculpture section of the exhibition Marmo: The New Italian Stone Age, sponsored by the Italian Trade Commission), California Museum of Science and Industry, Los Angeles (Catalogue)
	Selections From the Permanent Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL Raymond Saunders: Choices, Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA
	America, Italia, Spagna: Cristoforo Colombo 1492–1992, La Galleria San Benigno, Genoa, Italy (Catalogue)
1988	*Bay Area Sculpture,* Palo Alto Cultural Center, Palo Alto, CA
	Afro-American Prints & Drawings, Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston, MA
	Peter Selz Selects, Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley, CA (Catalogue)
1987	California Figurative Sculpture, Palm Springs Desert Museum, Palm Springs, CA (Catalogue)
	Masters of Color: Contemporary Black American Artists, Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, Burlington
	Recent Modern Acquisitions, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA
1986-87	*Between Painting and Sculpture,* Palo Alto Cultural Center, Palo Alto, CA
1986	*Works of Art on Paper by Black Artists,* Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA
	Transitions: The Afro-American Artist, Bergen Museum of Art and Science, Paramus, NJ
	American Painting: Abstract Expressionism and After, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA
	New Painterly Figuration in the Bay Area, San Francisco Art Institute, CA. Travelled to: Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA (Catalogue)62nd Annual International Competition of Prints and Photographs, The Print Club, Philadelphia, PA (Catalogue)
	Between Metaphor and Fact: Recent Drawing, Leonarda Di Mauro Gallery, New York
1985-86	*Artists' Forum,* Fine Arts Gallery, California State University, Los Angeles. Travelled to: California State University, Long Beach; Art Gallery, California State University, Fresno; California State University Legislative Reception, Sacramento Community Center, CA (Catalogue)
1985	*Contemporary California Painting: Oliver Jackson,* Mary O'Neal, Raymond Saunders, Art Gallery, California State University, Sacramento
	States of War, Seattle Art Museum, WA (Catalogue)
	Selections from The Rutgers Archives for Printmaking Studios, The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University at The Grolier Club, New York
1984-85	*American Sculpture: Three Decades,* Seattle Art Museum, WA
	The 20th Century: The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Collection, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
	Recent Painting and Sculpture 1944–1984, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA

1984	*An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture,* Museum of Modern Art, New York (Catalogue)
	The Human Condition: SFMMA Biennial III, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (Catalogue)
	San Francisco Bay Area, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln (Catalogue)
1983	*1983 Biennial Exhibition,* Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (Catalogue)
1982	*Fresh Paint: Fifteen California Painters,* San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA
	From the Sunny Side, The Oakland Museum, Oakland, CA
1980	Mosaic, University of California, Davis
	Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston, MA
1979	Aspects of Abstract, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA (Catalogue)
1978	*Prints: New Points of View,* Western Association of Art Museums (Traveling)
1976	*Other Sources: An American Essay,* San Francisco Art Institute, CA
1975	Contemporary California Artists: Carlos Gutierrez-Solana, Oliver L. Jackson, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Travelled to: Snowbird Galleries, University of Utah, Snowbird Summer Arts Institute; Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, Salt Lake City
1974	*Crocker Art Museum,* Sacramento, CA
	Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA
1971	*Black Untitled II/Dimensions of the Figure,* The Oakland Museum, Oakland, CA
1968	*Black Artists Group,* St. Louis, MO
1966-68	Art-in-the-Embassies Program, Washington, D.C.
1966	Peoria Art Center, Peoria, IL
1965	*Mid-American Exhibition,* Kansas City, MO
1964	*Faculty Collection Exhibition,* University of Illinois, Urbana
1963	People's Art Center, St. Louis, MO

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE/VISITING ARTIST

2012	University of Hawaii, Hilo. Visiting Artist, January-February
2010	Flint Hill School, Oakton, VA. Visiting Artist, April
2009	Flint Hill School, Oakton, VA. Visiting Artist, April
2008	University of Hawaii, Hilo. Visiting Artist, February
	Flint Hill School, Oakton, VA. Visiting Artist, April
2007	Flint Hill School, Oakton, VA. Visiting Artist, April
	CalArts Summer Institute, Valencia, CA. Visiting Artist, July
2006	Flint Hill School, Oakton, VA. Visiting Artist
2005	University of Hawaii, Hilo. Visiting Artist, April
2001	University of Hawaii, Hilo. Visiting Artist, Spring
2000	Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Artist in Residence, Spring

	California College of Arts & Crafts Summer Institute, Paris. Visiting Artist
1999	California College of Arts & Crafts Summer Institute, Aix-en-Provence, France
1994	California State University Summer Arts Program, Arcata. Visiting Artist
1993	University of Hawaii, Hilo. Artist in Residence, April
	San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA. Visiting Artist, Summer
1989	University of California, Berkeley. Visiting Artist, Spring
1988	University of Illinois, Champaign. Visiting Artist
1986	Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA. Visiting Artist, Summer
1985	University of California, Santa Barbara. Visiting Artist, Winter Quarter
	University of Washington, Seattle. Visiting Artist, Spring
	University of Iowa, Iowa City. Visiting Artist
1980	Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Wake Forest University and North Carolina School of the Arts, Winston-Salem, NC. Artist in Residence Program, Sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation
1979	School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL. Visiting Artist

SELECTED LECTURES / PANELS / WORKSHOPS

2019	National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., *Conversations with Artists: Oliver Lee Jackson*
2017	San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, CA, *Oliver Lee Jackson in Conversation with Harry Cooper*, April 9
	Institute of African American Affairs, New York University, New York, NY, *Black Renaissance Noire,* September 22
2009	40 Acres Gallery, Sacramento, CA, *Oliver Jackson in Conversation with Allan Gordon,* March 24
2006	Art Department, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA, Lecture, April 18
2000	The Art Institute of Boston, MA, Lecture, March 9
	Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Lecture, March 22
	Wiegand Gallery, College of Notre Dame, Belmont, CA, *African Sensibilities/ Aesthetics,* October 4
1998	Artists Forum, San Francisco, *The African Sensibility: Cosmology,* February 3
	Artists Forum, San Francisco, Collecting African Art, February 24
	Artists Forum, San Francisco, *The African Sensibility: Aesthetics,* March 10
1997	Artists Forum, San Francisco, *The Transformative Process as a Function of Art,* October 14
	Artists Forum, San Francisco, *Integrity in Making,* October 28
1996	Artists Forum, San Francisco, *Materials and Abstraction,* October 29
	Artists Forum, San Francisco, *Space and Themes,* November 19
	Artists Forum, San Francisco, *Modes and Sensibility,* December 3
1994	International Sculpture Conference, San Francisco, CA. Marble sculpture

	workshop Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and San Francisco Art Institute, Panelist, *Odun De, Odun De: The Global Presence of African Spirit in Contemporary Art,* October 14–16
1993	University of Hawaii, Hilo, HI
1991	Bomani Gallery, San Francisco, CA, *NOMMO: In the Spirit of the Word*

SELECTED COMMISSIONS

2019	San Francisco Arts Commission painting purchase for the San Francisco International Airport, Terminal One
1993	Cleveland/San Jose Ballet, San Jose, CA. Set design for ballet "The Overcoat," choreographed by Donald McKayle
1986	U.S. General Services Administration, Washington D.C. Commission for marble sculpture for Federal Courthouse, Oakland, CA (installed 1993) California Arts Council, Sacramento, CA. Commission for painting for State Office Building, San Francisco

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Detroit Institute of the Arts
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
The Metropolitan Museum, New York
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Museum of Modern Art, New York
The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
New Orleans Museum of Art
Portland Art Museum, Oregon
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
San Jose Museum of Art
Seattle Art Museum
St. Louis Art Museum
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
National Center for Afro-American Artists, Boston, MA
Rutgers University Print Archive, New Brunswick, NJ
Santa Barbara Museum of Art
Lafayette Library, Lafayette, CA
Columbia Museum of Art
De Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University
Port of Oakland, CA

Andrew Kreps
Gallery

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT