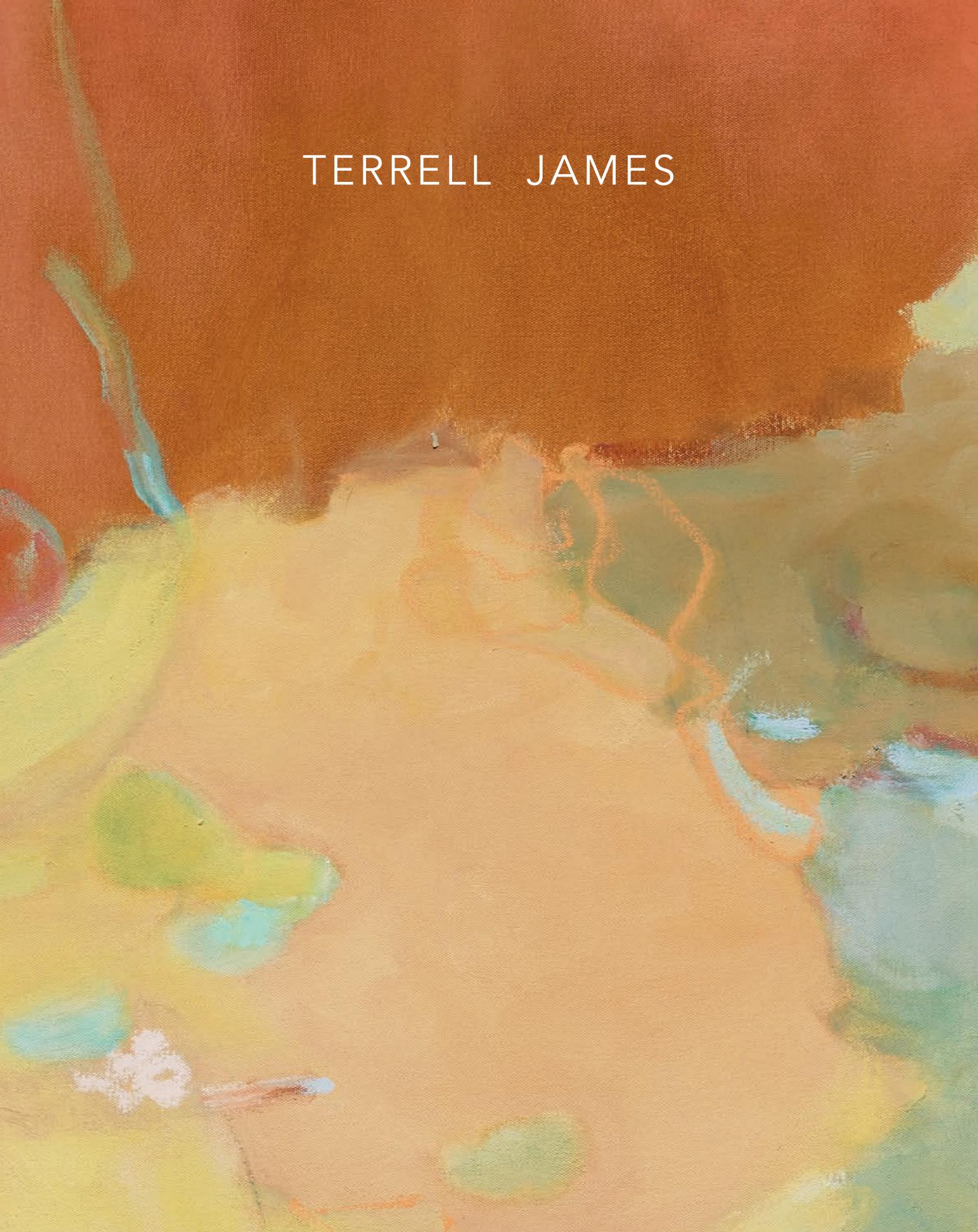
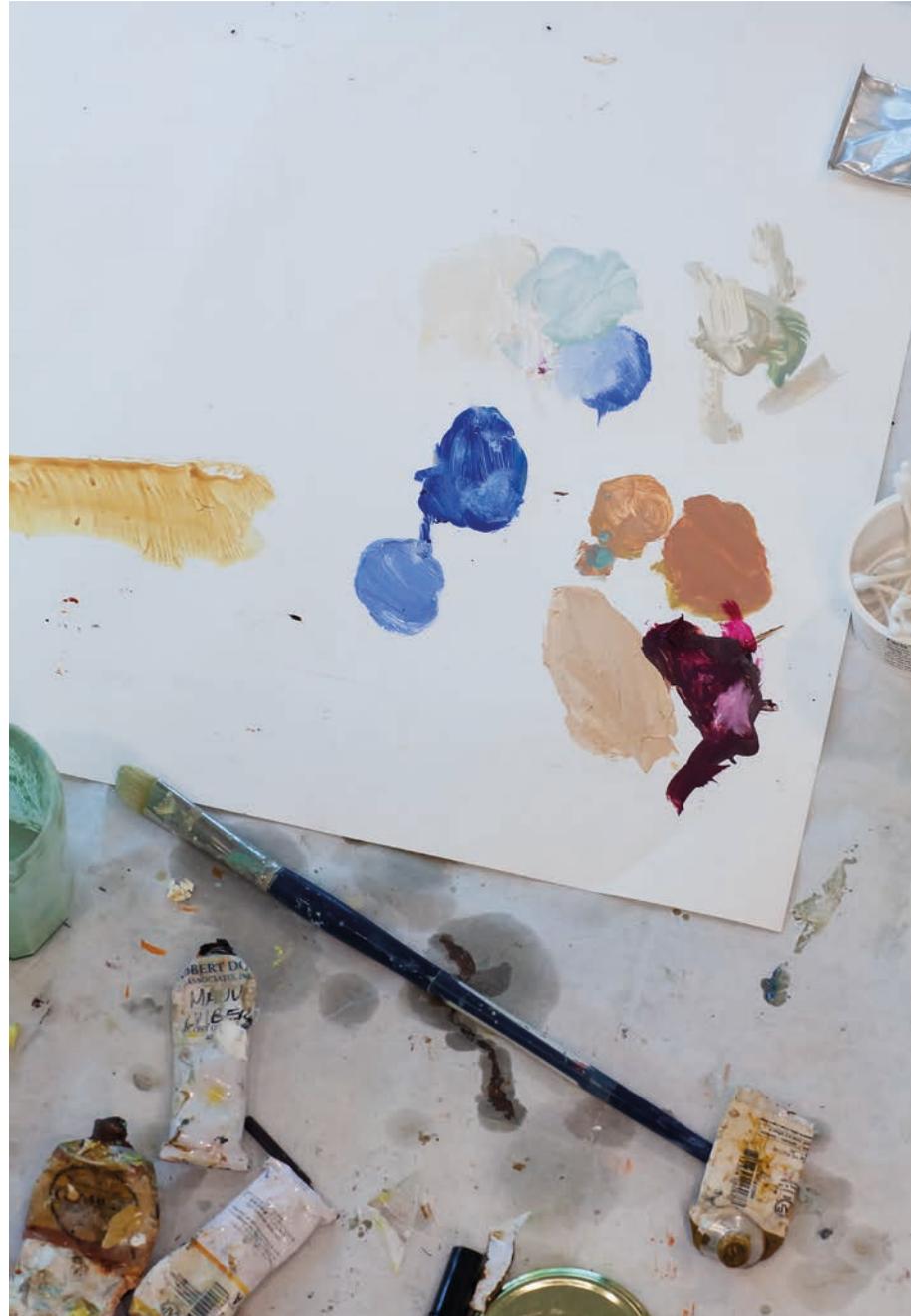


TERRELL JAMES





TERRELL JAMES

Second Sight

12th October - 6th November 2021

Private View
Tuesday 12th November

6 - 8pm

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Terrell James's Texas Project

Archie Squire

Texas is a state of just under 700,000 square kilometres, or nearly three United Kingdoms. It has two time zones, thirteen million cattle, and countless shifts in terrain. The sculptor Donald Judd, in his final interview for a German television documentary, suggested Texas was so large that it should be its own country.¹ When Terrell James was born in the state's biggest city, Houston, in 1955, a period of picnoleptic urban expansion quite literally fuelled by the booming petrochemicals industry was well underway. Heritage architecture was soon superseded by postmodern skyscrapers; space – whether occupied or not – was always already a blank canvas.

It just so happened that James's appearance also coincided with the city's arrival as an artistic centre. In 1957, the American Federation of Arts convened at Houston's monolithic Shamrock Hotel to hear from speakers including Columbia art historian Meyer Schapiro, gallerist Sidney Janis, architect Philip Johnson, and none other than Marcel Duchamp himself. Discussing Henri Cartier-Bresson's documentation of the event, one writer remarked that his photographs "mark the juncture when the Magnolia City became the Space City, as the pace of the Old South began accelerating to that of an international metropolis."² Soundtracked as it is by cicadas and whinnying horses, James's Houston studio seems a world apart from such a throng. Indeed, the lyrical canvases she paints there contain the Texan largeness at the same time as they begin to undo the careering redevelopment it inspires. James's attentive abstractions excavate successive spatial realms, recovering buried histories and geologies, and opening outwards on axes both lateral and longitudinal. As the artist adds swatches of serendipitous colour, she implies a cloth rippling far beyond the stretcher's edges. As she scrapes away through the paradoxical act of adding paint layers, her gestures recall the histories of place, and of her own biography.

Between 1980 and 1985, James was employed by the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts, to gather and preserve diverse materials that would build up a vivid picture of the art scenes of Texas from 1875 onwards.³ Her archival work was part of the 'Texas Project', an altogether different kind of resource extraction to the one that had shaped her immediate surroundings, and unearthed a wealth of material on artists such as the shrimp fisherman Forrest Bess, whose tiny visionary paintings taught her how a single work could hold a wall. Taking the various letterheaded addresses of Bess's one-time studios and apartments in Houston from the very documents the project salvaged, we can witness for ourselves just how much that city has changed. Where stable blocks and local bars once stood, now Google Street View unveils sweeping tarmac and business hotels. To look into James's painterly matrices is thus to peer across great vistas at once geographic and temporal, to feel a sense of depth conserved at the surface. Perhaps the very mode of ocular archaeology they inspire is encapsulated in the artist's titular notion of a 'second sight': a forensic re-vision.



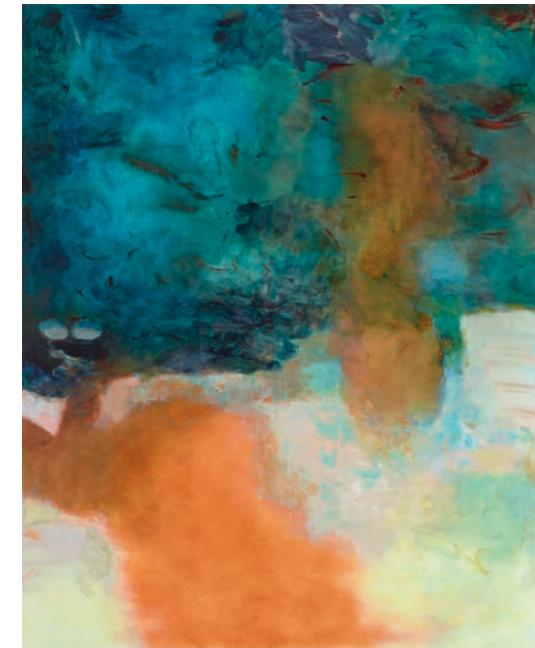
¹ Donald Judd, Regina Wyrwoll, and Jutta Arzt, *Bauhaus, Texas: Donald Judd, Ein Amerikanischer Künstler* (Munich: Goethe-Institut, 1995). James has spent much time in the Chihuahuan Desert, home to Donald Judd's various long-term installations in Marfa.

² Lauri Nelson, 'Cartier-Bresson in Houston, 1957.' *Cite: The Architecture + Design Review of Houston*, Iss. 33 (Fall-Winter 1995): 27.

³ As new scholarship continues to show, the coalescence of lesser-known modernisms in Houston precedes by several decades the emergent collector class of mid-century that was largely responsible for the growth of the Houston scene around the time of James's birth. See, for instance, Susan J. Baker, Randy Tibbits, 'Bayou Bohemia: Early Modernism in Houston.' *Art Inquiries*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2018): 278-293.

In one of James's most recent works, *Gone West* (2021), passages of vaporous brushwork form points of anchorage between regions of light pink and bleached sage. At left is the suggestion of a silhouetted streetlamp, perhaps, its cantilevered form penetrating the field of marks and beginning to disintegrate before us. Beneath it, smoky paintwork appears the residue of James's recent interest in the coal paintings of Victor Hugo.⁴ As it dissipates from bitter brown into caramel, the paint distils a climactic shift into a minor compositional fragment. I am drawn to these areas not only because they seem to contaminate the field in a manner that is both beautiful and timely, but also because they resemble the aggregate images of a vastly different constellation of artists working today, with AI – the 'second sight' of our present. Like James's many paint layers, the algorithmic photography of figures such as Pierre Huyghe and Trevor Paglen mines and superimposes decades of image generation, each composite the summation of tens of thousands of spectral inputs. In James's sooty regions, she attains that same pictorial depth with economical strokes, her textures soft and whispered. The composite impression reappears in other canvases, too: in the sulphuric upper right pocket of *Between Twins* (2018); the Duchampian 'Milky Way' passages of *Piece of the World* (2018); and the inky cave network of *Pueblo* (2020). To recognise their commonalities is to enact a double take, a second sighting, as if their chasms or voids hold other clues, more data.

Revenant (2021) is altogether more alchemical, its dense surface charged with paint that veritably fizzles. Emerging from their respective realms of light and dark, two protean forces seem on course for a cosmological collision. The mouldered Rococo hues of the lower half are juxtaposed with the blue torment above it, across which anxious flickers of red are the colour of dried blood. By its centrifugal momentum, the composition directs us inward at the same time as it throws us out. James herself recognises a seaborne tornado in the dirty mustard form, implying with her observation an aerial viewpoint that is denoted on the left of the canvas by a pair of grey eyes bisected with blue.⁵ But she also suggests the possibility of a doubled vision – of eyes watching the viewer; eyes, moreover, that are concealed behind reflective lenses. Laminated within this arrangement of co-surveillance, then, is the ghost of James's *revenant*, that figure who sees us from a point of invisibility. By drawing us in and throwing us out at the same time, the *revenant* embodies the painter's centrifugal effect.



A quite different pair of works, from James's *Studio Window* series, metaphorises a more literal kind of 'second sight' – that of the smudges of a garden witnessed through glass. Burnt oranges flash between mutinous greens; cornflower blue shimmers beside gasoline yellow. Nature itself is vitrified as the multiple realms of interior and exterior collapse into a single p(l)ane. Each canvas records the retinal drag of greenery in motion, some marks recessive and others pressed at the surface like mosquitoes crisping in the sun. Through the windows, we take in multiple foci with a telescopic glance, our seeing compounded with James's own. She cites van Gogh's *Rain* (1889, Philadelphia Museum of Art), and her streaks are suddenly the violent grammar of a summer storm, emerging from nowhere and dissolving just as rapidly into nothing.⁶



⁴ Zoom conversation with the author, 16 June 2021.

⁵ Email correspondence with the author, 20 July 2021.

⁶ Zoom conversation with the author, 16 June 2021. James notes that the raw canvas edges of the *Studio Window* series also pay homage to the van Gogh painting.

In the emphatic laterality of the *Studio Window* paintings, James perhaps found a rigorous training ground for her most ambitious work to date, a 100ft-long drawing, *Terrain* (2021). At the height of the pandemic she wrote, "To speak truth from the decades of work and research my practice allows may be the most important thing I can do in this time of change."⁷ Her words form a prelude to the grand undertaking of *Terrain*, which registers the continuous psychogeographic expanse of Texas so magnetic to figures like Judd. An exercise in semi-automatic drawing, it represents the fluency of hand connected to mind, the gushing forth of an idea that is nevertheless stately in its gradual evolution. Through these parallel registers, James imparts something of both her dynamic self and the unhurried landscape; the loose homophony of 'Terrain' and 'Terrell' suggests a deeply rooted connection between the two. James's drawing is not of a picturesque vista but a sliver of fossilised earth, a stratum studded with biomorphic bodies. Her paintwork is a dance of mitotic processes and synaptic motifs, as if archaic lifeforms have originated and decomposed again in the paper's microscopic pores. Concealed among latex paint strokes are eyes and feathers, the patters of fingerprints or paws, scarlet berries and deep blue seedpods. White mists settle over ochre washes; dabs of muddy brown commingle with unripe pear green. Like a forest floor, the uppermost layer is illusory, camouflaging other planes and facets beneath it. Every trace at the surface has a genealogy, a rhizome below.

Hung sequentially for the first time at Cadogan Contemporary's new barn in Hampshire, the drawing spans both the cinematic total environments of new media art, and the grand, episodic narratives of works such as Jean Bondol's fourteenth-century *Apocalypse Tapestry*.⁸ As if to literalise this historical compression, James uses a continuous roll of composite paper formed of marble dust. Such a poetic materiality draws out the millennial preservation of forms, blown across the paper as if by an ancient wind swirling leaves, seeds, and strange insects in its current. But *Terrain* brings to my mind another drawing, too: Robert Rauschenberg's *Automobile Tire Print* (1953, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). A monoprint of a car tyre driven over a 22ft stretch of glued paper, the work might evoke the highways of Texas and the oily tracks of its flagship industry.⁹ In its fading line, we recognise beginning and end, origin and destination. James's drawing may not be so starkly linear, but it too has an opening and a close. In fact, it seems to run adjacent to *Automobile Tire Print*, underneath the imagined shrubland just beyond the boundary of Rauschenberg's tarmac. Or perhaps instead it envisages what lies below the road itself, prior to the road's existence.

In *Terrain*, James's work is again spatial and temporal, recuperative and archival, personal and universal. With its broadly ecological connotations, the drawing reminds us that any terrain, whether in downtown Houston or drifted far off Google's beaten track, is in fact never a blank canvas. To truly grasp that for ourselves, we must look at earth's bigger picture: the one contained in James's magnificent drawing.

7 Terrell James, 'COVID Studio Time.' Unpublished text, 7 June 2020.

8 The hanging of *Terrain* in two overlapping strips, or strata, also echoes the presentation of the *Apocalypse Tapestry* at Château d'Angers, France.

9 While Rauschenberg's Texan heritage is disregarded in the vast majority of writings, some scholars have argued for the significance of Texas to his work. For a survey of these, see Melissa L. Mednicov, 'Questions of Texas: Avant Garde and Outlier.' *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 2020): 1-10.

Terrain

Friends have asked how Terrain came to be and, as well, fellow artists have been curious about the change it might mark in my practice. They ask, Was it a commission? Is it for a specific place? Were you searching for a new genre, or continuing an old one?

Actually, the opportunity for Terrain arose from several factors. Early in 2021, looking forward to my upcoming exhibition at Cadogan Contemporary in London, I had the idea of doing something a little different with them, something new. Cadogan happens to have a second exhibition space, lodged in a graceful old barn in Hampshire. Its setting amidst grassy meadows, and its fine natural light and large spaces have afforded lovely settings for installations by several artists of the gallery. There was, also, my access to the very last roll of Chinese stone paper, one hundred feet in length. The potential for its unique visual qualities to interact with the clarity of the barn's open volumes made it a compelling a venue both for the work's installation and for its encounter by viewers.

Usually, a painting's title doesn't become obvious until after I've completed it – or even lived with it for several weeks. Only then can my words grasp what the work is telling me, what it's about. A title may come from one of many sources – my readings of poetry, notes I've taken from literature of whatever kind, fragments of conversations, and also dreams I recall. With Terrain, the title announced itself very early, almost immediately. I think that's because of its aptness in suggesting the geographic qualities of such a massive sheet – it's like a map, but physical, not conceptual. Also, because this effort was so intensive and all-consuming, the work's 120 days of scrawling, daubing, painting, lifting and sketching seemed to produce a terrain of me, personally. And that's not all. Terrain also refers to the specific character of the stone paper, its fabrication from actual pulverized rocks, and their impact on the work – what it looks like, what it feels like, and how it was made. With my most ambitious forward reach defining a far horizon, a sense of grounding at the near edge of my twenty-foot table, and a wide, wide stretch horizontally, its expanse could seem continental.

My work with Terrain called up deep memories from all periods of my life, as well as reflecting my decades of paintings and sketchbooks. As forms and meanings spilled out, they seemed to fix in place an image of my unconscious. All the time, I was surrounded by objects from many parts of the world – massive pinecones from the Pacific Northwest, turtle shells from East Texas, and artifacts like the ancient First Nation scrapers discovered by my mother near Junction, Texas. Seed pods, bones and shells, little stones collected in childhood, and books of botanical prints and glasswork invertebrates carpeted my work tables. Numerous of them can be spotted in Terrain, but less as fragments of the world outside it than of the universe of remembrances its creation channeled onto the stone paper. Terrain's appearance in Cadogan's clean, open space is especially exciting not just because it allows one to experience the work in its entirety, but because that entirety enables each person to focus at will on details, passages, themes or even on everything all at once, as the mind pieces together a personal vision.









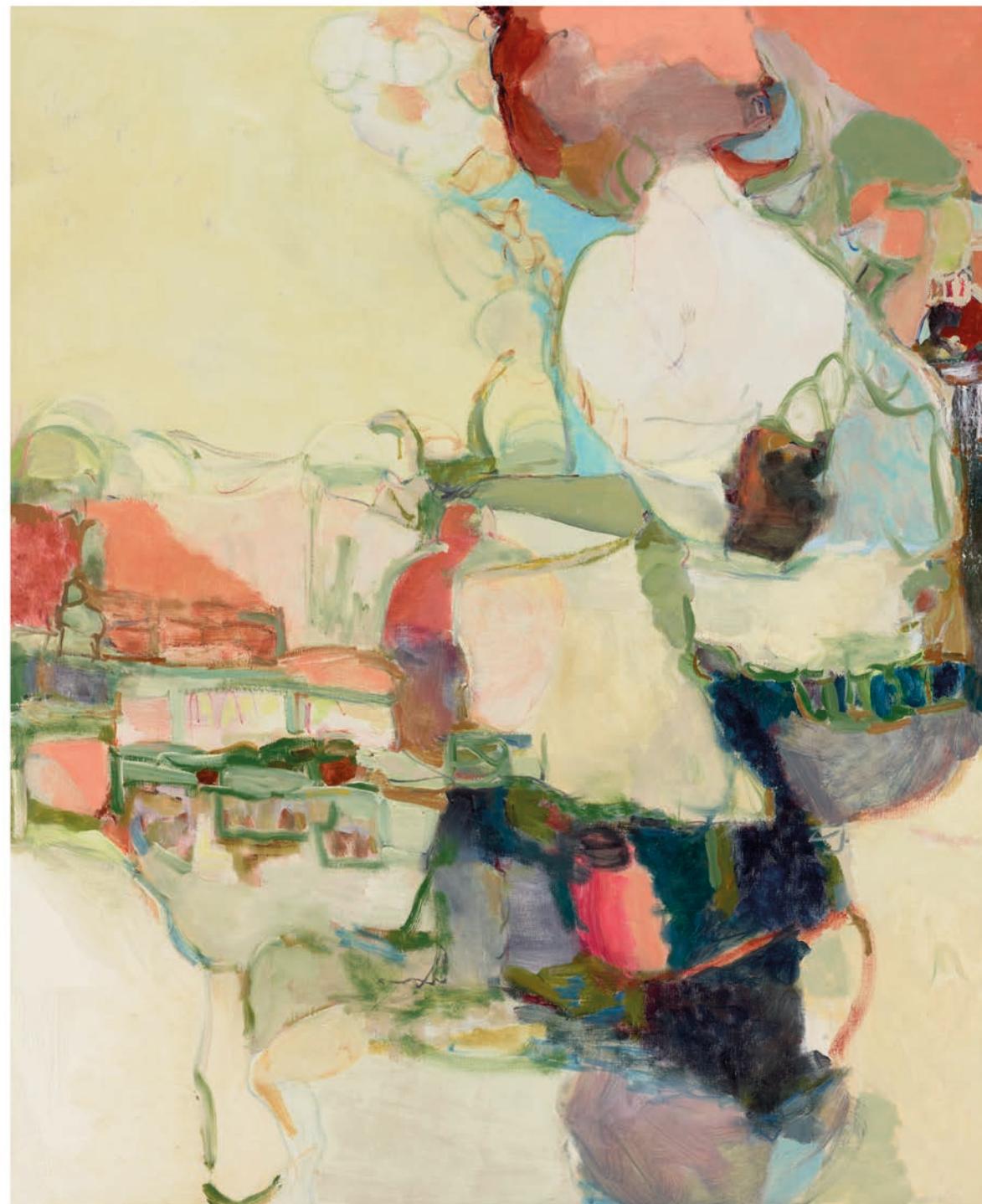


Paintings

Pueblo

oil on canvas

147cm x 122cm (58" x 48")

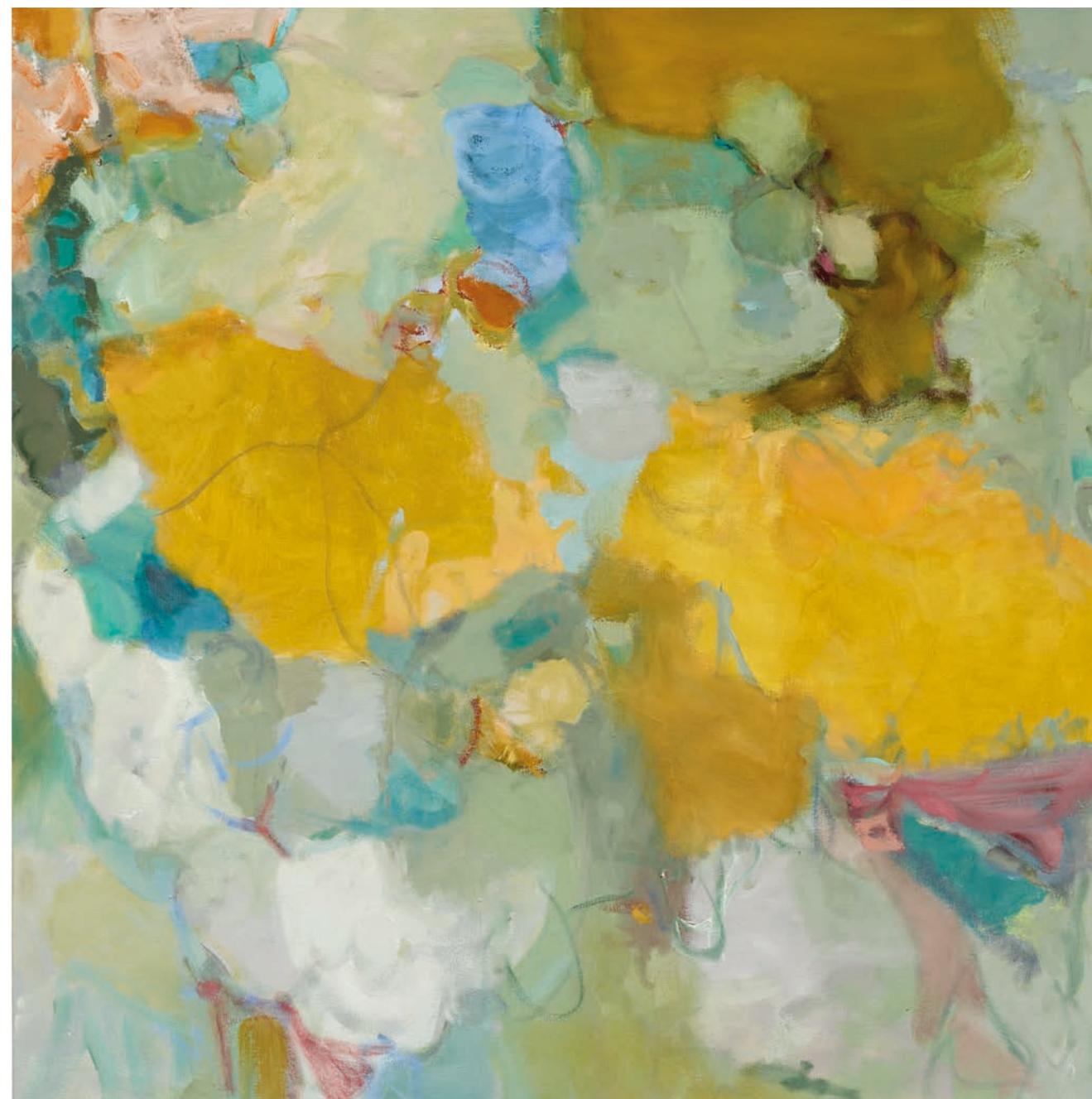




Between Twins

oil on canvas

107cm x 107cm (42" x 42")



Gone West
oil on canvas
167cm x 167cm (66" x 66")





A talent for friendship

oil on canvas

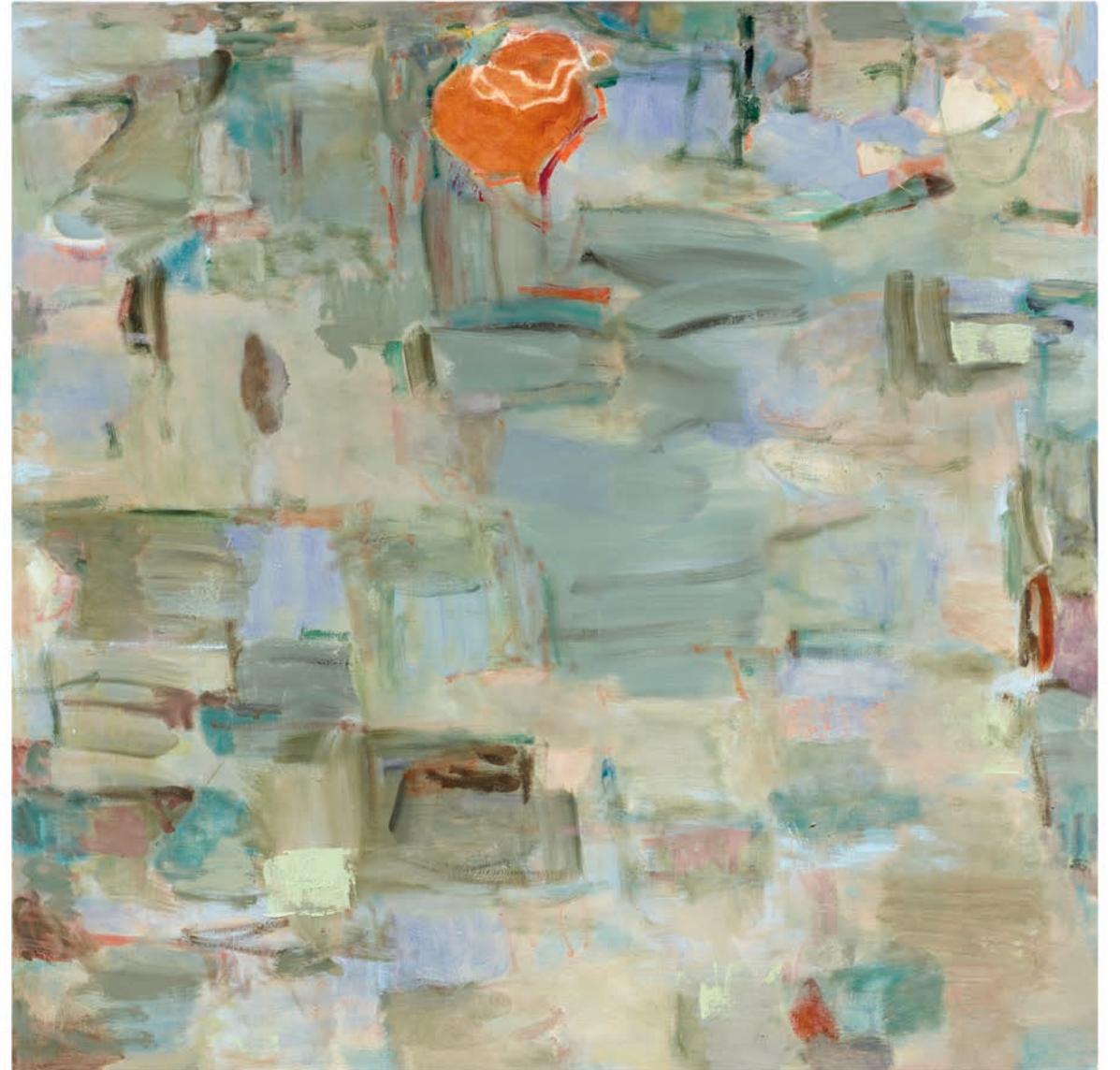
107cm x 107cm (42" x 42")



Lotus

oil on canvas

124cm x 127cm (49" x 50")





Mirror Mirror
oil and mica on linen
107cm x 107cm (42" x 42")

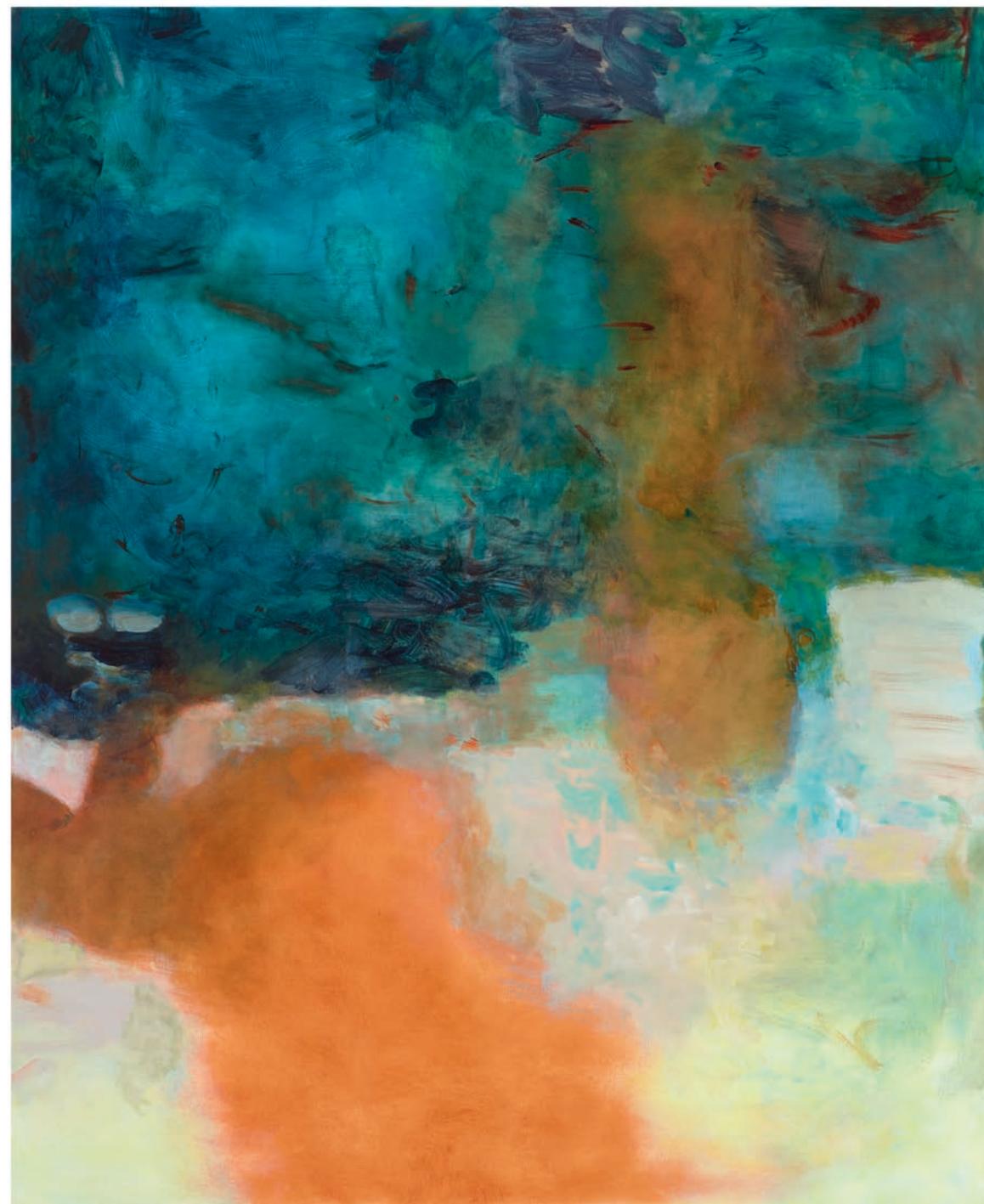




Revenant

oil on linen

147cm x 122cm (58" x 48")



A piece of the world

oil on canvas

155cm x 198cm (61" x 78")





How to forget I

oil on linen

60cm x 30cm (24" x 12")



How to forget II

oil on linen

60cm x 30cm (24" x 12")



Studio window summer I

oil on linen

30cm x 60cm (12" x 24")



Studio window late summer I

oil on linen

30cm x 60cm (12" x 24")



Terrell James

Born in 1955 in Houston, TX

Education

1972-73	School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas
1973	Instituto Allende, San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico
	Print Annex, Ignacio Ramirez Cultural Center, Instituto de Belles Artes, Universidad de Mexico, San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico
1973-77	BA Fine Arts, University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee (Graduated Magna Cum Laude with departmental honors, Phi Beta Kappa)
1978-79	School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas

Solo Exhibitions

James has had solo exhibits locally, nationally and internationally at venues including: Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston TX (2021, 2019, 2015, 2013, 2011, 2008, 2007, 2004, 2003, 2001, 2000, 1998, 1997, 1995, 1994, 1993, 1991), Cadogan Contemporary, London UK (2021, 2018,2016), Froelick Gallery, Portland OR (2021, 2019,2016, 2014, 2012, 2010, 2008, 2003), Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas TX (2021, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2011, 2009), Art League Houston (2016), The Cameron Art Museum, Wilmington NC (2011), Jason McCoy Gallery, New York NY (2021, 2020, 2010, 2007, 2004),Fundacion Centro Cultural, Santo Domingo Dominican Republic (2003), Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi TX (1997), Delgado College Gallery, New Orleans LA (1992, 1985), C.G. Jung Center, Houston TX (1991), Graham Gallery, Houston TX (1989, 1985, 1982), Bishop's Common, University of the South, Sewanee TN (1981), and Christ Church Cathedral, Houston TX (1978).

Group Exhibitions

James' work has also been included in national and international group exhibits at venues including: Louise Hopkins Underwood Centre for the Arts (2018), Glassell School of Art (2018, 2001, 1997, 1995, 1990), The Ninth International Ink Art Biennial, Guan Shanyue Art Museum, Shenzhen, China, The Cameron Art Museum, Wilmington, NC, (2016, 2014), Jason McCoy Gallery, New York NY (2015, 2011, 2010, 2009), Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas TX (2020, 2019, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013,2012 2011, 2010, 2009, 2001, 1991, 1988, 1987, 1986), Gallery Homeland, Portland OR (2012, 2009), Froelick Gallery, Portland OR (2021,2019,2018, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2012, 2011, 2009, 2006, 2001, 2000, 1999, 1996); Cadogan Contemporary London (2021, 2018, 2015), The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston TX (2016, 2015, 2011, 2000, 1999, 1998, 1996, 1994, 1993),Williams Tower, Houston TX (2015, 2013), Lawndale Art Center, Houston TX (2011, 2000, 1998, 1996, 1994, 1993, 1987, 1986, 1985, 1984, 1983, 1982, 1979), Pillsbury Peters (2011, 2010, 2009, 2008), Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe NM (2011, 2009),Sin Sin Fine Art, Hong King (2008, 2006), Portland Art Museum, OR (2010, 2003), Museo Moderne Artes, Trujillo, Peru (2007), Marfa Book Company, Marfa TX (2002), DiverseWorks, Houston TX (2002, 1990, 1986, 1985, 1984, 1983), Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston TX (2001, 2000, 1998, 1994, 1993, 1992, 1989), Dutch Triodos Bank, Zeiss, The Netherlands (2010-2001), Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington TX (2001, 1999, 1991), The Old Jail—Art Center, Albany TX (2000), Hooks Epstein Gallery, Houston TX (2000, 1989),Tembo Cerling Print Studio, Houston TX (2000), The HK Visual Arts Center, Hong Kong (1999), Mohseni Fine Arts, Limited, Hong Kong (1999), (1988,1987, 1986, 1985, 1983), Sewall Art Gallery, Rice University, Houston TX (1988),Bronxville, New York NY (1986), Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans LA (1985), Southern California Gallery for Contemporary Arts, Los Angeles CA (1985), University of Saint Thomas, Houston TX (1985), Drawing Room Gallery, Houston TX (1985), Houston Coalition for the Visual Arts, Square One Gallery, Houston TX (1985), Midtown Art Center, Houston TX (1984); Rachel Davis Gallery, Houston TX (1984),Houston Women's Caucus for Art, Houston TX (1984, 1983), Center for Art & Performance, Houston TX (1982), Art League Houston, Houston TX (1979), St. Luke's School of Theology, Sewanee TN (1977), Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga TN (1976).

Museum and Foundation Collections

Casa Lamm Cultural Center, Mexico City, DF
The Barrett Collection, Dallas, TX
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
Driendl Family Collection, Vienna, AU
Edward Albee Foundation and private collection, New York, NY
Fundacion Vergel, Cuernavaca, Mexico and New York, NY
Menil Collection, Houston, TX
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Museum of Sewanee: The University of the South, Sewanee, TN
Museum of Texas Tech University, Artist Printmaker Research Collection, Lubbock, TX
Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland, OR
Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR
Rice University Print Collection, Houston, TX
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA
Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
Transart Foundation, Houston, TX
University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX
The Watermill Collection, Water Mill, NY
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Selected Public and Private Collections

American Airlines, Dallas, TX
Bering Realty Consulting, Houston, TX
Cisco Systems, Houston, TX
El Paso Energy, Houston, TX
Enron Corporation, Houston, TX
Exxon Chemical, Darien, CT and Houston, TX
Federal Reserve Bank, Dallas, TX
Free International University World Art Collection, Triodos Bank, Zeiss, The Netherlands
Frito Lay, Plano, TX
Galtney Group, Inc., Houston, TX
Hilton Americas, Houston, TX
Holt CAT Collection, San Antonio, TX
Hoffman Family Collection, Dallas, TX
Houston Lighting & Power Collection, Houston, TX
Iberia Bank, Houston, TX
Lancaster Hotel, Houston, TX
Polaris Collection, United Airlines, Houston, TX
The Post Oak Hotel, Uptown, Houston, TX
Ritz-Carlton Hotels, Dallas, TX and White Plains, NY
Sands Macao Hotel, Macao, China
Sitka Center for Art & Ecology, Cascade Head Experimental Forest, Otis, OR
Solvay International, Houston, TX
Southern Crow Music, Topanga, CA
Southwestern Bell, San Antonio, TX and St. Louis, MO
Texaco, Inc., Houston, TX
Texas State Bank, McAllen, TX
Touche Ross and Company (Deloitte), Houston, TX
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An abstract painting featuring a large, vibrant red upper section. Below this, there are various shapes and colors including yellow, light green, and a darker red. The brushstrokes are visible, giving it a textured, expressive feel.

C A D O G A N

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