



8



07.04.2017 > 10.06.2017

William T Williams

Things Unknown Paintings 1968-2017

To me, painting is a way of marking time; it gives meaning to my life. It is a way of trying to communicate. I live. I existed. I created. I think painting has to be self-validating. The process of being an artist has to be self-validating. And it took time for me to get to that. Withdrawing from the art world for a long time was, in a sense, the best thing that I could have done as an artist.

William T Williams

The exhibition presents twenty-eight paintings from the artist's most major painting series, starting with his late 1960s bold geometric abstractions like *Harlem Angels* (1968) to recent gold metallic fields with lyrical lines (2016).

9



For five decades, Williams has been committed to an abstraction that derives its force from productive tensions among colours and forms. While he has consistently tested the limits of his earlier styles and developed new approaches, his meticulous attention to the process of art-making has remained constant.

From the outset of his career, Williams' art has been characterized by bold colour and daring compositions that paid homage to and challenged the abstraction that had come before it. He emerged when abstract expressionism was in decline, while pop art, colour field painting, and minimalism were on the rise. Concurrent with this aesthetic transition were social and political transformations that saw artists, intellectuals, and activists challenging the exclusivity practiced by New York's white, male-dominated art institutions.

These critiques came in multiple forms, including an approach to art that favoured figural representation embedded in a politics of struggle and an assertion of identities misrepresented by or excluded from American culture. Such images were a necessary correction to a history of omission and caricature, but they risked being received by the art establishment in a way that affirmed its tendency to ignore work by abstract artists who were also African American.

The synthesis between personal, cultural, narrative and abstraction that Williams developed early on in his career was met with deserved success. He studied with some of the foremost painters of the day including Richard Lindner, Philip Pearlstein, Alex Katz and Richard Bove. It was, however, Al Held that played a particularly encouraging and influential role for Williams.

10



1

Harlem Angels

1968, Acrylic on canvas
307.3 x 102.9 cm

2

JD

1968, Acrylic on canvas
182.9 x 62.9 cm

3

Mercer's Stop

1971, Acrylic on canvas
274.3 x 213.4 cm

4

Trane Meets Jug

1970-71, Acrylic on canvas
274.3 x 213.4 cm

5

Strange Fruit

1982, Acrylic on canvas
213.4 x 137.8 cm

6

A Note to Marcel Proust

1984, Acrylic on canvas
213.4 x 137.8 cm

7

Let Me Know

2017, Acrylic on canvas
153.0 x 101.9 cm

8

William T Williams in his New York City studio with Mercer's Stop (cropped)

© Photo by Grant Delin, 2017

9

Installation view

10

Things Unknown

1988-2003, Acrylic on canvas
165.1 x 72.4 cm

*All works are signed and dated
© William T Williams Courtesy of
Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC,
New York, NY*