

MARC SELWYN FINE ART

FRANK BOWLING
September 23, 2017



Marc Selwyn Fine Art is pleased to announce an exhibition of paintings by Frank Bowling, O.B.E., RA, opening September 23, 2017. Works in the exhibition range from the artist's mid-1970's poured paintings to his recent canvases, which respond to American Abstract Expressionism with a wider diversity of technique and composition.

Early pieces in the exhibition include prime examples of Bowling's poured paintings in which the artist developed a unique mechanism to tilt the canvas, sending his acrylic medium flowing downward in spontaneous fusions of color. As Mel Gooding writes, "In their thrilling unpredictability, and their vertiginous disposition of the pure materials of their art, these poured paintings have about them something very close to the free-form excitement of contemporaneous advanced New York jazz, itself a brilliant manifestation of the modernist spirit."

Within a year, Bowling began to experiment again, producing more atmospheric works, recalling masters of the English landscape tradition such as Gainsborough and Turner. In *Plunge*, 1979 for example, clouds of sienna, aqua, muted yellow and pink are diffused in an ethereal composition made with pearl essence and chemical interventions. In more recent paintings, Bowling has added found objects, layers of canvas collage and experimental materials to his repertoire often using a highly personal sun drenched palette. In *East Gate with Iona*, 2013, horizontal bands of color recall Rothko's compositions and become the background for a painterly flow of yellows and pinks. In *Innerspace*, 2012, thin veils of translucent color bring to mind the curtain-like washes of Morris Louis's paintings of the 1960's.

A mix of self-referential and Abstract Expressionist elements reveals the complex issues and conversations reflected in Bowling's paintings. As a young black artist, Bowling wrestled with the expectations of his peers, the confines and practices of 'Black Art,' and the dominance of American abstraction at the time. According to the artist, "I was not allowed to explore the paint possibilities. Every time I did a group of pictures, it had to be nailed down within this black dilemma or political or Caribbean dilemma. It could not be taken as art qua art; it had to be socio-political or socio-anthropological. All of those disciplines kept getting in the way of my effort to be a painter, so I had to be constantly on the move. That's what is happening in the work. When I got to the point that I had something iconic, I had to move on. I had to be like Muhammed Ali and get dancing, because the blows were coming too hard and too fast."

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Bowling began his career at the Royal College of Art after moving from his native British Guyana to London in 1953. During his time at the RCA, he studied alongside David Hockney and Peter Blake and became involved in the British Pop Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. Aided by a Guggenheim Fellowship, Bowling moved to New York in 1966. Following a solo exhibition at the Whitney in 1971 (in the same period as shows featuring Melvin Edwards, Jack Whitten, and Alma Thomas), Bowling met influential critic Clement Greenberg, who became a regular visitor to the artist's studio and a major influence on his practice. With Greenberg's advice and encouragement, any lingering doubts about his commitment to Modernism were abandoned, and Bowling began to progress further toward pure abstraction, removing all recognizable imagery to focus on process, materials and color.

Bowling's work can be found in numerous prestigious collections including Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Royal Academy of Arts, London; Tate Gallery, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others. An exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Art in 2015 marked the first time in nearly 45 years that Bowling's Map Paintings were on view since its debut at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971. Additionally, a current exhibition *Mappa Mundi* at Haus Der Kunst in Munich, Germany presents a comprehensive overview of rare and monumental map paintings from 1967- 1971 along with other works.

In 2019, the Tate Britain will mount a retrospective spanning over five decades of Bowling's career.