

JASON MCCOY GALLERY

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TERRELL JAMES: CIRCLE OF INTIMATES

May 18 – June 30, 2021

Artist Talk with Terrell James: Wednesday, May 26, 4pm



Terrell James, *Sky Bounce*, 2020, Oil on birch plywood panel, 16 x 20 inches (40.6 x 50.8 cm)

Jason McCoy Gallery is pleased to present the virtual exhibition *CIRCLE OF INTIMATES*, the first presentation solely focused on the small-scale paintings by Terrell James.

Though acclaimed for her large to mural-sized works, James also has a long practice of creating paintings that could be described as book-size. Her interest in these intimate compositions goes back to the 1980s when she researched Forrest Bess (1911-1977), an experience that left her “enamored with the power that small paintings can have.” James remembers: “It was remarkable to witness how Bess could hold a huge gallery wall with a canvas that measures no more than 8 x 10 inches.”

In speaking about particular paintings that are now presented in the *CIRCLE OF INTIMATES*, James shares the following insight:

“For me, the exploration of intimacy in large works is just as compelling as finding a sense of immensity in small ones. *DIVE* illustrates this clearly, as a feather cuts through layers of rock and wave, as two grey whales or floating islands approach from the left. *VAGRANTS*, *SUSPENSE*, and *SHAPE THE SKY* all suggest a seascape as well. *SUSPENSE*, the most representational piece in this exhibition, features a definite fore- and middle ground, as well as a horizon line. The *VAGRANTS* drifts into view from a foggy ship deck, seen above the waterline. Floating rocks, which also may be reflections of clouds in water, populate *SHAPE THE SKY*.”

The earliest piece in the group, THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD TOWN (TONGLI WATER TOWN, CHINA) (2015) was made after my visit to Tongli, the ancient water town in the Wujiang district in China. Imagine the floating quality of the place, lined with ancient buildings and bridges, over continuous canals. There are no cars; all travel is done on foot and seems to traverse time. This painting serves as a forerunner for the newest works, RED EYE (2021), GOYA'S WITCHES (2021), and MR. TANGLE'S CHANCERY (2021). As in THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD TOWN, each of these compositions allows the paint to hover above the linen support, which gives a supple flaxen color to the entire surface. This creates a different space in the pieces, as the rich oil paint saturates the toned linen ground. Leaner pieces, such as BETWEEN LANGUAGES and BLUE TREES, STUDIO are essentially drawings in oil paint on linen.



Terrell James, *Thousand-Year-Old Town (Tongli Water Town, China)*, 2015
Oil on linen, 18 x 24 inches (45.7 x 61 cm)

SKY BOUNCE and AT THE BORDER are painted on board, which provides a tougher surface for the brush than canvas would. These two pieces both have the energetic quality of my drawings on paper. While AT THE BORDER brings to mind my walks up hills in Mexico, SKY BOUNCE is an opposite sort of landscape. It looks like a tussle between cloud shapes and distant hills, with the cloud's movement literally bouncing between sky and land. AT THE BORDER suggests ambling stability in daily life; SKY BOUNCE, nature's changing forces, disrupting human order.

SKY PULSE, VISITING TANDANAN, and BOUNDLESS are the most painterly pieces in this selection. They share a lush palette of blues, greens and violets. Meanwhile, ASCENT is an outlier with its brash cadmium red as the unifying field of color, an enlivening mint-green-beige and blue-violet-plum dash and swirl at the upper half, almost balloon like. In this vibrant scene, another case of opposites claims our stage set. On the one hand, the top form might threaten an anvil-like drop, crushing the inhabitants standing below. On the other, there may occur the surprise lift off, a dramatic escape of cumulous form. A cloud snaps off, calving like an iceberg. Or recall the former Dr. Marvel, Oz the Terrible, debunked and breaking free, prematurely, in his hot air balloon, lamentably without Toto and Dorothy.

Born in 1955 in Houston, Texas, Terrell James has exhibited extensively in the United States, South America and Asia. Her work is part of the permanent collections at the Dallas Museum of Art; the Menil Collection; the Museum of Fine Arts Boston; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Portland Art Museum, Oregon, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others. James lives and works in Houston.