

David Zwirner

New York London Paris Hong Kong

More Life: Jesse Murry
Rising

September 17, 2021
533 West 19th Street, New York



Jesse Murry holding one of John Constable's brushes, 1991
Photo: Richard Constable

*All my life
has been a life of crossing
from the racial barriers
imposed by the tragic limitations of history
to the transcendental urge
to move beyond those limitations.*

*What has prompted this effort toward humanity
is a necessary belief in art's saving powers of address.
This is the effort to restore imaginative possibility
along the line of the horizon,
through the space and form of landscape
as the mind recaptures its capacity to create
and the soul may regain its freedom.*
— Jesse Murry, excerpt from "From Notes on a Landscape," 1987

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Jesse Murry: Rising*, curated by Lisa Yuskavage and Jarrett Earnest, at the gallery's 533 West 19th Street location in New York.

Painter and poet Jesse Murry (1948–1993) identified three significant approaches to landscape —“poetic,” “dramatic,” and “visionary,” which he aimed to synthesize into abstract paintings. Built of subtly shifting color dynamics, his canvases became “places summoned by the memory through the imagination; where the elements of WEATHER are protagonists that act out moods open to many readings; where the light & space have a spiritual import.”¹ To this end, the horizon was both his central image and guiding ideal, as the moment where near and far, inside and outside, self and other could be negotiated and reconciled. Fusing the Romantic painting tradition of John Constable and J.M.W. Turner with the quality of mind and imagination of Wallace Stevens’s poetry, Murry uniquely sought to create a “landscape” within the fiction of painting that could be “more than a place to dwell but a suitable space for dreams.”

Jesse Murry: Rising brings together paintings from the last five years of the artist’s life. This work—made while confronting his impending mortality from AIDS-related illness—testifies to Murry’s lifelong belief in the capacity of painting to hold the complexity of human meaning, at the meeting of a material fact and a location within the mind.

Yuskavage and Earnest note:

Every curatorial decision was guided by Jesse Murry’s own words, taking a cue for the title of the show from one of his final paintings, Rising, in our attempt to not only “bring him back” as an artist, but also to convey what an extraordinary man was lost. Furthering our organizing principle, visitors will be able to listen to newly unearthed audio recordings of Murry speaking in 1980 from the collection of the Archives of American Art at the exhibition and online. We hope the gallery will be a space of quiet contemplation where we invite the viewer to sit and read his writing while being surrounded by the paintings. There will also be a short video on the gallery’s website that, coupled with the art and writing, will give viewers a sense of this exceptional painter, intellectual, poet, and cultural force.

The exhibition is a part of *More Life*, a focused series of curated solo exhibitions presented on the fortieth anniversary of the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis. For more information, please visit davidzwiner.com.

Murry and Yuskavage met while attending Yale School of Art, where they received their MFAs in 1986. Yuskavage’s essay “[Muse](#)” on their friendship was published in 2011 in *Art in America*. An exhibition of new paintings by Yuskavage will be concurrently on view in the main space of the gallery’s 533 West 19th Street location—the first time since their 1986 MFA thesis exhibition that Murry’s and Yuskavage’s work will be presented in adjoining galleries.

Born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and raised in White Plains, New York, Jesse Murry (1948–1993) studied art and philosophy at Sarah Lawrence College. Following his graduation in 1976, Murry moved to New York City, where he immersed himself in the contemporary art world. His essays on artists such as Hans Hofmann and Howard Hodgkin appeared in a range of publications and catalogues, including *Arts Magazine*. In 1982, he curated *Reverend Howard Finster* at the New Museum. After two years of teaching art history and exhibiting at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Murry enrolled in the Yale School of Art at the age of thirty-six, where he took classes with Andrew Forge, Jake Berthot, and Harold Bloom. Murry received his MFA in 1986 and staged his first New York solo exhibition at Sharpe Gallery the following year. In this period, he was awarded the Mellon Individual Project Grant and the Pollock-Krasner Grant. Despite the budding success of his work in his final years, Murry’s work has rarely been exhibited since his death. In 2019, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, who represents the estate of

¹ Jesse Murry, *Painting Is a Supreme Fiction: Writings by Jesse Murry, 1980–1993*, ed. Jarrett Earnest (Chicago: Sobercove Press, forthcoming).

the artist, presented *Jesse Murry: Radical Solitude*. Rising will be complemented by the first publication of Murry's art criticism and poetry, *Painting Is a Supreme Fiction: Writings by Jesse Murry, 1980–1993*, edited by Jarrett Earnest with a foreword by Hilton Als, published by Soberscove Press.

Painter Lisa Yuskavage is known for her highly original approach to figurative painting that has challenged conventional understandings of the genre. Yuskavage received her BFA from the Tyler School of Art in 1984 and her MFA from the Yale School of Art in 1986. Yuskavage's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at numerous institutions worldwide and is held in prominent public collections. Most recently, *Lisa Yuskavage: Wilderness* was on view at the Aspen Art Museum through October 2020 and is currently on view at the Baltimore Museum of Art through September 19, 2021. The exhibition is accompanied by an extensive new monograph featuring essays by Christopher Bedford, Helen Molesworth, and Heidi Zuckerman, as well as an interview with the artist by Mary Weatherford. Yuskavage's monumentally scaled painting *Bonfire* (2013–2015) is currently on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, as part of the permanent collection exhibition *Knowledge of the Past Is the Key to the Future*.

Jarrett Earnest is the author of *What it Means to Write About Art: Interviews with Art Critics* (2018), editor of *Hot, Cold, Heavy, Light: 100 Art Writings 1988–2018* by Peter Schjeldahl (2019), and recently curated *Ray Johnson: WHAT A DUMP* at David Zwirner, New York (Spring 2021).

For all press inquiries, contact

Julia Lukacher +1 212 727 2070 jlukacher@davidzwirner.com

Erin Pinover +1 212 727 2070 epinover@davidzwirner.com