

David Zwirner

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Frank Walter *Pastorale*

14 September–28 October 2023
5–6/F, H Queen's,
80 Queen's Road Central
Hong Kong



Frank Walter outside his photo studio, Antigua, 1990s
© The Family of Frank Walter and Barbara Paca

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of work by Antiguan artist, writer, and polymath Frank Walter at the gallery's Hong Kong location. Curated by art historian Barbara Paca, a close friend to the artist and devoted scholar of his work, *Pastorale* is the gallery's third exhibition of Walter's work and the first presentation of his work in Asia. The presentation coincides with the forthcoming exhibition *Frank Walter: Artist, Gardener, Radical*, opening in October at the Garden Museum, London.

The exhibition will feature paintings and works on paper that exemplify Walter's rich body of work, which encompasses a variety of media, styles, and formats, including those made on such supports as Polaroid film cartridge boxes, mosquito coil boxes, and fragments of sketchpad covers. A group of Caribbean landscape paintings will feature alongside a selection of small-scale paintings depicting the meadows of Scotland—made from memory to commemorate the time he spent there in 1960—revealing the artist's distinctive use of color and his personal vision of the places he lived, traveled, and imagined. Over his prolific

six-decade career, Walter created paintings that range from the vividly colored landscapes—which evoke the Romantic spirit of William Blake and Caspar David Friedrich—to formally inventive and probing portraits and systematic, abstract compositions. As Paca writes in a curatorial statement for the exhibition, “*Pastorale* presents a new dimension of the vast oeuvre of universal artist Frank Walter. As a recluse, Walter was more at ease in a world where he dwelt as the solitary inhabitant, and he captured every nuance with immediacy and honesty.”¹

Walter’s landscape paintings reveal the artist’s keen eye for color and texture, as even the smallest works radiantly convey a profound sense of light and calm. A descendant of enslaved persons and plantation owners, Walter was born and raised in Antigua and lived in England and elsewhere in Europe from 1954 until 1961. He traveled through much of Scotland and Germany during that time—mostly on foot. These long, taxing walks became a time and space of freedom for Walter during which he could let his mind wander and explore his personal artistic pursuits, resulting in a body of intimate and emotive landscapes that depict the colorful meadows of wildflowers and rolling hills of the Scottish countryside. In these and Walter’s Caribbean landscapes, skies glow in hues of lavender, pink, and red, often layered with flowers and foliage that the artist enlivens with sponge-like brushwork in equally vibrant color. Occasional scenes invoke the pastoral, featuring groups of grazing sheep or goats. Several landscapes are defined by trees or branches that flank each side of the image, their darkened trunks acting as a framing device that creates a portal through which we see Walter’s vision of the horizon beyond. “Through these paintings,” Paca writes, “Walter interprets his homeland, which for interesting personal reasons includes Great Britain and Europe as a sacred idyll, chronicling the harmony of his solitude there with a skilled and sensitive paintbrush.”²

Frank Walter (1926–2009) was born Francis Archibald Wentworth Walter, on Horsford Hill, Antigua, in 1926. From a young age, Walter’s intellect was apparent to his family, and he quickly gained the admiration and respect of his community. Feeling a deep connection to his native land, Walter studied agriculture and the sugar industry—the basis of Antigua’s economy—and at the age of twenty-two, he became the first person of color to work as a manager within the Antiguan Sugar Syndicate, where he helped modernize harvesting and production methods and sought to improve the status and labor conditions of the workers. He spent much of the 1950s traveling and learning advanced agricultural and industrial techniques in England, Scotland, and West Germany. During this time, he experienced the depths of racism and bias against people of color, and he often resorted to working as a day laborer to get by. While in Europe, Walter pursued a variety of creative and artistic outlets, including drawing and painting as well as writing prose, philosophical texts, and poetry.

¹ Barbara Paca, “Frank Walter’s *Pastorale*,” 2023.

² Ibid.

The artist returned to the Caribbean in 1961, where, in addition to painting, drawing, and writing, he began making sculptures, photographs, and sound recordings. In the early 1990s, Walter designed and built his home and studio on Bailey Hill in Antigua, where he spent the remainder of his time in relative isolation, reflecting, writing, and making art inspired by his thoughts, knowledge, journeys, and surroundings.

In addition to his retrospectives at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, in 2020 and the Pavilion of Antigua and Barbuda at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017, Walter has been the subject of solo exhibitions at The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College, Dublin, in 2013, and Harewood House, Leeds, UK, in 2017. In 2019, his art was featured at the 58th Venice Biennale as part of the group exhibition *Find Yourself: Carnival and Resistance*, exploring Carnival in the culture of Antigua and Barbuda, curated by Barbara Paca and Nina Khrushcheva, and his work was included in the group exhibition *Get Lifted!*, curated by Hilton Als for Karma Gallery, New York, in 2021. In late June 2024, a solo exhibition of Walter's work will be presented at The Drawing Center, New York.

Walter's work is in the permanent collections of Glenstone, Potomac, Maryland; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Pinault Collection, Paris; and Rennie Museum, Vancouver.

The Frank Walter Catalogue Raisonné project is currently being undertaken by the Walter family and Barbara Paca.

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