

Frank Walter *Moon Voyage*

10 January–22 February 2025
108, rue Vieille du Temple, Paris



Frank Walter, *Moon Voyage*, c. 1994
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Courtesy Kenneth M. Milton Fine Arts and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Moon Voyage*, an exhibition of work by Antiguan artist, writer, and polymath Frank Walter (1926–2009) at the gallery's Paris location. Organized in close collaboration with art historian Barbara Paca and the Walter family, this is the artist's fourth solo exhibition with the gallery and the first dedicated presentation of his work in Paris.

The exhibition coincides with the inclusion of Walter's work in the group show *Après la fin. Cartes pour un autre avenir*, which opens January 25, 2025, at Centre Pompidou-Metz, France, and follows the artist's recent institutional solo shows at the Garden Museum, London (2023), and The Drawing Center, New York (2024). His work was recently included in group exhibitions at the Fondation Carmignac, Hyères, France (2023), and the Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection, Paris (2024).

Featuring paintings, works on paper, and a selection of ephemera related to the myriad manifestations of Walter's intellectual and artistic lives, *Moon Voyage* showcases the development of the artist's work as he shifted from the landscape genre to abstraction and back again, returning to certain vistas or motifs as a way of working through various ideas and compositional strategies. The works in this presentation speak to Walter's romanticism; his individualistic, vividly colored, and intimately scaled compositions fuse abstract forms with scientific and celestial concepts or allusions to the wonders of the natural world. As Paca writes in her essay for the exhibition, "Walter's abstract paintings contain symbolic meanings that often reference his life experiences and work in other areas such as historical accounts, music, and philosophical texts. For Walter, stepping away from visual references in the natural world to rely more on abstraction allowed him to paint his 'feelings and visions' as well as to transform 'the invisible' into the 'aesthetic.'"¹

¹ Barbara Paca, "Moon Voyage," davidzwirner.com, 2024.

Moon Voyage takes its title from a painting in Walter's *Milky Way Galaxy* series, a body of work that expresses the artist's interest in outer space, extraterrestrial life, and the mysteries of the universe. A group of works from this series—which have rarely before been exhibited together—forms one of several focal points of this show. In these paintings of the cosmos, Walter employs a palette of golden yellow, gray, black, white, and red to fantastically depict zooming spaceships, celestial light beams, and moon craters—evocative motifs that emerged out of his practice of gazing at the night sky, beholding the stars, planets, and darkness. “While a visual departure from his studies of the world around him,” curator Claire Gilman notes, “these images constitute an extension of Walter’s investment in close observation; seeing is for him as much an act of mind as of body.”²

Another selection of works in the exhibition further highlights Walter’s keen sense of observation and his vivid imagination, through figurative and representational paintings of subjects both real and envisioned. Ranging from inventive self-portraits and images of heraldic devices to tranquil nature scenes or colorful architectural facades, these compositions speak to the breadth of Walter’s practice and the scope of his vision.

A full wall of the gallery space is devoted to an expansive installation of Walter’s signature Polaroid paintings—minute traditional landscapes made on the packaging of Polaroid film cartridges. These intimately scaled, vibrantly colored, and powerfully reductive compositions showcase Walter in his essence, serving as miniature windows into the artist’s extraordinary world. As Paca notes of these works, “Working in rustic conditions, Walter’s brush reveals a deep and emotive connection to memory and place. His tiny Polaroid paintings draw the viewer into the compositions by capturing the familiar elements of landscapes in an essential way, depicting well-composed swaths of fields, mountains, vegetation, and sky. At the same time, these recognizable features are rendered in unexpected, distinctive ways, with naturalistic color schemes upended. His genius as a colorist is evident.”³

Also exhibited will be an array of historical material from Walter’s archive, including photographs, notebooks, sketches, correspondence, and personal effects, which complements the works on view and illuminates the artist’s travels of the body and mind.

Frank Walter created a rich body of work that encompasses a variety of media, styles, and formats. His paintings range from highly individualistic, vividly colored landscapes to formally inventive and probing portraits to systematic, abstract compositions, all rendered in the artist’s absorbing palette and distinctive visual style. Walter 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 local 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

² Claire Gilman, “To Capture a Soul,” in *Frank Walter: To Capture a Soul*, exh. cat. (New York: The Drawing Center, 2024), p. 76.

³ Paca, “Moon Voyage.”

drawing and painting as well as writing prose, philosophical texts, and poetry. 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 Pavilion of Antigua and Barbuda at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 and the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, in 2020, Walter has been the subject of solo exhibitions at The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College, Dublin, in 2013 and Harewood House, Leeds, United Kingdom, in 2017. In 2019, Walter's 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. His work was included in the group exhibition *Get Lifted!*, curated by Hilton Als for Karma, New York, in 2021. In 2024, David Zwirner Books published the catalogue *By Land, Air, Home, and Sea: The World of Frank Walter*, which features new scholarship and a contribution from Als, curator of the exhibition of the same title at David Zwirner, New York (2022).

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

For all press inquiries, please contact:

Mathieu Cénac +33 (0)1 85 09 43 21, mathieu@davidzwirner.com

Sara Chan +44 (0)7981802449 sara@davidzwirner.com