

里森画廊

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Oliver Lee Jackson

7 March – 25 April 2026

2/F, 27 Huqiu Road, Shanghai

American artist Oliver Lee Jackson presents his first solo exhibition in Asia and his second with Lisson Gallery, showcasing new and recent paintings that challenge the viewer's intrinsic urge to delineate between figuration and abstraction. The presentation brings together a series of paintings from the past three decades along with a never before exhibited, multi-panel screen. Every work presents a self-contained spatial universe, opening avenues for contemplation and multiple interpretation.

Jackson's artistic signature lies in constructing intricate, stratified compositions where figurative forms, often termed 'paint people', emerge within dynamic fields of paint. Though based in figuration, his works are not narrative, but instead they hold the possibility for a profound experience in looking. At 90 years of age, his creative approach draws from comprehensive, lifetime engagement with diverse art historical traditions, from ancient Egypt to classical and modern Europe, to the richness of African visual cultures. The coherence of Jackson's oeuvre is achieved through six decades of disciplined studio practice. When painting, he circumambulates the panel or canvas, which is laid flat on trestles or stretched on the studio floor. This orientation circumvents compositional hierarchies imposed by gravitational orientation, giving the artist more control of the paints and allowing him to approach the composition from all sides-to generate a churning visual field in which figuration and abstraction coexist with equal agency.

Jackson's paintings, often rich in colour, are charged with what the artist refers to as 'fields of energy', with the figure as an entry point, whether a simple line drawing of a crouching figure or a serpentine representation of the human form rendered through the use of materials like chalk, oil paint and spray painted stencils. Through layered forms and visual gestures, his evocative paintings lead viewers through complex compositions that gradually reveal figural elements and connective passages, creating a world within each work. In the paintings exhibited in the Shanghai gallery, these 'paint people' are shown gathered in groups, or in isolation in various poses—squatting, drawing, pointing, embracing or reclining—often accompanied by hints of flowers, birds, or other forms.

Jackson's works lead the eye through a world of forms and gestures, coaxing viewers to take in the overall effect through the lens of their own personal experience. Jackson says that the nature of painting is simultaneity, which may lead to a sense of ambiguity in the viewer. It is this that makes the experience of viewing an artwork a personal one, between the viewer and the work.

Anchoring the presentation is a dynamic tripartite screen that can be positioned in multiple ways to present different pictorial scenarios. Painted on both sides, each panel operates as a reversible element, allowing divergent and interchangeable arrangements, generating novel spatial orientations and compositional relationships. When closed, the ensemble displays layered human silhouettes on the combined surfaces; when expanded, the configuration opens the central panel, introducing landscape motifs and formal elements that shift toward abstraction. The work thus exists in a dialectical state, maintaining its essential two-dimensionality while simultaneously asserting a sculptural presence.

The presentation is complemented by a playlist of saxophone quartets composed by the late jazz musician Julius Hemphill, a longtime friend of Jackson. This sonic environment resonates with the improvisational nature of Jackson's practice, reflecting his passion for spontaneity and expressive freedom inherent in various musical forms.

About Oliver Lee Jackson

Oliver Lee Jackson is a painter, sculptor and printmaker whose creations open up spaces for contemplation and interpretation, as well as encounters with seen and unseen worlds. He has long engaged in freeing form and matter from the strictures and false oppositions between figuration and abstraction, preferring hybridity, ambiguity and improvisation with his materials over fixed meanings and didacticism.

Beginning with gridded compositions in the 1960s and then moving his large canvases to the floor in the 1970s in order to approach his work from multiple orientations, Jackson's images remain based in the world and bound to human experience. "Every exchange we have, regardless of whether we call it spiritual or not," says the artist, "is through the world, by the senses, absorbing things in things, exploiting things by things, always relationships with things."

His chosen materials—stone, steel, wood, marble, fabric, paint—become the conduit for him to communicate feelings, moods and shared phenomena through the making of effects and images. The figure is a constant presence—sometimes overt, sometimes fragmentary and fugitive—in all of Jackson's work, acting as both starting point and anchor for the marks, passages, moments and motives behind each composition. Even on a two-dimensional surface, the relative weights and volumes of brushstrokes, handprints and color expanses create fluctuating densities, depths and spatial possibilities. Demonstrative narratives or references to actual events are rare or fleeting in his work. An exception is found in his title for his 1960s–1970s series of paintings based on photographs of anti-Apartheid demonstrators caught in the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 in Johannesburg, South Africa, whose gestures profoundly reflected interior states of being—in this case fleeing the terror of state-sponsored violence. Otherwise, Jackson cites influence from both African and European art traditions to feed his approach to working that suggests a timeless, bodily flow of life force, memory and atmosphere.

Oliver Lee Jackson was born in 1935, in St. Louis, Missouri and now lives and works in Oakland, California, USA. After attending the University of Iowa and advising the St. Louis collective of musicians, poets, dancers and artists known as the Black Artists Group (known as BAG) in the late 1960s, Jackson relocated to the West Coast to be a professor of art at the California State University, Sacramento, from 1971 until 2002, where he initially developed a curriculum for the Pan African Studies program. In addition to numerous collaborations with writers, musicians and dancers, Jackson has worked on large-scale commissions and held major solo presentations at the Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO (2021); di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, Napa, CA (2021); National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2019); Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO (2012); Harvard University, Cambridge MA (2002); Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA (1993, 1984, 1977); Seattle Art Museum (1982) among others.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 70 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles and Shanghai. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists and others of that generation, from Carmen Herrera and Olga de Amaral to Hélio Oiticica and Lee Ufan. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Liu Xiaodong, Otobong Nkanga, Pedro Reyes, Sean Scully, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Wael Shawky. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists including Dana Awartani, Cory Arcangel, Garrett Bradley, Ryan Gander, Josh Kline, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost and Cheyney Thompson.

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