

LISSON

OLIVER LEE JACKSON Form Follows Feeling

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION DATES:
SEPTEMBER 18 – NOVEMBER 7 2026
1037 N. SYCAMORE AVENUE
LOS ANGELES

OPENING: SEPTEMBER 18, 6 – 8PM

Lisson Gallery presents its first Los Angeles exhibition of painter, sculptor, and printmaker Oliver Lee Jackson. A Bay Area resident based in Oakland, Jackson builds his compositions around the human figure, a recurring presence that underpins his work's structure. This presentation brings together works spanning several decades of his practice from paintings to a group of marble and mixed media sculptures. His sculptural output, a lesser-known but vital aspect of his oeuvre, was last seen in a monumental commission of metal figures for New York's High Line in 2024, while these forms are being presented publicly for the first time.

After initially carving marble in Carrara, Italy in the 1980s, Jackson took to sculpting sensuous figures from stone and wood, but often left the unfinished works aside as he ruminated over their final forms. The resulting sculptures are complex constructions of juxtaposed matter, including draped cloth and graphite marks – each medium seeking out the figure contained within. Rupture occurs in the breaks and cuts between these materials, with flashes of gold leaf adding a sense of quiet ritual or spiritual uplift, but harmony is restored through Jackson's keen sense of composition and balance. While these multipartite works are recently completed, they all contain components begun many years, perhaps even decades ago. Earlier sculpted forms may reference totemic monuments and African sculptures, their relative horizontality or verticality dealing with emergent figures experiencing compression or weightlessness.

Figures in flight, figures in shadow, figures in limbo and under duress also pervade Jackson's new paintings. The fugitive nature of his figuration is mirrored by his non-hierarchical technique of drifting between the use of spraypaint, chalk, enamel and oil stick, as well as the drawn line. His paintings move from the classical to the modern, from sky to earth, all while exploring the emotions of certain poses and bodily contortions. The figurative image is not for Jackson an exercise in bodily verisimilitude, but instead signifies a search for a universal feeling or a physical state that can be inferred through a crouched posture, a silhouetted face or a prone position. The colored grounds of each panel are prepared for Jackson without his prior knowledge, adding an extra challenge into the process.

In both two and three dimensions, Jackson's figures emerge and recede, generating a vivid sense of movement and depth. Sometimes clearly formed and sometimes fleeting, these collected forms shape a visual language that balances moments of clarity with ambiguity and mystery, inviting viewers into a fluid, evolving experience.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

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

Lisson is a global gallery dedicated to shaping the art of today. Creating meaningful dialogues and robust markets between artists and audiences across six venues in the UK, US and China, Lisson exhibits the most engaging and challenging work, adding value and narrative through decades of experience and innovation.

Building significance and reputation with our artists, Lisson nurtures and amplifies their vision at every turn, supporting opportunities to show beyond the gallery’s walls in museums, the public realm and through international partnerships. The gallery’s heritage and its foundational role in contemporary art since 1967, allows for a deeper perspective and more thoughtful relationships when furthering the career and voice of an artist.