

Petzel

JAMES LITTLE

Homage El Shabazz

November 5 – December 19 2026

520 West 25th Street

Petzel is pleased to present *Homage El Shabazz*, James Little's third exhibition with the gallery, which brings together a rarely seen body of work from a pivotal moment in Little's practice. The exhibition comprises six intimately scaled paintings from Little's *Homage El Shabazz* series made between 1985 and 1989. This show marks the largest presentation of the series since 1992, when six of these works were included in the Walker Art Center's *Malcom X: Man, Ideal, Icon* exhibition curated by Dr. Kellie Jones. Coinciding with *Homage El Shabazz*, the first extensive monograph on Little's five-decade career will be published this fall, featuring essays by Valerie Cassel Oliver, Aruna D'Souza, Gavin Delahunty, and Carrie Cooperider. Petzel will host a public launch and signing for the book at their 25th Street location on November 14, with Little in conversation with Aruna D'Souza.

In his *Homage El Shabazz* paintings, Little applies hand-mixed oil and wax to canvas, producing subtly shifting fields of color that lend a human touch to the structured, hard-edge compositions. In each work, four triangular panels converge at the center to form an "X" — a tribute to political activist Malcolm X, who used the name El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz following his pilgrimage to Mecca. Little has described these works as containing a "revolutionary spirit" without dictating a specific narrative or social effect on the viewer, posing a conscious examination of how political and personal references can coexist with the autonomy of abstraction.

Little's work is deeply informed by Black histories and experiences, but he approaches abstraction as a language that extends beyond any single category or identity. His *Homage El Shabazz* paintings bring questions of racial activism and representation into dialogue with his sustained investigation of color, geometry, and materiality. For Little, abstraction possesses its own "non-narrative" syntax, capable of communicating multiple meanings and interpretations through time.

Homage El Shabazz will run concurrently with several significant institutional exhibitions featuring Little's work, including *Geometries* at the Studio Museum in Harlem; *Hard Art* at MoMA PS1, both in New York; and *Rhapsodies in Black*—part of the inaugural program that will open at the new Memphis Art Museum this December.

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About James Little

James Little (b. 1952, Memphis, TN) holds a BFA from the Memphis Academy of Art and an MFA from Syracuse University. He is a 2009 recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award for Painting. In addition to being featured prominently in the 2022 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, his work has been exhibited extensively in solo and group exhibitions around the world, including at MoMA P.S.1, New York; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; and the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C. In 2022, Little participated in a historic collaboration for Duke Ellington's conceptual Sacred Concerts series at the New School for Social Research in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include: Petzel, New York (2024); Kavi Gupta, Chicago (2022); Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis (2022); Louis Stern Fine Arts, West Hollywood (2020); and June Kelly Gallery, New York (2018).

His paintings are represented in the collections of numerous public and private collections throughout the United States and Europe, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond; The Studio Museum, Harlem, New York; The Menil Collection, Houston; Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Memphis Museum of Art, Memphis; Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis; Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse; Syracuse University Art Museum; The Horseman Foundation, St. Louis Missouri; New Jersey State Museum, Trenton; Tennessee State Museum, Nashville; and the Newark Museum, Newark.

Petzel is located at 520 West 25th Street New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10am–6pm. For press inquiries, please contact Julia Ribeiro at julia@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.