

Petzel

JAMES LITTLE *Affirmed/Actions*

November 7 – December 21, 2024
520 W 25th Street

Petzel is pleased to present *Affirmed/Actions*, an exhibition of new abstract paintings by Memphis-born, New York-based artist James Little. The show marks Little's second solo exhibition at the gallery and will be on view from November 7 to December 21, 2024, at Petzel's Chelsea location at 520 W 25th Street. Little will unveil a new group of encaustic black paintings and white oil paintings, the latter featuring many apertures with swirling colors, both series that were featured in the 2022 Whitney Biennial. Little will also debut a new series of white encaustic paintings, imbued with his distinct treatment of line, light, and movement.

Little's signature encaustic process, enabling him to compose matte, yet richly textured surfaces, began with experiments as a student in the early 70s. Combining wax and oil, Little has since refined his materials through custom, alchemical mixes and singular application methods. His works are labor-intensive, taking many months to create, and represent a decades-long inquiry into form, color, and composition. Little remarks, "My orbit is pretty much contained with that subject matter and decision making...it's a kind of step-by-step approach. It's always about a pictorial phenomenon and analytical thinking."

One such "step-by-step approach" is evidenced through his oil on linen white paintings, in which Little lays a ground before coating the surface in layers of multicolored speckles, often using an eyedropper. Little then selectively masks off his surfaces, before blanketing the canvases in a wash of white paint, then revealing rows of stars, dots, or squares once partially dry. This body of work foregrounds the artist's treatment of the paint itself, highlighting Little's reverence for both "truth to materials" and formal harmony.

Affirmed/Actions also features new black paintings by the artist, and the debut of oil and wax white works, pushing his abiding study of "light as a medium" further: while Little's black paintings absorb light, the artist's white counterparts reflect it. Little's former series, composed of black striped stars and diamonds, are both flat and expansive, imbued with geometric precision and power. Little's white paintings band together rolling chevron patterns and pointed diamonds, achieving a spectrum of shifting shades, which Little has achieved by using only two tints of white.

Little's subject matter is driven by a fusion of Greenbergian "purity" principles and lived experience. His titles often evoke social conditions, political realities, or the artist's own personal history. In this suite of works, Little references Black musicians, actors, and stars through his titles, making nods to famed performers such as Josephine Baker, Celia Cruz, Fats Domino, Mahalia Jackson, and Eddie Kendricks and David Ruffin of The Temptations, among others. Another black painting, titled *Elvis*, references the so-called 'King of Rock 'n' Roll,' whose rise in Memphis benefited from discriminatory practices in the segregation-era music industry.

While his titles allude to social commentary, Little adopts a "non-narrative, non-descriptive language" in his paintings, focused on core tenets of abstraction. Little's newest works reveal their impact through an adherence to the artist's principles and formal rigor, radiating energy and emotion beyond their planes.

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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 Lincoln Center, New York, with the New York Choral Society at the New School for Social Research and the Schomburg Center 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, 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 Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis; Maatschappij Arti Et Amicitiae, Amsterdam; Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis; Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse; New Jersey State Museum, Trenton; Tennessee State Museum, Nashville; and the Newark Museum, Newark.

Petzel Gallery is located at 520 West 25th Street New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquiries, please contact Karolina Chojnowska at karolina@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.