

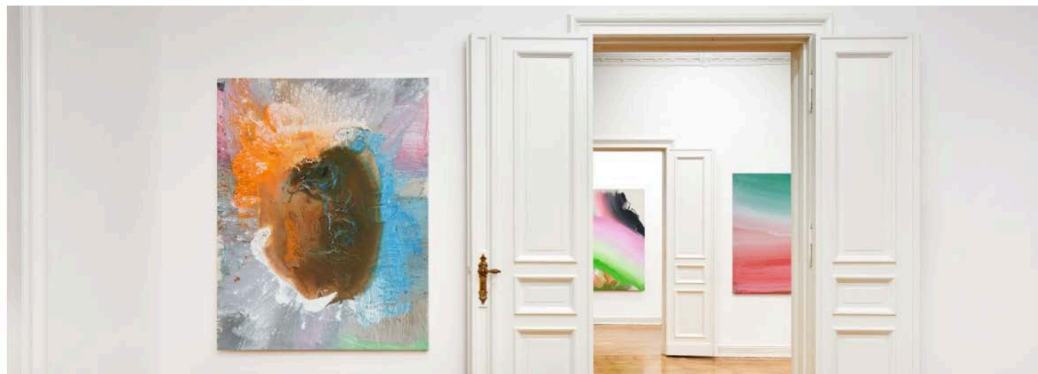
weiss berlin

Kherbek, William. "Ed Clark/Weiss Gallery, Berlin" *Samizdat* September 24, 2017



ED CLARK / WEISS GALLERY, BERLIN

SEPTEMBER 14, 2017 <



Berlin's Weiss Gallery is currently presenting a timely exhibition of the paintings of Ed Clark, an African-American painter now in his tenth decade whose works continue to explore the potentialities of the shift toward abstraction in painting that characterised the aesthetic ecosystem of Clark's early maturity. Clark is one of several giants of the first wave of abstraction-friendly western artists of African heritage whose works are at last getting their due. Clark, along with his fellow American, Sam Gilliam, and the British-Guyanese Royal Academician, Frank Bowling, are particular notables in this tradition who, happily, are still discovering new narratives for a movement that has become so familiar as to become something of a cultural cliché. However, Clark, and, indeed, Gilliam, create works that never succumb to the exhausting fetishisation of the individual consciousness in the same way the first wave of white American Ab/Ex artists often did. As for Bowling, the delicacy and sensitivity with which his works are infused undercuts the wanton sturm-und-drang to which abstraction so often readily lent itself in an appeal for intellectual seriousness and influence. These artists, all very distinct in their approaches it should be said, express an elegant disregard for these forms of posturing perhaps because their lives were characterised by enough real world struggles as to render academic thrust-and-parry a mild form of diversion on the path to larger things.

In the case of Clark and the paintings at Weiss, the sense of materiality they express is one of the most powerful currents in the exhibition. The show spans four decades of work, and among the most striking features of the earliest canvas in the exhibition, an untitled piece from 1978-80, is the sense of the physical act of painting as a material, as opposed to theoretical, process. The weight of paint as an object in its own right appears foregrounded in Clark's work. Paint's viscosity, resistance, fragility, and the process of managing this dynamic characterises all of the works at Weiss. The tiny intrusion of a green seam in the untitled work, for example, is an eloquent metaphor for what paint, and indeed, art itself, can and cannot do: representation is always misrepresentation; surfaces exist to be breached or redefined. More recent works in the show, including "New Orleans Series #1", from 2012, deepen this exploration of the possibilities and limitations presented by paint as a medium and mark-making as an endeavour. The New Orleans work is far more than a dialogue of pigment and geometry; the act of moving paint across a specific geography is palpable in the stretching and morphing of regions of colour. Clark's works certainly do not want for beauty, but they also embody a sense of struggle, a struggle in which a viewer can profit handsomely by engaging.

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Hours
Thu-Sat 13-18h
and by appointment