

FRANK BOWLING OBE, RA

David Pagel, 'Review: Frank Bowling at Marc Selwyn Fine Art: Discipline meets delight', Los Angeles Times, 29 September 2015



Frank Bowling's "Through Camellias to De La Warr" (2014), acrylic on canvas, 60.25 inches by 72.125 inches. (Marc Selwyn Fine Art)

Frank Bowling's West Coast solo debut is two shows in one.

The first covers the years 1968 to 1979, just after Bowling moved from London to New York, where he set up his studio and began to exhibit regularly. His increasingly large, increasingly abstract canvases made a mess of the idea that painting had to be one of two things: either a rigorously formal exercise exclusively concerned with color, shape and texture, or an autobiographical account of its maker's life, particularly if he was not white.

Bowling's works are both. And more. A whole lot more.

Born in British Guyana in 1936, Bowling graduated from London's Royal College of Art in 1962. Three years later he moved to New York. He now splits his time between Brooklyn and London.

At Marc Selwyn Fine Art, an eye-opening exhibition features a pair of Bowling's 1968 "Map Paintings," blazing fields of supersaturated color into which he has stenciled images of the Southern Hemisphere, prominently featuring South America and Africa.

Playing off of Jasper Johns' "Map Paintings," in which maps of the United States were rendered in Abstract Expressionist brushstrokes, Bowling's works add Color Field painting into the mix. The same goes for collage, found-object assemblage, a patchwork of fabrics from his mother's seamstress shop and double-edged references to Mark Rothko's hovering clouds of luscious color, Barnett Newman's lightning-bolt Minimalism and Melvin Edwards' raucous, all-thumbs assemblages.

Five of Bowling's canvases from the 1970s share many of the features that figure prominently in contemporary abstract painting. These include softness, dreaminess and casual, come-what-may happenstance. But Bowling's paintings have nothing to do with the half-baked indecisiveness and self-satisfied preciousness that plagues so much painting today.

Scrappy, even gnarly, his works feel as if they have been cobbled together for a purpose. Many seem to have been done over, repaired and recycled. In for the long haul, they inhabit a kind of time that is cyclical and continuous — neither instantaneous nor over-and-done-with.

Their beauty comes with a swift kick of urgency — a drive that is not old-fashioned or outdated but the very stuff of an underdog ethos.

The second part of Bowling's two-shows-in-one is even better. It includes paintings he has made over the last three years. Each wrestles rip-roaring gorgeousness out of surfaces that look as if they've been to hell and back, and are all the better for it.

Their palette is an electrifying stew of sumptuous pinks, resplendent tangerines, sizzling chartreuses and luxurious burgundies. Stuck to the surfaces of some are acupuncture needles, tiny cardboard stars and strips of silver tape.

The gritty razzle-dazzle makes for paintings that are hard-won and light-handed, at once rough around the edges and lyrical. Peppered with just the right mix of discipline and delight, Bowling's loaded canvases knock your socks off while setting pleasant reveries adrift in your head.

Marc Selwyn Fine Art, 9953 S. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills, (310) 277-9953, through Oct. 31. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.marcsewlynfineart.com