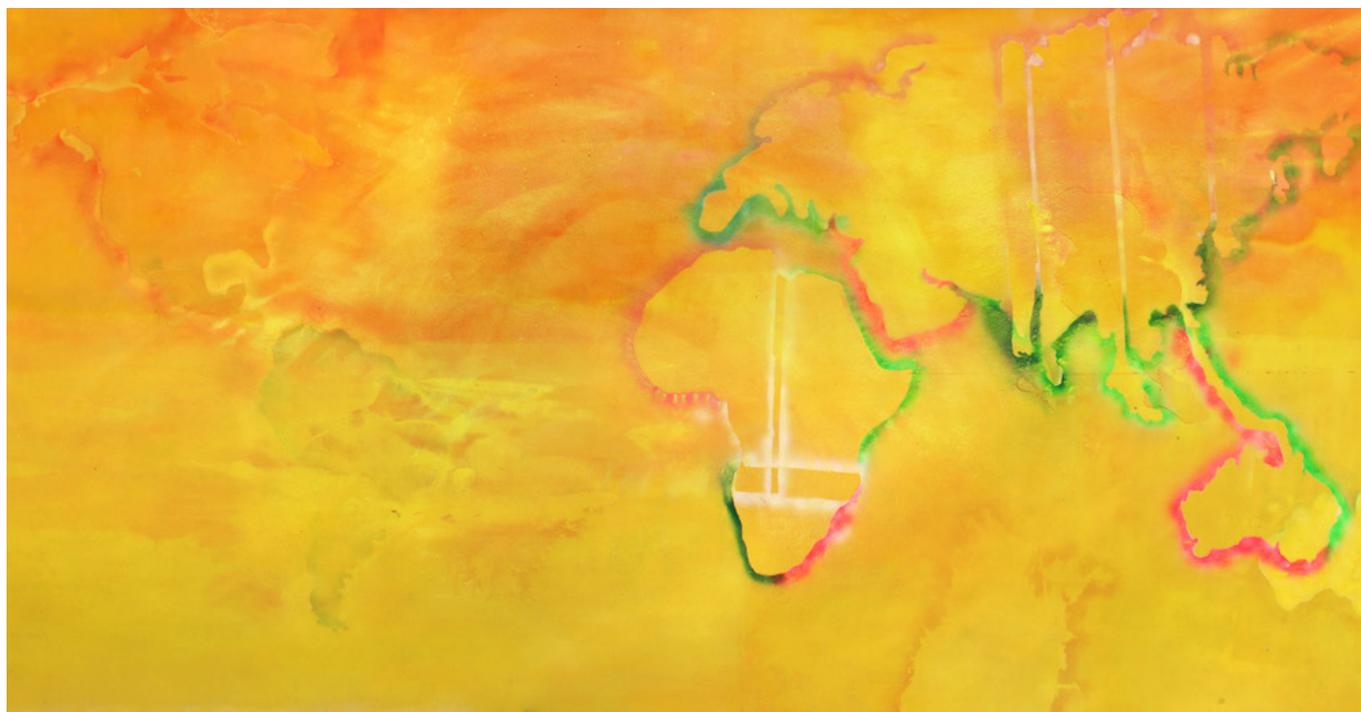


FRANK BOWLING

Aidan Dunne, 'Art in Focus: Frank Bowling – Australia to Africa, 1971',
The Irish Times, 24 March 2018

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Frank Bowling, *Australia to Africa*, 1971, (detail).

Australia to Africa, 1971, is a painting by Frank Bowling. It is one of his breakthrough series of “Map” paintings made from 1967 to 1971. Against a glowing field of yellow pigment, the shapes of Africa, Australia and Eurasia are clearly discernible, as though the continents are adrift – as indeed they are – on a simmering molten mass.

How was it done?

Bowling arrived in New York in 1967 on what turned out to be an extended stay. He laid canvas flat on the ground and stained paint into the fabric, matching colours to the changing light. One day, as the pigment pooled, it seemed to resemble a caricature of Charles de Gaulle but then, as it dried, it looked like an outline map of South America. Something clicked. When he settled in New York (he still divides his time between there and London) and found a bigger studio, he started making big paper stencil maps and using them to make outlines, while still allowing the pigment to occupy the canvas in oceanic expanses.

Where can I see it?

Frank Bowling: Mappa Mundi, a major retrospective of Bowling’s work, is in the main galleries of the west wing of

the Irish Museum of Modern Art until July 8th (Admission €8, concessions €5, free entrance on Tuesdays). Besides many of the Map paintings, the show includes objects-cum-paintings from the early 1980s, and several major series of paintings: *Great Thames*, *Bartica Flats*, and *Wintergreens*, plus documentary material.

Is it a typical work by the artist?

Typical from the late 1960s onwards. Born in Bartica, British Guyana, in 1936 (some sources state 1934) Richard Sheridan Franklin Bowling moved to England in his late teens and attended the Royal College of Art alongside David Hockney and RB Kitaj. He won the silver graduation medal to Hockney’s gold, though it’s widely considered that external factors lost him the gold. Acclaimed in 1960s London, he was drifting into pop art but became uneasy. Hence his move to the US.

When he devised the Map paintings, they provided a means of dealing with such things as questions of identity, post-colonialism and diaspora from within abstract painting rather than, say, via photography and video. He has remarked that he felt typecast as a Caribbean artist in the 1960s. People expected a certain kind of protest work from him, work that

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essentially corralled him within the field of identity politics, and hence kept him within the orbit of his own geopolitical and ethnic identity, whereas he wanted to find his own voice.

He is also a writer and was very active in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1971, in an important piece titled: *It's Not Enough to Say 'Black is Beautiful'*, he outlined the disadvantages faced by black artists in the West and made the case for the right, even the necessity, to make art that is not defined by identity.