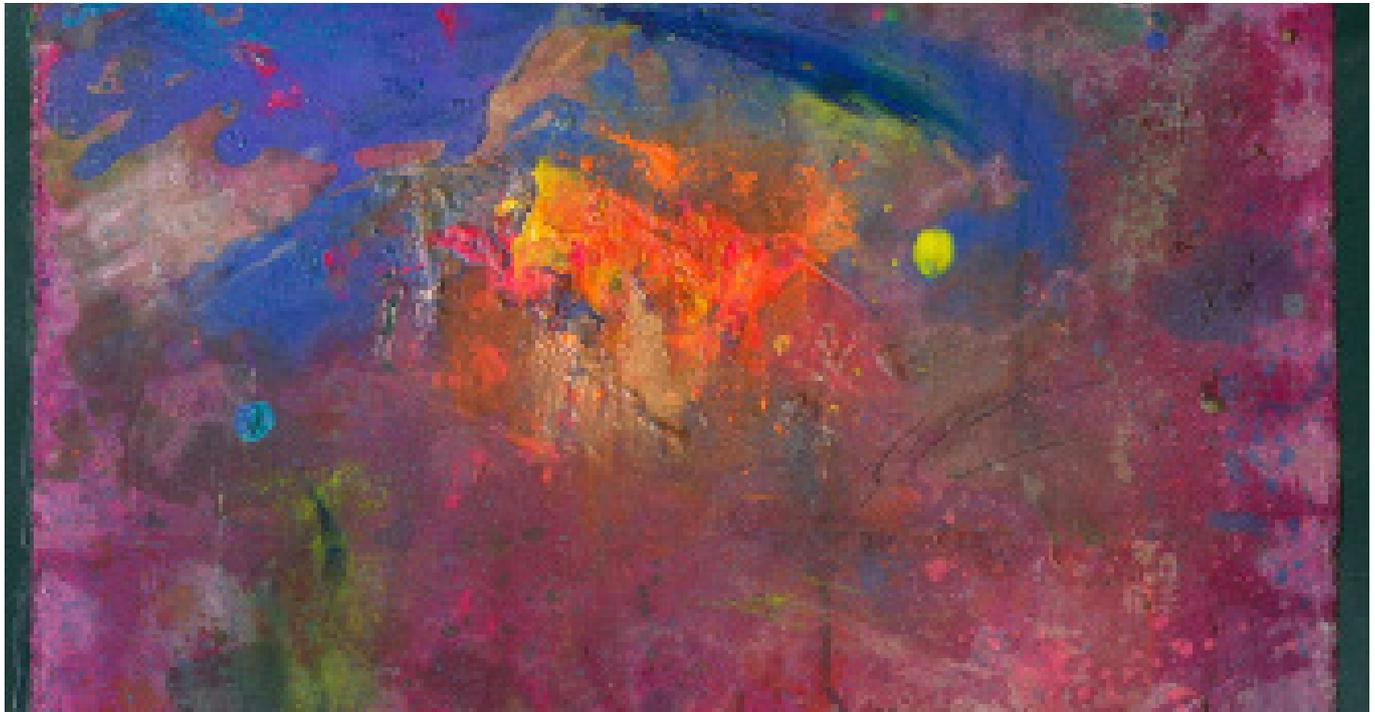


FRANK BOWLING

Roberta Smith, 'At 7 Art Galleries, the Ecstatic Flow of Paint and the Stories It Can Tell', The New York Times, 28 September 2018

The New York Times



Frank Bowling, *Hothead*, 2016, (detail)

Few truths about paint are more basic than this: it tends to go on wet, whether on canvas, furniture or buildings, and then it dries. Once dried, it can preserve a sense of its original fluidity to greatly varying degrees. In the postwar years it became a sure sign of modernity and freshness. It's dynamic, at times volcanic, like artistic genius is supposed to be, but it can also have a comedic, even ironic quality. It conveys immediacy, material reality, improvisation as well as flamboyance and glamour, *savoir faire*.

Giving full voice to the liquidity of paint has gone in and out of style since it was liberated in the 1940s by the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock, Janet Sobel and Norman Lewis. In the mid-1950s, Helen Frankenthaler opened further possibilities. Working on the floor, she thinned her paint to the consistency of water, creating floods and eddies of color that soaked into the canvas. Her techniques established the Color Field School in the United States. The Japanese artists of the Gutai took wetness to fabulous excesses, making it a lavalike substance. Things turned ironic with Andy Warhol's Oxidation series, achieved by the artist and others urinating on canvases painted with copper metallic paint.

Sometime in the 1970s, Color Field fell out of favor and visibly liquid paint had a much a lower profile. You could say it flowed underground. But it never went away, and right now,

seven shows in New York galleries give both its present and its recent past a new visibility.

The Guyana-born, London-educated painter Frank Bowling, now 86, imperiously takes Ezra Pound's famous battle cry to artists as the title of his show of recent work: "*Make It New*." What Mr. Bowling has been making new for much of his career is Color Field painting, messing it up with added images and references. When he was living in New York in the 1970s, the continents of Africa or South America sometimes floated behind his fluorescent fields of color. (Hints of them recur in "*Another Morrison as in Stuart*.")

Elsewhere, Mr. Bowling undermines the style's pristine aloofness and one-shot purity by adding bits of fabric, thread and whatnot. These make reference to craft and ritual, and to time, reconsideration and even decay. But Mr. Bowling refuses predictability: "*Drift I*" and "*Drift II*" (2018) are formally ironic, door-size canvases printed with bright stripes, each topped with an eruption of paint as thick as melted ice cream.