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Press Release

Frank Bowling Penumbra Light

Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse
10 June – 20 August 2022



Over the course of six decades, Sir Frank Bowling has relentlessly pursued a practice which boldly expands the properties of paint. For the artist's first solo presentation in Switzerland, coinciding with Zurich Art Weekend, 'Frank Bowling. Penumbra Light', displays recent abstract paintings made mostly during the London lockdown in 2020. Following a period of ill health for the artist in 2019, the works trace the renewed energy and dynamism that Bowling channelled in the studio during his recovery. His restless reinvention of the painted plane endures in this current body of work, which continues to break new ground through the artist's use of multi-layered washes, thick impasto textures, acrylic gels, stitched canvas and metallic and pearlescent pigments.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an eponymous catalogue by Hauser & Wirth Publishers, featuring texts by Arnolfini Bristol curator Gemma Brace and Ben Bowling, the artist's son. In October 2022, 'Frank Bowling's Americas' will open at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the first major survey of the artist's work by an American institution in more than four decades, which will travel to SFMOMA in San Francisco in 2023. In 2021, Bowling was awarded the Wolfgang Hahn Prize, and a presentation of the newly acquired painting 'Flogging the Dead Donkey' (2020) will go on view at Museum Ludwig, Cologne in November 2022.

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Born in Guyana in 1934, Bowling arrived in London in 1953, graduating from the Royal College of Art with the silver medal for painting in 1962. At the age of 88, he continues to work most days in his South London studio, forever driven by his fascination with the vast and radiant possibilities of paint. In Zurich, Bowling's latest body of work culminates in nine large-scale, luminescent canvases that celebrate the artist's achievements in exploring the properties of light, water and colour.

Employing a plethora of vivid hues in water-based paints, from acid greens and scorched yellows to neon pinks and deep reds, works such as 'Towards the Palace of the Peacock' (2020) and 'Up a Tree' (2021) evoke the vibrancy of past series, whilst highlighting a more relaxed and fluid approach to the artist's painterly process. Aided by chance, Bowling submerges many of his canvases in water, then layers pigmented washes and allows drips of paint to merge, swirl and run across the canvas. Bowling often intervenes in this process by using a handheld spray bottle to change the form and course of the running paint. Works such as 'Watermelon Bight' and 'Oriented Light' (both 2020) suggest the speed at which these droplets make their journey across the canvas. The themes of water, shorelines and memory are central to the works and are evoked through the dried areas of layered paint that become reminiscent of borders, as seen in 'Penumbral Lite' (2020), harking back to earlier series such as Bowling's Map paintings from the 1960s.

Drawing on memory and imagination, the works on view are largely inspired by early experiences of the light in Guyana, as well as the light surrounding the River Thames, which the artist crosses daily while travelling to his London studio. 'I think that living in the tropics is different from living in a more temperate light, and it's this that I want to portray...' states Bowling, 'my work is all about this experience.' By using pearlescent pigments, works such as 'The Pearl Poet' (2020) both masterfully emanate light and appear illuminated from within, contained through the artist's coating of turpentine and beeswax. In works such as 'Thunder in the Night' (2020), Bowling continues to play with translucency through patches of gel on the surface, revealing layers of paint and glitter below. 'The whole business of living is to reveal, and the special story about each life becomes much clearer if that person reveals themselves or is being transparent,' says Bowling.

Ambitious in scale and scope, Bowling's dynamic engagement with the materiality of his chosen medium in these works has resulted in paintings that continue to highlight the artist's unparalleled originality.

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Through this late body of work, 'Penumbra Light' is a testament to Bowling's pioneering spirit in revealing the intrinsic qualities of light through paint. The presentation in Zurich coincides with 'Frank Bowling and Sculpture' at Stephen Lawrence Gallery in London, the first exhibition to focus on the artist's sculptures and the sculptural aspects of his paintings.

Hauser & Wirth at Zurich Art Weekend

Coinciding with this exhibition at Limmatstrasse is a solo presentation of rarely exhibited paintings by American abstractionist Jack Whitten from the late 1960s. Bowling and Whitten were friends in New York in the 1960s and 70s, both at the forefront of abstract painting. In 1969, Bowling organised, curated and wrote the catalogue essay for the notable exhibition, '5+1,' at the State University of New York, Stony Brook and Princeton University, which showcased the work of five African American abstract artists, including Jack Whitten, as well as his own recent paintings. At Hauser & Wirth's space on Bahnhofstrasse 1, 'Facing Infinity. Alberto Giacometti & Pablo Picasso', curated by Dr. Dieter Buchhart opens on 9 June until 27 August.

About Frank Bowling

Sir Frank Bowling OBE RA has been hailed as one of the greatest living painters. Born in Guyana in 1934, Bowling arrived in London in 1953, graduating from the Royal College of Art with the silver medal for painting in 1962. By the early 1960s, he was recognised as an original force in London's art scene with a style combining figurative, symbolic and abstract elements.

After moving to New York in 1966, Bowling's commitment to modernism meant he was increasingly focused on material, process and colour, so that by 1971 he had abandoned the use of figurative imagery. Bowling's iconic 'Map Paintings' (1967-71), which include the stencilled landmasses of South America, Africa and Australia, embody his transition to pure abstraction. Bowling exhibited six large 'Map Paintings' in a solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971. From 1973 to 1978, Bowling experimented with ideas of chance and 'controlled accidents', pouring paint from a two-metre height to create his visually arresting 'Poured Paintings'.

Bowling became a Royal Academician in 2005. He was awarded the OBE for Services to Art in 2008 and a knighthood in the Queen's birthday honours in 2020. His work is represented in collections worldwide and has been exhibited in numerous group and solo exhibitions, including the 2017 – 2019 touring exhibition, 'Mappa Mundi,' and the hugely successful retrospective at Tate Britain in 2019. Bowling is the subject of a BBC documentary, 'Frank Bowling's Abstract World', which coincided with the opening of the Tate Retrospective.

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Opening hours:

Tue – Fri, 11 am – 6pm
Sat, 11 am – 5 pm

www.hauserwirth.com

Caption and courtesy information:

Frank Bowling
The Pearl Poet
2020
Acrylic on canvas
292.1 x 188 cm / 115 x 74 in
© Frank Bowling. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2022
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Sacha Bowling

Frank Bowling in his London studio
© Alastair Levy
Courtesy the artist Hauser & Wirth

Frank Bowling
Thunder in the Night
2020
Acrylic and acrylic gel on canvas with marouflage
280 x 188.4 x 5 cm / 110 1/4 x 74 1/8 x 2 in
© Frank Bowling. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2022
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Sacha Bowling

Frank Bowling
Penumbra Lite
2020
Acrylic on canvas
304.5 x 185 x 4.5 cm / 119 7/8 x 72 7/8 x 1 3/4 in
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Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Alex Delfanne