

JAMES LITTLE | BEYOND GEOMETRY – SELECTIONS



## JAMES LITTLE

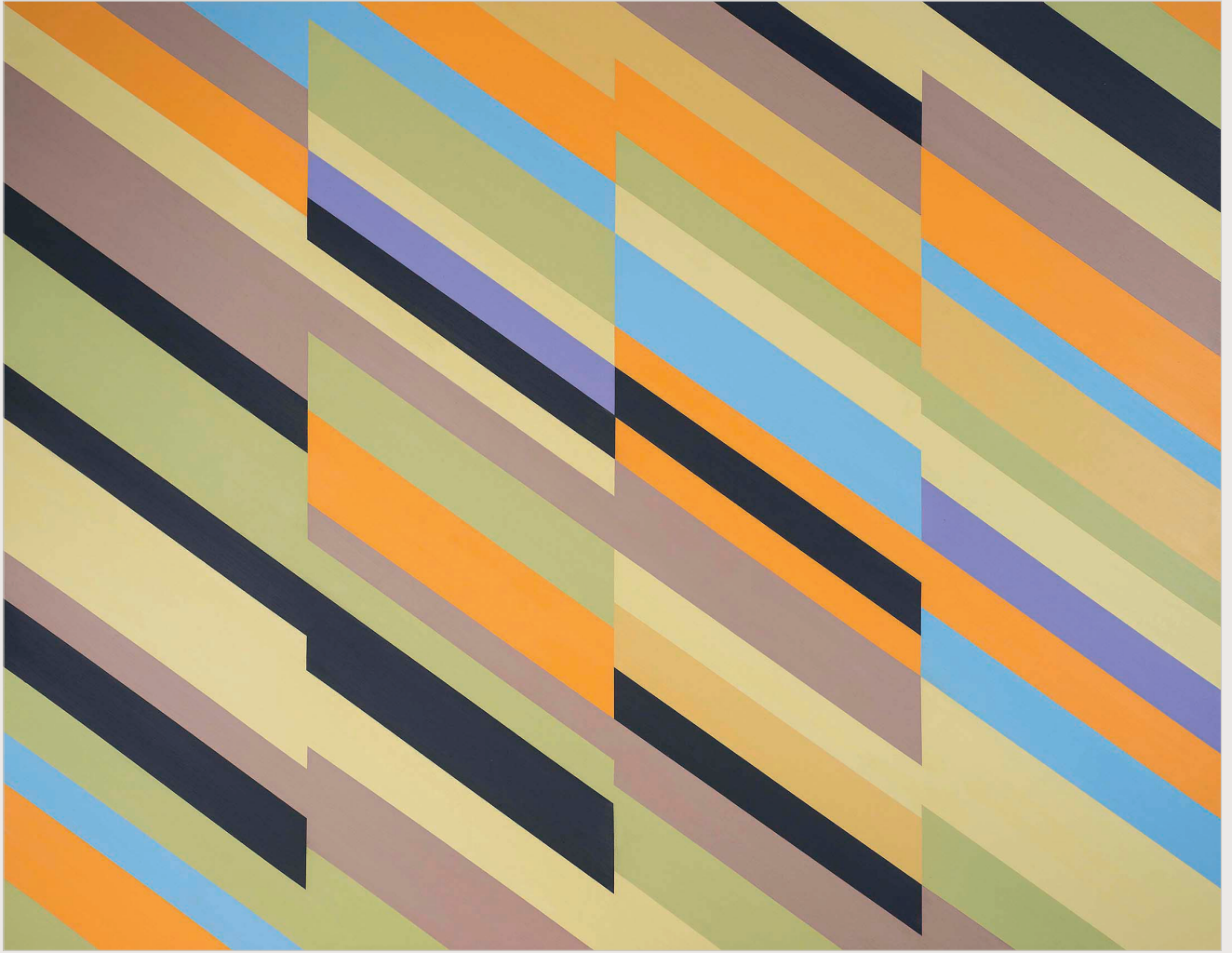
An artist's life shouldn't be the litmus test for an artist's work, yet biography can't help but inform vision. Each of us is the culmination of our respective experiences. An artist can no more be expected to shuck his individuality than the next person. The catch is that it is the artist's responsibility to create a world that, though inherently partaking of the self, stands firmly independent from it.

The power of art lies in its autonomy — in the ability to foster thoughts and feelings that even its creator may not be privy to. The painter James Little is wise to this seemingly contradictory pursuit. A veteran of the New York art world, Little has steadfastly maintained a distinctive take on geometric abstraction, staying true to hard-won truths that are no less seductive for their rigor. Staying above the fray of fashion, Little has proved stubbornly independent. This is all to the good. What is an artist if he isn't tenacious?

Born in Memphis, Tennessee, Little is a son of the working class — his father toiled in construction, his mother was a cook. The value of a job well done was instilled early on, as was, it should be stressed, a job done by hand. Working alongside his father and taking note of his mother's culinary gifts, Little gained practical understanding of the inescapable physicality of materials and the step-by-step nature of process. These lessons stick to this day: Little is nothing if not an impeccable craftsman. He makes his own paint — using, of all things, a kitchen blender to mix color — and builds each composition over the course of months.

Preparation is paramount. Oil paint, a notoriously difficult medium, is best handled with a degree of caution and an abundance of patience. Years of experimentation on Little's part have paid off in paintings whose tactility is unlike any seen in contemporary art. Little jokingly refers to himself as both scientist and alchemist. That goes some way in explaining his lustrous blend of oil and beeswax. Applied with a palette knife — that is, of course, after a thorough priming of the canvas surface — Little arrives at textures and colors unique in their density and richness.

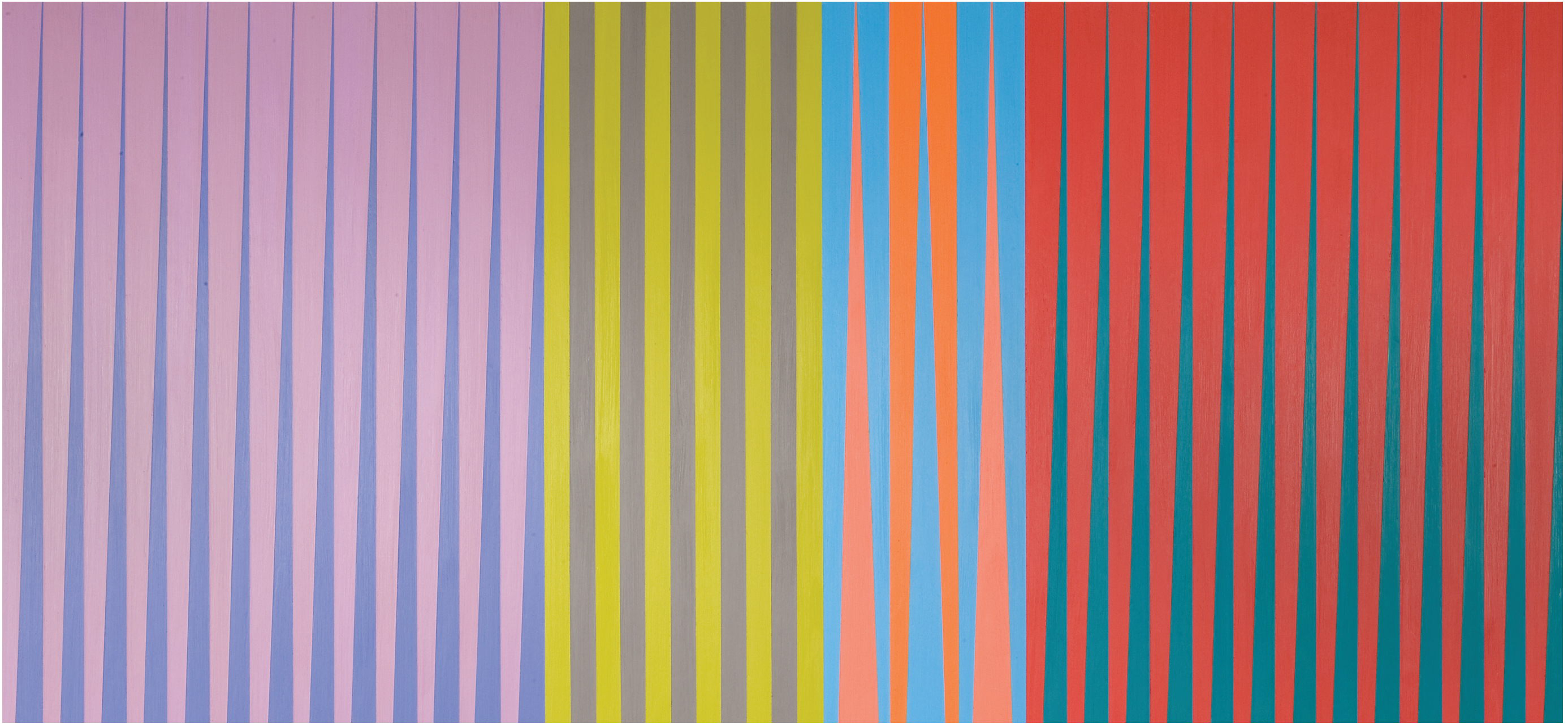
Methodical though Little may be, intuition is vital to the realization of the work. Rooted in the studio but attuned to the world outside of its confines, Little alternates patterns and colors with a musicality characterized by its resonance and vitality. How much mileage can be gained from forms as anonymous and sleek as stripes, triangles and angles? As Little proves, plenty.



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*Titian's Cube*, 2016, Oil and wax on canvas, 72.5 x 78 inches





*Near Miss*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 74 x 96 inches



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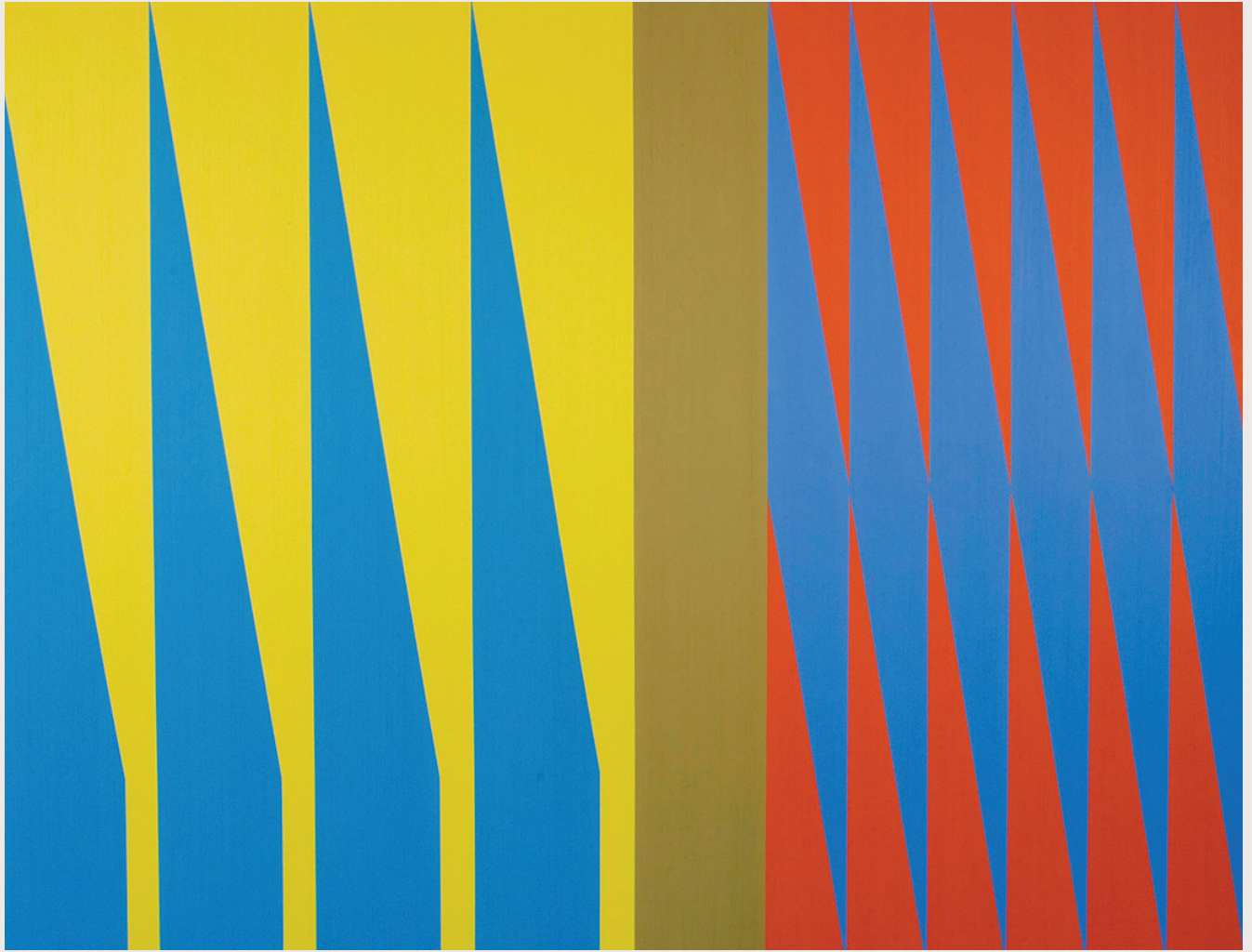
Juxtaposition is key, rhythm the motor, and scale the locus of drama. The kick-step frontality of *Picasso's Funeral* (2006) and the silky veils of pigment cascading through *American Dreamers Denied* (2011) are keyed to the human form. Each picture is a bit taller than life-size and a bit wider than arm's length, creating a vertiginous sense of space and speed, of sensations that, in equal measure, engulf and transport the viewer.

And color? Color provides poetry. Little's palette ranges far-and-wide in temperature, atmosphere and saturation. He's no less capable shuttling the vibrant oranges and greens in *Legacy of Thieves and Pundits* (2009) than employing the magisterial grays that serve as a buffer for *American Dreamers Denied*. Color is the most allusive and unruly of pictorial elements. Little employs it with rare and enviable aplomb.

Painting is a visual medium: the meaning of a specific picture — its worth, really — is generated from the orchestration and appeal of its form. Still, the role of titles in Little's art bears consideration. What can be gleaned from the words attached to a non-representational image? *Picasso's Funeral* refers to the famed Spanish painter. *Near Miss* connotes a sense of vulnerability as well as serving as a tongue-in-cheek reference to genealogy and geography. (Little's family hailed from Mississippi.) The aforementioned *American Dreamers Denied* glances upon politics, and previous of Little's titles have touched upon figures and currents in U.S. history.

As an African-American artist, Little brings a particular range of experience and a sweeping breadth of interest to his art — everything from growing up in a segregated culture to the inspiration derived from Tiziano Vecelli, the 16th-century Venetian painter name-checked in *Titian's Cube*. So, yes, biography matters — not as a literal marker of one man's life, but as an indicator of the multiplicity of forces that shape his art. The work of James Little redounds, with consummate skill and underplayed authority, on the art of painting and the pleasures attendant to it.

## Mario Naves



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*Picasso's Funeral*, 2006, Oil and wax on canvas, 76 x 98 inches

Cover: *Legacy of Thieves and Pundits*, 2009, Oil and wax on canvas, 72.5 x 94 inches (detail)

## **499** PARK AVENUE / The Lobby Gallery

Park Avenue and 59th Street, New York, NY 10022

Gallery hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM - 6:00 PM

This brochure celebrates the exhibition "**James Little: Beyond Geometry**", which opened in the Lobby Gallery at 499 Park Avenue on July 20, 2020.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

499 Park Avenue, through its exhibition program, actively contributes to the cultural community as an expression of ongoing commitment to excellence in the visual arts and architecture.

We thank the artist, James Little, for the loan of these paintings.

CURATORS        Jay Grimm, Jay Grimm Art Advisory; Lenore Goldberg, Hines

ESSAY            Mario Naves

### **ABOUT MARIO NAVES**

Mario Naves is an artist, critic and teacher based in New York City. His work is represented by Elizabeth Harris Gallery. Naves's writing has been published in *The New York Observer*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Slate*, *The New Criterion* and other publications.

### **ABOUT JAY GRIMM ART ADVISORY**

Jay Grimm is an independent arts professional with over 25 years of experience in the New York gallery world.

For more information about this exhibition and program, please contact [Jay@jaygrimm.com](mailto:Jay@jaygrimm.com), (T): 917.690.0035.



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