

David Zwirner

New York London Paris Hong Kong

By Land, Air, Home, and Sea: The World of Frank Walter

Curated by Hilton Als

June 2–July 29, 2022
34 East 69th Street, New York



Frank Walter in his studio in St. John's, Antigua, n.d. (c. 1975). © Kenneth M. Milton Fine Arts.

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of work by Antiguan artist, writer, and polymath Frank Walter (1926–2009) at the gallery's East 69th Street location in New York, curated by Hilton Als.

This focused exhibition follows the solo show of Walter's work presented at David Zwirner London in 2021 as well as the celebrated retrospectives held at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, in 2020 and the Pavilion of Antigua and Barbuda at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. Organized in collaboration with the artist's family, *By Land, Air, Home, and Sea: The World of Frank Walter* will center on Walter's relationship to Antigua through a range of works that express his intimate connection to nature, landscape, and place.

As Als writes:

I didn't know a thing about [Frank Walter] that spring day in Venice [in 2017] when I arrived at the Pavilion of Antigua and Barbuda, but it was as if my eyes and my heart recognized him at once. Not only as a master artist, but as a maker of a universe completely his own, grown out of the richness and debris that sometimes characterizes the life of a West Indian island dweller who is not rich, who must make a world out of making do. It seemed to me, that afternoon ... that Frank did everything, and wanted to do everything....

Looking at his paintings, none very large, all detailed, was like looking through a scrim at someone else's dreams. You could see every line, every color, but you had to peer past his poetic resolve not to tell everything, not to reveal all the world but to show all the world in fragments—a palm tree here, a house there, a dog there, a woman here—because it was truer to what he knew: taking the fragments that life gave him, building on that and making it whole....

One gets the sense, in looking at Walter's rivers and sky, that his perspectives were hard-won: he doesn't just look at a bank and water, he pulls back, rather like a cinematographer—he had a great interest in

photography, too—to get at the poetic essence of a scene. This requires aloneness, and silence: you have to listen to your own feet falling as you traverse this or that landscape, looking not for the right moment but for the decisive moment that Henri Cartier-Bresson told us about so long ago, and that remains vibrant in Walter's work. His work is filled with correct moments, even when the image is obviously a work of the imagination, as in his portraits of people...

In a way the work is all about him, and how he saw in a very particular way the blood and joy of history as it filled his eyes and shaped his hands and mind [and it] is about the articulation of a particular kind of experience: race without ideology, fantasy without apology, the natural world on its own terms as it meets the particularities of the artist's eye.¹

On the occasion of the exhibition, a catalogue will be published by David Zwirner Books. Edited by Hilton Als, the publication will include new texts by Als, Peter Doig, Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, Barbara Paca, and Charlie Porter.

Frank Walter (1926–2009) created a vast body of work that encompasses a variety of media, styles, and formats. His paintings range from highly individualistic, vividly colored landscapes, to formally inventive and probing portraits, to systematic, abstract compositions, all rendered in the artist's own absorbing palette and distinctive visual style.

Walter was born Francis Archibald Wentworth Walter, on Horsford Hill, Antigua, in 1926. From a young age, Walter's intellect was apparent to his family, and he quickly gained the admiration and respect of his local community. Feeling a deep connection to his native land, Walter studied agriculture and the sugar industry—the basis of Antigua's economy—and at the age of twenty-two, he became the first person of color to work as a manager within the Antiguan Sugar Syndicate, where he helped modernize harvesting and production methods and also sought to improve the status and labor conditions of the workers. He spent much of the 1950s traveling and learning advanced agricultural and industrial techniques in England, Scotland, and West Germany. During this time, he experienced the depths of racism and bias against people of color, and he often resorted to working as a day laborer to get by. While in Europe, Walter pursued a variety of creative and artistic outlets, including drawing and painting as well as writing prose, philosophical texts, and poetry.

The artist returned to the Caribbean in 1961, where, in addition to painting, drawing, and writing, he began making sculptures, photographs, and sound recordings. In the early 1990s, Walter designed and built his home and studio on Bailey Hill in Antigua, where he spent the remainder of his time in relative isolation, reflecting, writing, and making art inspired by his thoughts, knowledge, journeys, and surroundings.

In addition to his retrospectives at the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, in 2020 and the Pavilion of Antigua and Barbuda at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017, Walter has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Harewood House, Leeds, UK, in 2017 and The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College, Dublin, in 2013. In 2019, his art was featured at the 58th Venice Biennale as part of the group exhibition *Find Yourself: Carnival and Resistance*, exploring Carnival in the culture of Antigua and Barbuda, curated by Barbara Paca and Nina Khrushcheva, and his work was included in the group exhibition *Get Lifted!*, curated by Hilton Als for Karma Gallery, New York, in 2021.

¹ Hilton Als, exhibition text for *By Land, Air, Home, and Sea: The World of Frank Walter*, David Zwirner, New York, 2022.

The Frank Walter Catalogue Raisonné project is currently being undertaken by the Walter family and Barbara Paca.

Hilton Als became a staff writer at *The New Yorker* in 1994, a theater critic in 2002, and chief theater critic in 2013. He began contributing to the magazine in 1989, writing pieces for *The Talk of the Town*. Als was previously a staff writer for *The Village Voice* and an editor at large at *Vibe*. He has also written articles for *The Nation*, *The Believer*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *4Columns*, among other publications. His first book, *The Women*, a meditation on gender, race, and personal identity, was published in 1996 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. His 2013 book, *White Girls* (McSweeney's), was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism.

Als is the recipient of numerous awards, including a 2000 Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing, the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism for 2002–2003, and a Windham Campbell Prize for Nonfiction in 2016. In 2017, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism. The same year, he was the recipient of the Langston Hughes Medal, and he was awarded the Clark Prize for Excellence in Arts Writing in 2022.

In 2015, Als cocurated, with Anthony Elms, a retrospective of Christopher Knowles's work at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. In 2016, he produced a six-month survey of art and text at The Artist's Institute, New York, and organized *Desdemona for Celia by Hilton*, an exhibition of work by Celia Paul, at the Metropolitan Opera's Gallery Met in New York. Als curated the critically lauded exhibitions *Alice Neel, Uptown* (2017), which traveled from David Zwirner, New York, to Victoria Miro, London and Venice, and *God Made My Face: A Collective Portrait of James Baldwin* at David Zwirner, New York (2019). Recent exhibitions he has curated include *She Who Is: Adrienne Kennedy and the Drama of Difference*, Artists Space, New York (2020); *Get Lifted!*, Karma, New York (2021); *Frank Moore*, David Zwirner, New York (2021), and *Toni Morrison's Black Book*, David Zwirner, New York (2022). He is curating a series of three successive exhibitions for the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, of the work of Celia Paul (2018), Lynette Yiadom-Boakye (2019), and Njideka Akunyili Crosby (2022) and is preparing an exhibition inspired by Joan Didion's life and work for the Hammer Museum, UCLA.

Als is a teaching professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and an associate professor of writing at Columbia University's School of the Arts. He has taught at Princeton University, Smith College, Wellesley College, Wesleyan University, and the Yale School of Drama. He lives in New York City.

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