

JAS KNIGHT

Terrain is the first solo exhibition in Europe by Brooklyn-based painter, Jas Knight. Bringing together multiple strands of his practice in an ambitious survey of works spanning the past five years, portraiture and genre paintings based in West Africa are seen in parallel with a series of his acclaimed master copies and studies. Through his refined application of oil painting techniques, Knight translates his love of art history into moving portraits of modern people doing everyday 21st century things.

Knight's depictions of the daily rhythm of urban life in Senegal – drawn from personal experience whilst travelling in the region – are the fruit of an adventure that began with reading the American scholar and cultural historian David Brion Davis' writings on the Senegambia region of West Africa during the 17th and 18th centuries, and encountering the work of orientalist painters such as Alberto Pasini and Marià Fortuny whilst a student of Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the oldest art academy and museum in the United States.

The rich and vivid culture produced by the syncretism of African and Arab cultures inspires Knight's motivic language of arabesque architecture and brightly-coloured patterned fabrics, here enveloped in soft, hazy vignettes of daily circumstance and commonality. In contrast to more linear academic painting styles, his economical and effusive use of paint foregrounds the effects of mass, texture and light, as well as the relationship between perception and memory. Whilst his portraits, capturing a mixture of friends, acquaintances and strangers in and from the region, reflect on and implicitly subvert the traditional relationship between sitter, painter, viewer upheld by the art historical canon.

Concerned deeply with the application of form, tonality, composition, Knight's commitment to his own draughtsmanship is honed through an ongoing series of master copies from Diego Velázquez to Jean-Léon Gérôme, allowing him not only to refine his technique but embody the perception of other artists, a way to truly see a painting and establish forms of communion with history, its many deep-rooted challenges and emotional and technical discoveries.

Included in *Terrain*, are master copies of *Bashi-Bazouk* by Gérôme; *Henriette Goldschmidt*, *Elizabeth Winthrop Chanler*, *Manuel García* and *Venetian Bead Stringers* by Singer Sargent; *Murzynka* by Anna Bilińska-Bohdanowicz; *The Barber of Suez* by Bonnat; *Ferdinando Brandani* and *Portrait of Juan de Pareja* by Velázquez; and *Portrait of Samuel Ampzing* by Frans Hals, paintings held museums around the world – from the National Museum in Warsaw to the Museo del Prado in Madrid, Buffalo Albright-Knox Art Gallery in upstate New York and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in the heart of Manhattan.

Knight further cites the work of British painter Euan Uglow and Ettore Tito as sources of inspiration, with particular reference to the power of design and unwavering authenticity of their works. For Knight, painting contains a problem-solving element: how to utilise the senses and elicit emotion.

His portraits reflect a desire to speak plainly to people – from the most innocent child to the most learned of the elderly – “to be like the last traces of the sun’s wrath on the clouds of evening, a thing seen and appreciated.” Knight periodically chooses decorative historic frames for his artworks, the rolling acanthus ornaments functioning like trills in a baroque fugue, pushing the margins of his portraits.

Jas Knight (b. 1977, Connecticut, US) graduated from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, US, where he earned his BFA in painting. The recipient of a Greater Hartford Arts Council Innovation Grant and a Leonard Andrews Foundation Scholarship, Knight’s work is held in esteemed public collections in America including the Studio Museum Harlem, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Yale University, and the US Department of State Collection. In 2023 Knight was featured in the exhibition *In Search of Juan de Pareja: From Arturo Schomburg to Jas Knight* at the Hispanic Society Museum & Library in New York in conjunction with *Juan de Pareja, Afro-Hispanic Painter* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.