



Photos by Ben Torres/Special Contributor

About four years ago, Otis Jones began to receive long-overdue recognition as a formidable painter of international stature. His works are on view at the “New Paintings” show at the Barry Whistler Gallery in Dallas.

VISUAL ART

Artist savors the unprime of life

View the works of an internationally famous Dallas painter you’ve probably never even heard about

Artist Otis Jones has lived and worked in Dallas for the better part of his career, decades actually. Now, by appointment only, you can see his latest work at Barry Whistler Gallery, local recognition of Jones’ high profile abroad.

About four years ago, a seismic shift occurred, one that reversed Jones’ underappreciated place in the local art world. He began to receive long-overdue recognition as a formidable painter of international stature.

How could this have happened? Is there something that the New York gallerist Marc Straus knows, or Sunday-S and Sorry We’re Closed — galleries in Copenhagen and Brussels, respectively — that collectors, museum directors and curators here do not? Over the last several years, these galleries have all mounted sold-out shows in their spaces and through the art fair circuit.

A major retrospective pairing Jones and one of his older peers, Ron Gorchov, is tentatively scheduled for January 2021 at the Fondation CAB in Brussels, as well as the publication of a book covering his entire career. What’s going on?

You can draw your own conclusions by visiting the exhibition “Otis Jones: New Paintings,” where 10 pieces in various sizes reveal Jones’ artistic authority.

Jones, 74, is more than seven years removed from a double lung transplant, and it seems as if nothing has been able to tear him away from working in the studio. His style of painting is the result of exposure to several art history precedents.

From the New York School of abstract painting, Jones developed an admiration for Clyfford Still’s varied and textured surfaces. Jones came of age during the heyday of minimalism, which explains the reductive and spare aspects found in his meticulously worked pieces and unusual frame supports.

The latter find their source in post-minimalism, notably the work of Eva Hesse, whose exploration of materials and anti-empirical shapes and forms led Jones away from strict geometry



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Details

“Otis Jones: New Paintings” runs through July 25 at Barry Whistler Gallery, 315 Cole St., No. 120, in the Dallas Design District. By appointment only. Free. barrywhistler-gallery.com.

and other minimalist dogma that eschewed revealing the hand of the artist.

Additionally, adding and subtracting thick and copious amounts of paint with a palette knife, found in Leon Golub’s work in the 1970s and ’80s, reveals the final piece of the puzzle. Jones distilled these four precedents from the modernist tradition into a highly original expression of a mature, recognizable, signature style.

Going back to the Renaissance, images provided the basis for one of two ways to depict reality, either a window through which to view the world or a mirror held up to it. In some contemporary art this still applies, but abstract art denatured these categories.

In Jones’ case, he raised the stakes by undermining the so-called purity of the picture plane, something dear to devout abstract artists, by revealing his technique to the viewer and foregrounding the status of his pieces as objects themselves. What’s unfinished in the mind of the purist, like unprimed canvas and the presence of staples and glue, is precisely what Jones perceives as finished.

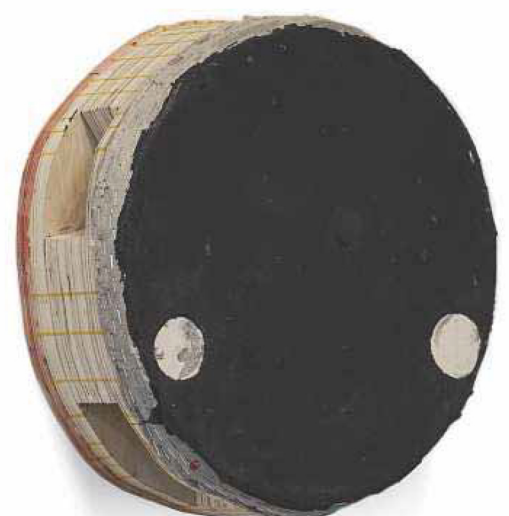
This is evident in the two strongest pieces in the show, *Black Circle with Two Raw Canvas Circles* and *Red Oxide and Gray Circles on Black Wash*. The former is a black-surfaced sculpture supported by natural wood with traces of glue running across the sides. The red oxide painting defies symmetry, set over a washed-out gray color field, a mysterious conundrum that simultaneously expresses both Jones’ freedom and restraint.

Every piece in this exhibition is the product of hours of intense labor dealing with an array of media. He may make it look easy, but nothing excellent ever is.

John Zotos is a Dallas-based art critic and essayist.



Black and Red Circles on White, 2020



Black Circle with Two Raw Canvas Circles, 2020