

An abstract painting by James Faure Walker, featuring a dense and vibrant composition of colors and textures. The palette includes shades of blue, green, yellow, orange, red, purple, and black, applied with thick, expressive brushstrokes. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and complex visual relationships.

**C L I F F O R D  
C H A N C E**

**JAMES FAURE WALKER: PAINTINGS AND SIGHTINGS**  
9 MAY 2022 - 8 MAY 2023

# JAMES FAURE WALKER

James Faure Walker has been an artist for over fifty years, starting his studies at art school in 1966 when the institutions were a hotbed of debate about what contemporary art was, and should be; the emergent Conceptual Art artists clashing with American influenced Abstract formalist painters, and the socially engaged agitprop artists locking horns with the more traditional realists. At the centre of these rippling torrents, James Faure Walker has independently followed his own course – avoiding the didactic, preferring doubt, questioning, investigating, ever open to experimentation (and experience). ‘I have more time for ditherers like (the French painter) Bonnard’ he has written. James’ paintings are assured, without being bombastic, they can appear tentative whilst retaining authority. Looking closely at his large canvases is to get lost in a fluctuating world of colour and light, leaving the viewer, in the sometime unfashionable concept for contemporary art, with a surfeit of pleasure.

Building on our previous Concourse displays of large-scale paintings from the 1980s - by artists such as John Hoyland, Clyde Hopkins, Mali Morris, John McLean, Frank Bowling amongst others – we are delighted that James has given us the opportunity to show some major paintings of his created in that period, along with more recent works. In 1976 James was a founding editor of the influential art magazine *Artscribe*, which was set up to ensure that practising artists could get their voice heard amongst the hectoring of powerful and opinionated art critics. Its remit was wide, not exclusively dedicated to abstract art, and embracing all tendencies. One of the critics who James employed was Stuart Morgan, who later wrote of James’ own work ‘His doubt may lead to one of those careers which bridges older and newer practice, and which opens more doors than it closes’.

By this, he may have been referring to James’s passion for that most English of art pursuits: the watercolour, which he continues to paint daily, executed at speed, and his early take-up of the computer in his art. Before Photoshop, in 1988 Faure Walker began using an Apple II, with the Dos interface, and a basic Image Artist programme to *draw* digitally, and continues, with the latest technology, to complete digital images, which may be incorporated into his hand-painted artworks. He is considered a pioneer in the digital art field, with the Victoria & Albert Museum acquiring over 25 of his works (the Canary Wharf Group were also early collectors of these images) and the author of the well regarded *Painting the Digital River: How an Artist Learned to Love the Computer*, published in 2006.

It is a great thrill to be able to show James Faure Walker’s paintings in the Concourse, several of which have not been seen for many a year. And, over the next year, to introduce a new audience to these wonderful, and important, works. The firm’s Art Committee is deeply appreciative of the artist’s generosity in extending such a long loan.

Nigel Frank

The Clifford Chance art collection



*Lazy Afternoons* 1979 oil on canvas 170 x 488cm

'*Lazy Afternoons* was shown in 1979 at the Hayward Gallery. I was one of five artists invited to select a section of the Hayward Annual. What of the title, the loose brush-work, the apparent easy-going atmosphere? It actually took some effort to get that feeling across, years of working with grids, systems, what the artist Bert Irvin called 'visual carpentry'. That was now discarded. Here I was improvising blindly, seeing what would happen: it could be fluid, include anything from the sublime to the trivial. The colour scheme of the right-hand panel was taken from the chow mein I had just had for lunch.' JFW



*Spring, Homage to Ivon Hitchens* 1982 oil on canvas 170 x 305cm

'*Spring, Homage to Ivon Hitchens* was shown at the prestigious John Moores Painting Prize exhibition in 1982 in Liverpool. It is moody, an impressionistic reverie with an armature. The artist Ivon Hitchens was a true individualist. He could evoke a woodland glade without the foliage - just a languid sweep of the brush, glorious and lyrical.' JFW



*Heron Island* 1984 oil on canvas 170 x 305cm

'*Heron Island* was shown in my one-person exhibition at the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester, in 1985. In 1983 I had been invited to Australia to be an artist-in-residence in Melbourne, and to undertake a lecture tour. I was determined to see the Great Barrier Reef, and that proved a turning point. On my return to the UK I decided that painting needed my full attention, and I left Artscribe. In the catalogue I wrote:

*What I saw exceeded my expectations. It was like being inside the most magical painting, with points of iridescence all around you, dangerous shadows roaming beneath, stripes of colour arranged in perfect intervals; and yet this was entirely the work of nature – how absurd it is that in art the word conjures up soft cultivated fields and makes the tropical life of a coral reef seem bizarre.'* JFW

In the catalogue essay for my Whitworth Gallery exhibition, I said that “I wanted to see a crisper, more electric, autonomous, kind of painting”, one that would connect with watching TV or driving. I found the answer. I discovered I could use paint software alongside regular paint. There were just eight colours and pixels like Lego, but it clicked with the way I used colour. I adjusted to the new mindset, applying the kaleidoscopic chaos of computer graphics to the slow chemistry of oil paint. Computer power increased drastically year on year. I was rudderless, with no history, no rules to fall back on, but a digital art movement emerged, principally in Germany, Holland and the USA. The mainstream art world didn't take much interest.

So, my ideas were thrown in the air. There were other currents. In the eighties abstract painting was running into trouble. Its ban on imagery, its air of historical self-importance, its dependence on the New York School, all this was looking stale. A swathe of new painting, rich with imagery and reckless creativity, skipped past the taboos. Being 'right' didn't matter as much as being alive to what was going on.' JFW



*Train Ticket to Milan* 2007 oil on canvas 173 x 213cm

'I am showing three paintings made some twenty years later. Did it really take me that long to absorb the lessons of the new technology? Perhaps it did. But these later paintings may express what was latent in the earlier work. The title *Train Ticket to Milan* came from a dream. I had been to a Eurographics conference in Milan, spending hours in the naval section of the Science Museum, photographing early aviation. In the early hours I walked the length of the city accompanied by a professor of electronic engineering from Sussex University. He had worked alongside Turing in Manchester. I was now using stencils and projectors. These enabled me to integrate what was drawn digitally with what was painted on canvas. This painting was shown in a Hilton hotel window facing Trafalgar Square in 2007, as part of a London Group exhibition. My painter friends till then had been ambivalent if not outright sceptics about computers. For the first time they paused, and said: how did you do that then?' JFW



*Marsh Harrier* 2016 oil on canvas 137 X 173cm

'*Marsh Harrier* was first shown at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 2017. Imagining the viewpoint of a bird of prey is a compelling idea. This picture had a long genesis, which included incorporating a passage from a Sam Francis lithograph. It wasn't till late in the process that I thought of introducing the Marsh Harrier. I had often observed them through a zoom lens. Digital devices expand immeasurably the range of what painting – and TV documentaries - can make intelligible, everything from the complexity of the night sky, to the vertiginous perspective of a bird of prey.' JFW



*Coastal* 2019 oil on canvas 155 x 173cm

'I enjoy the coast of Suffolk. When staying there I am drawing trees, hedgerows, or impossible tangles of brambles. Moving between digital paint, oil, watercolour, and drawing keeps me on my toes. The switch of technique lets me glimpse a motif before it runs away, something as simple as a place for cobalt turquoise – a potent pigment - or for the silhouette of an oak, subliminally transferred from digital drawing to canvas.' JFW



*James Faure Walker 1987*, photographer Jonathan Bayer

James Faure Walker (born 1948) studied at St Martins School of Art (1966-70) and the Royal College of Art (1970-72). He was a co-founder of *Artscribe* magazine in 1976, going on to edit it for eight years. Exhibitions include the Hayward Annual (1979), John Moores Painting Prize (1982, 2002), Serpentine Summer Show (1983), a solo exhibition at the Whitworth, Manchester (1985). He has been using computers in painting since 1988. He exhibited eight times at *SIGGRAPH*, USA, and regularly at *DAM*, Berlin. He won the 'Golden Plotter' at Computerkunst, Germany in 1998. His *Painting the Digital River* (Prentice Hall) was published in the USA in 2006, winning a New England Book Show Award. He has 28 works in the V&A Collection, and his work was shown there in *Digital Pioneers* in 2009. He won the Royal Watercolour Society (RWS) Award in 2013. He is Honorary Curator of the RWS. Recent solo shows include ARB, Cambridge, Class Room, Coventry, and Felix and Spear, London. Until 2014 he was Reader in Painting and the Computer at Chelsea College of Art.

# CLIFFORD CHANCE

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The works are for sale. For further information, contact [nigel.frank@cliffordchance.com](mailto:nigel.frank@cliffordchance.com)

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The Artist is represented by Felix and Spear, London  
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Front cover image: Detail from *Heron Island* 1984, oil on canvas

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