

FROELICK GALLERY

TERRELL JAMES

Artist Statement

Stanzas

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Drawing has been central to my practice as a painter, printmaker and sculptor. I can remember being fascinated by the power I felt as a small child when holding a pencil to paper, changing the plane through the surprising new line I had made. I drew every day as a child, encouraged by the seemingly endless supply of paper provided by my grandfather's printing company, Southern Printing. I could make a drawing of ladies with flowers in their hats as a five-year-old and have four color separation prints made as cards for fun.

As my work developed, I continued to draw almost daily, sketching faces in the crowd, figures in film, bones and fossils I had collected. Drawing has given me a sense of place within my awareness, a way of being conscious. The field of organic material has been an important source, as has the exploration of various art making materials.

And so we come to a show exclusively of drawings. Several years ago, artist friends in Portland introduced me to the stone paper that supports the pieces in *Stanza*, the current exhibition here at Froelick Gallery. This paper has opened new ways of drawing through its unusual properties.

I discovered the paper's ability to absorb marks and stains. Unlike paper made of cotton or wood pulp, the stone paper resists the immediate soaking in of pigment. This allows me the secondary method of removing stain, lightening the color once it is applied. This wiping away can be seen as a sort of erasing. One can see this clearly in the pieces called *Barnacles*, *Bloom* and *Cliff 1*, shown here.

The drawings in the exhibition coincide with a major work I completed in 2021, in the one-hundred-foot-long roll drawing called *Terrain*, shown in Hampshire, England in a centuries old dairy barn. In that piece I learned to let the image coalesce, bleed, form on the beautiful surface of this paper, which looks like plaster. So, the material has had a luminous effect in the pieces included here. A freedom evolved through my working on this monumental scale continuously for four and a half months.

The Burren came about after my visit to the stone landscape in western Ireland called the Burren. In that piece, one can see the rolling hills of the karst fields with their vast rocky expanse of limestone. Meanwhile the piece *Stanzas* records the environment in my Houston studio, looking at turtle shells, rocks and a can of paint brushes, and even a toothbrush. Other sources come from nature; this is true of *Barnacles*, which I have found in tidal pools along the Pacific Coast particularly.

Bad Fall refers to a time period. *Blessings* invokes my study of the artist Wols' works on paper. One finds its centrifugal form blasting out from the center, with its detailed ink drawing including a geological reference, echoing the German artist. *Keeping Things Whole* rings round in bouquet with plant material, incorporating collage from a paper maker in the Texas Hill Country with whom I sometimes to collaborate. *Bloom* shows the best qualities of what this remarkable paper allows, in its layering and washes. *Threads 4 and 5* continue the investigation.

Displacements, a horizontal landscape with two Egyptian eyes, comes from my concern about the many people being displaced from war and exile from their place of origin. The awareness of this problem was heightened when I saw a Tokyo exhibition in 2019 interviewing Japanese citizens displaced from the nuclear accident at Fukushima, their lives upended, and multi-generational homeland contaminated. A heartfelt loss came through the interviews. Of course, this recalls our country's displacement of the native people as well.

The series *Canvas* came about as a response to *Blind Folly*, an exhibition of Tacita Dean's work at Houston's Menil Collection. There are grand pieces along with very small postcard paintings, and I was taken by the impact of such very small works, and the dramatic shift in scale they represented. I wanted to explore the intensity of my drawing and painting on the 4 by 6-inch size. There is a potency to these small studies, and an interesting contrast to the more

open larger drawings. They can be place holders for larger gestures, remnants, notations; intimate but sometimes also monumental.

In the decades long evolving vocabulary of my work, continually ideas come from other artwork, objects in nature, the study of light as it embraces landscape, and a sense of place. In his book *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Keith H. Basso writes: "What do people make of places? The question is as old as people and places themselves, as old as human attachments to portions of the earth. [...] Places, we realize, are as much a part of us as we are part of them." These drawings bring forward the experience of place through memory and the process of drawing.

I'm very pleased to present this, my eleventh solo show with Froelick Gallery.

Basso, Keith H., *Wisdom Sits in Places; Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996, xiii; Also quoted in Stephanie Buhmann's essay *Terrell James; Witnessing Places*, catalogue for *Terrell James: Place for Two Stones*, 2007, Jason McCoy Inc. p6.

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