

Lesley Vance

Paintings, Watercolors

January 11 – February 23, 2025

Los Angeles

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to announce *Paintings, Watercolors*, an exhibition of new work by Lesley Vance. The exhibition will be on view in Los Angeles, where it will occupy two of the gallery's spaces at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl., from January 11 through February 23, 2025.

Vance's newest works find her entering into an ever more profound engagement with multiple legacies of painting. The exhibition features large- and medium-scale canvases, including several in formats that are new for the artist, along with a group of new watercolors. In addition to her perennial interests in color and visual movement, Vance experiments here with greater contrast between areas defined by expressive brushwork and those defined by uniform fields of color. The brushwork exudes a particularly active life of its own, providing clues to the unruly, emotionally fertile place from which the paintings begin.

As she endeavors to familiarize herself with the unknown or unpredictable facets of each painting, Vance also leaves room for processes that move her in the opposite direction, from the known back toward the unknown. A large-scale painting in a vertical format has been constructed from a sunny if acidic collection of blues, yellows, whites, and blacks. Viewed from afar, it points to Vance's long-standing interest in the pop-inflected Surrealism and serious-minded humor of the Chicago Imagists. Drop shadows that demarcate the edges of some of the curvilinear forms connote a traditional sense of three-dimensional space, but closer inspection initiates a gradual visual unraveling. Frayed, feathered, ribbon-like patches of yellow, black, and white threaten to dispel the notion that there is any distinction between foreground and background. Instead, Vance fully immerses herself in the calligraphic, elegant, impulsive, and exploratory potential of flatness and the sheer facts of oil paint on linen. These passages feel unadorned and honest, even when they hint at illusionistic effects and conjure the experience of light moving through liquid, for example, or the striations of materials as varied as hair and rock.

In addition to the constant circulation of form and color that is one of her primary goals, Vance has dedicated herself to establishing a circuit of interpretive positions in which historical references, ideas about perspective, and the representational capacities of painting are in flux. As a result, she shows how painting, as idea and object, is also a vehicle for emotional openness and surprise. This position has a corollary in the physical status of the works as they are in progress: the artist makes gestures wet-on-wet using slow-drying oil mediums, so that the paintings remain "open" until she deems their compositions resolved and can move onto the next phase of her process. Vance paints forms that appear to be actively undergoing change, but that feel paradoxically complete because of the ways in which they evoke the cyclical and transitional nature of many phenomena, including biological and geological as well as psychological ones. The development of the work involves locating elements in or through which this feeling of change is arrested and removing, transforming, and honing them until the eye is put into motion once again.

The watercolors provide Vance with a more intimate forum in which to allow her materials to compose sense and meaning on their own terms. Such intimacy is both the result of scale—each is 26 x 20 inches—and the closeness of touch that the medium is able to record. The back-and-forth of Vance's brush takes on, by proportion, a role equal to color and geometry in the making of the compositions. This brings increased attention to their surfaces, which, by retaining less depth of field than the surfaces of the paintings, function as condensed slabs of light. Here the entire trajectory of her development as an artist comes into view, from her earliest experiments with chiaroscuro to her more recent, entirely sui generis distillations of the luminous. These works speak simultaneously to the sun-sourced light of the natural world, the living dimension of the human inner world as a kind of light, and even the more fraught, backlit reality of contemporary digital life.

Throughout the show, Vance plays competing notions of real against one another. In some instances, she favors effects that transform open-ended gestures into seemingly palpable things with discernible visual weight. In others, she instinctively places her trust in the ability of paint to assert its own presence, channeling various strains of Abstract Expressionism and showing how chipping away at illusionism can be just as productive and generative as creating it.

In the watercolors and paintings alike, Vance continuously shows how oppositional tendencies in abstraction can co-exist, and how, when they do, the gradations between the elements of painting and the moods they communicate to viewers become more subtle—and more conceptually far-reaching. A watercolor featuring swaths of amber and blue is also dominated by unfurling waves of black, white, and grey that alternately embrace and overcome everything else around them. Inasmuch as those waves appear to have a will of their own, their status as living things—perhaps even living beings—exemplifies how Vance's abstraction always tends toward the real. Her pictures do things that other things in the known world do, even when they cannot be assigned to any particular category of animate or inanimate form, and even when they are clearly nothing more and nothing less than paintings.

Lesley Vance (b. 1977, Milwaukee) has been the subject of solo and two-person exhibitions at Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio (2023); FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2012); Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Bowdoin, Maine (2012); and the Huntington, San Marino, California (with Ricky Swallow, 2012). Recent group exhibitions include *50 Paintings*, Milwaukee Art Museum (2023); *Friends in a Field: Conversations with Raoul De Keyser*, Mu.ZEE, Oostende, Belgium (2022); *Aftereffect: O'Keeffe and Contemporary Painting*, Museum of Contemporary Art Denver (2019); *Painter Painter*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2013); and Whitney Biennial 2010, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Her work is in the permanent collections of institutions including the Dallas Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Milwaukee Art Museum; SFMOMA, San Francisco; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. An exhibition catalogue was published on the occasion of the artist's solo presentation at the Columbus Museum of Art in 2023. In 2019, Gregory R. Miller & Co. published a monograph surveying five years of Vance's work. Vance lives and works in Los Angeles.