DAVID
KORDANSKY
GALLERY

Abraham Lincoln Walker
After World, 1980–1991
November 13 – December 16, 2026
Los Angeles

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present *Abraham Lincoln Walker: After World, 1980–1991*, the gallery's first solo exhibition of paintings by Abraham Lincoln Walker (b. 1921, d. 1993), a visionary self-taught American artist whose extraordinary output was largely unknown during his lifetime. The exhibition will be on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from November 13 – December 16, 2026. An opening reception will be held on Friday, November 13, from 6 to 8 PM.

Focused on the period between 1980 and 1991, *After World* finds the artist at the height of his talents, synthesizing a lifelong preoccupation with the otherworldly and an intimate knowledge of paint as a medium. During these final years of his career, Walker moved away from overtly narrative figuration and into frenetic works of near abstraction that churn with biblical intensity. Rendered in oils ranging from burnt orange and rich browns to almost iridescent shades of purple, pink, and blue, sweeping strata of color capture fundamental contrasts, as if an ongoing struggle between light and darkness is unfolding within the pictorial plane. Though Walker had no formal art education, the relentless energy of his works evokes the awestruck tenor of Romantic painting and perhaps shares the movement's concerns with transcendence, vastness, judgment, and the ultimate fate of the spirit. But Walker's sublime is warped, made strange by a manipulation of paint so staggering it swallows viewers into its visual purgatory.

Abraham Lincoln Walker was born in Henderson, Kentucky, in 1921 and moved to East St. Louis, Illinois, in early childhood, where he spent the rest of his life. He was raised in the Church of God in Christ—a prominent African American Pentecostal denomination characterized by ecstatic, direct communion with God. This profoundly religious upbringing shaped the interests and imagery Walker would explore in his art throughout his career. Though he left the church as an adult, Walker's oeuvre indicates a constant grappling with questions of what lies beyond—not only after death, but behind the veil of reality. In the 1960s and 1970s, Walker honed a distinct figurative style that considered the Black experience in East St. Louis in atmospheric painted terms, interpreting economic depression and systemic racism into fragmented scenes of complex human interiority. This would mark the beginning of a remarkably generative artistic practice that produced a body of well-conserved paintings, most of which never left Walker's basement studio until after his death.

Walker owned a successful house painting business, and through his trade he refined his technical skills and experimented formally with different types of paint, surfaces, and application methods. Walker understood the behavior of paint, gaining expertise in his materials through decades of use. Over time, the artist developed techniques that maximize the intricacy of the painted field using a precise economy of gestures. Though the extent of Walker's engagement with art historical precedents is unclear, he was known to work hermetically and established a uniquely idiosyncratic approach over the course of his practice. The chaotic movement and vast depth achieved in the exhibited works can be traced to experiments in moving oils with a palette knife on butcher paper or Formica countertop samples, at times combining paint with small plastic beads and dragging the mixture across the surface to give a sense of illumination. In the final works, angular, highly intentional

press@davidkordanskygallery.com
www.davidkordanskygallery.com
Los Angeles: 323.935.3030
New York: 212.390.0079

knife strokes on the dense Masonite board or paper create a dramatic immediacy that draws the eye into and through their compositions. The culminating effect is at once muscular and fluid, restrained yet totally ungoverned, at times recalling the logical unpredictability of Surrealism.

Walker's late-practice layering methods allowed him to fuse figurative and abstract values into erupting, celestial panoramas, building thick layers of pigment directly onto the painting's surface that were then spread into arcing glides or angular shards of color. These multihued planes produce subjects porous to their metaphysical environments. In an undated work on paper, a Black woman's profile materializes from a maelstrom of color, rising like a massive plume of smoke. Refractions of light and pigment give *Untitled* (1982) a near-topographical treatment of space, as though an energetic presence is straining to break through. The mid-1980s sees Walker further transform the figure into a lyrical, open conception of the human, as forms emerge and retreat from luminous fractals: in an untitled work from 1984, the combined effect of diverse applications of paint results in something miraculously psychedelic. Vivid jewel tones bend across the painting while pieces of a woman's body—an arm and shoulder, the navel, an eye, lips—are being pulled outside their confines. Such compositions are so spatially upended as to become cosmological, interstellar scenes traveling through a blip of earthly time. Across this final period of artistic production, Walker seems to be trying to collapse the features of the physical world—whether bodies or occasional landscapes—with the unseen forces that constitute it, as if he could distill the very essence of the universe with paint.

Presented more than thirty years after his death, *Abraham Lincoln Walker: After World, 1980–1991* offers the artist long overdue recognition as a groundbreaking figure in twentieth-century painting. Often overwhelming and bracingly enigmatic, Walker's paintings may be approached as neither dystopian nor utopian, but as an attempt to reach into a concealed psychic realm where entire worlds are shattering and forming at the same time. From a basement in East St. Louis, he built a singular body of work unadulterated by dominant trends or art historical precedents. Though little is known about Walker's true motivations or influences, his vision is undeniable—its force undiminished by the mystery that surrounds it.

Abraham Lincoln Walker: After World, 1980–1991 is presented in collaboration with Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.

Walker rarely exhibited in his lifetime, organizing only a few small shows at local East St. Louis venues in the mid-1970s. He was the subject of a posthumous retrospective at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, IL (1995); and solo exhibitions at Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York (2025); and 10th Street Gallery, St. Louis (2013). Recent group exhibitions include *Afterlife*, curated by Paul Laster, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York (2026); *Black Artists in America: From the Bicentennial to September 11*, curated by Dr. Earnestine Lovelle Jenkins, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA (2025) and Dixon Gallery, Memphis, TN (2026); and *Inventing Abstraction: Nonrepresentational Self-Taught Art*, curated by Jay Gorney, SHRINE Gallery, New York (2026). His work is in the permanent collections of institutions including the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; and Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY.