



Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Surge*, 2021, Oil on linen, 59 x 64"

## JEREMY GILBERT-ROLFE *Paintings from 2009 to 2022*

May 18 - June 17, 2022

**David Richard Gallery, LLC**  
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Private viewings are available by appointment, please call or email the gallery to schedule. David Richard Gallery is pleased to present Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's presentation, *Paintings from 2009 to 2022*, his first solo exhibition in New York in a decade and debut with David Richard Gallery.

This presentation of fifteen paintings is organized in two groups. The largest includes the debut of nine new paintings created in Florida from 2016 through 2022. They are presented alongside a suite of five paintings from 2015, *Five Times During The Day*, that consider the light and corresponding colors and impressions during different times of day from early morning to sunset. The last, and earliest painting in the exhibition is a more rigorously geometric work from 2009 titled *Emanuel Shinwell Goes to University*, it's very subtle differences between adjacent dark colors gave rise to the first—an even darker grid painting—in the series *Five Times During The Day*. These last six paintings were the final works completed in California prior to Gilbert-Rolfe's move to Florida.

Gilbert-Rolfe's interest in the viewing experience is what ties his various works and approaches together, first is exploration of the surfaces followed by the use of color to create a "projection [ . . . ] into the space between [the painting] and its viewer." Closer inspection of the surfaces generally results in deconstructing the artist's process to reveal not only the many layers of paint and underpainting, but also the influences from artists such as "Manet, Cézanne, Newman and Ryman" and numerous art historical references.

Gilbert-Rolfe's paintings are full of binaries and contrasts, both within and between individual paintings and bodies of work over time. Such binaries include: geometric shapes and grids versus gestural and expressionistic passages, often in the same composition; saturated colors juxtaposed next to softer pastel hues; hard edge shapes adjacent to pillowy soft and diffuse forms or grounds. The artist has noted that generally his work is considered "geometric abstraction", but recently posited that perhaps "post-minimalism" might be a better fit given his interest in process and the viewing experience versus a preconceived final composition.

Consistent with the post-minimalism reference, many of the binaries and contrasts in his work seem to be brought about through his approach to handling the oil medium with palette knife and brush, often yielding end results that

seem different than expected. Particularly, in several of the newest paintings, the brushwork reads more like pastel than paint. Examples of this approach include *(t)here*, 2018 and *Early Evening*, 2015. On the other end of the spectrum, several paintings are more geometric and grid-like, reading hard edge from a distance yet have very painterly and brushy areas both as ground and within the geometric shapes. Such examples include: *Space Surface and Depth (Cello)*, 2018, *Emanuel Shinwell Goes to University*, 2009 and *Early Dawn*, 2015.

Analyzing, comparing, and contemplating the paintings in the current presentation, there also seems to be a nod to Patterning and Suprematism. Consistent with the artist's stated interests in "complexity" and "space" between the painting and viewer, the subtle references to Pattern Painting achieves both, but in different ways in *Emanuel Shinwell Goes to University*, 2009 and *Malatesta*, 2018 (which are hung next to each other in the exhibition). The painting, *Emanuel Shinwell Goes to University*, 2009 is a highly structured grid, but through two contrasting color palettes, the composition is bisected diagonally into halves, one darker and the other lighter. However, it is the shift in width of the grid in the central portion of the composition and value shifts in colors, as well as further subdividing of the interior of certain ranges of squares, that brings about the overall patterning and interior patterns within individual squares. The net effects are: first, complexity, and second, a fragmentation of the surface in combination with the clustering of light and dark hues and corresponding value shifts that creates a push-pull effect and spatial depth within the composition.

In a more subtle approach, the surface of *Malatesta*, 2018 is fragmented by using a subtle pair of perpendicular brushy strokes that are repeated to create a nearly uniform ground. The central geometric elements are not just floating on the surface, but there is a suggestion of spatial depth between each element achieved in various ways: first, the arc of the white and black elements with the strong contrast in colors and variations in widths creates an imagined shadow line; and second, the use of warm and cool colors for the rectilinear geometric shapes starts positioning them spatially one in front of the other. In this painting, one could argue that the repetition of the subtle ground colors and resulting pattern function to both fragment the surface and simultaneously activate the viewer's eye and challenge visual perception. The net effect from the viewer's perspective is the possibility of dimensional space and volume, even if that was not the artist's intent.

The nod to Suprematism is from Gilbert-Rolfe bringing together not only geometric shapes, but also line and color as well as process approaches (as noted above) to create sensations and viewer experiences, not just geometric pictures. The best examples in this presentation that capture such sensations include: *Deliberate*, 2019, *Surge*, 2021, *Late Afternoon*, 2015, *(t)here*, 2018 and *Landscape in the Air*, 2017. The artist stated in a recent correspondence, "I think the audience needs to know that I'm concerned to get phenomenal experience that is complicated rather than fundamental on the surface." These paintings deliver on that request.

There are two striking features that also emerge from viewing the paintings in this presentation and responding to a comment by the artist. The first is the realization of the strong figure and ground relationships in Gilbert-Rolfe's paintings. However, the grounds do not merely provide context for the geometric shapes, instead, they work hand-in-hand with the shapes to create a dynamic viewing experience as noted above. The grounds often have an active role providing a push-pull effect (see *Surge*, 2021), or activate the eye to challenge perceptions (*Malatesta*, 2018), or create a mood and set the tone (*Early Evening*, 2015). Second, the artist recently made a reference to his interest in a "wall of sound painting", invoking a visual parallel to the bigger than life and full-frontal auditory experience from music producer Phil Spector. One can argue that Gilbert-Rolfe similarly pulls together formal concerns with his process approach that provides a feedback loop or "reverberation" (in auditory parlance) allowing him to generate the next mark or stroke in response to the prior one to achieve his "wall of sound painting".

#### About Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe:

##### The Artist's Statement:

Seeing Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* was influence at first sight, I had never seen that much space in painting before. That was in 1963. I never made paintings that were directly influenced by Newman, but likewise also never made one that wasn't affected by his work to some extent. No one else does simplicity that isn't simple that profoundly, or at least in my view.

My paintings are about complexity, I think that they have come to be about logic as much as anything else. Not logic as in philosophy, logic as in music, where one talks of it making sense but does not mean it provides a riddle and its answer. I want the work to interact with the viewer, to take place in the space around itself and between itself and the person looking at it, and to hold the attention for some time. T.J. Clark began his history of Modernism and its aftermath with David's painting of Marat murdered in his bath. I'd begin mine, if I wrote one, with Friedrich's monk on the beach, because it is the first painting to be mostly made out of space. The sublime, I think, is what we used to call uncertainty or the indeterminate. I should like my paintings to be made out of uncertainty, or to make uncertainty be an active force. There's too much certainty around in art as far as that goes (I'm sure of that,) but that is why its opposite is attractive to me. I think uncertainty puts movements in play rather than resolving them, space as depth is by definition uncertain—you can measure length and width but how deep it is can't be got at with a ruler, to paraphrase Marin and Merleau-Ponty—and that's what I work with. That, and painting being a matter of inside and outside, are together the basis of what joins it to the viewer and the world, and separates it from them too. I'd go so far as to say that space brings with it the experience of movement, one's eyes go in and come back, and that this moving groundlessness is activated further—intensified and seen to be structured or kept unstructured—by color and drawing, both of which are

always moving.

My work has changed over the years, of course, and has had periods of being very varied. In earlier work I, like most or many in my generation and those immediately before, thought about what defined the medium and worked with it. I did so indirectly, however, and not usually because I had a question that was related exclusively to painting. For example, I made a group of five-panel paintings which had as their starting point Eisenstein's thought that in film there are only two shots, the direct and the oblique. So those paintings are bas-reliefs at which one is always looking directly at the oblique. That's a start though, not the point of the work, that had more to do with duration. Likewise, I made some works on paper that were framed asymmetrically, in order to relate the image to its frame in a certain way, and which were mounted on matte boards that were photographic magnifications of the center of the work. Again, they were a start that got one looking at the work in a certain way, they weren't about a lesson in the formal relationships between support and the supported. Although, of course...

Now I don't think about painting as a medium very much at all. I think of it more as an instrument that one plays, regardless of whether it's in fashion in this particular epoch. I have dealt with the death of painting issue in various places,<sup>[1]</sup> and shan't address it here. I think, though, there's a reason why thinking about it as a medium has in a way run its course and it has to do with mediums being historical. Playing the violin is not historical, to the extent that it is at all, in the way music as an institution may be. The medium, I think, is no longer able to be the place where one may find what one needs to make art be more than a record of something, let alone, and worse, the confirmation of an historical inevitability. I think in part, at least, that what I'm thinking has to do with the distinction between being in the moment and being of it. Anything that happens is of the moment, and tells one something about it by default and to this or that degree of coherence and self-explanation. Herbie Hancock said there was one night where he was playing with Miles Davis and it felt like his fingers were playing by themselves, his whole mind and body was in the moment. All the music they made together was of the moment, but that was the good stuff. That is an example of what makes me find the idea of the instrument more useful than that of the medium, at this late phase of my career. Art should cut across history, otherwise it never gets to take place now.

[1] Perhaps most thoroughly in [Penny book, Ashcroft press...] and most recently and also cursorily in [Brooklyn Rail]

Artworks Included in Public Collections

Albright-Knox Museum, Buffalo, New York.

The Getty Study Center, Los Angeles.

Lincoln Center, New York.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami

#### About David Richard Gallery:

Since its inception in 2010, David Richard Gallery has produced museum quality exhibitions that feature Post War abstraction in the US. The presentations have addressed specific decades and geographies as well as certain movements and tendencies. While the gallery has long been recognized as an important proponent of post-1960s abstraction—including both the influential pioneers as well as a younger generation of practitioners in this field—in keeping with this spirit of nurture and development the gallery also presents established artists who embrace more gestural and representational approaches to the making of art as well as young emerging artists.

In 2015 David Richard Gallery launched DR Art Projects to provide a platform for artists of all stripes—international, national, local, emerging and established—to present special solo projects or to participate in unique collaborations or thematic exhibitions. The goal is to offer a fresh look at contemporary art practice from a broad spectrum of artists and presentations. The Gallery opened its current location in New York in 2017.

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