

Thomas Nozkowski: *The Last Paintings*

September 10 – October 23, 2021
540 West 25th Street
New York



Thomas Nozkowski, *Untitled (9-69)*, 2019 © Thomas Nozkowski, courtesy Pace Gallery

New York – Pace Gallery is pleased to present *Thomas Nozkowski: The Last Paintings*, an exhibition of the final paintings that Thomas Nozkowski completed before his passing in 2019. Marking the artist's eighth show with the gallery since joining it in 2008, the exhibition features 15 works which Nozkowski rendered in oil on linen on panel between 2015 and 2019. Each painting showcases the enigmatic and uniquely variegated visual language for which Nozkowski was critically celebrated over his more than 40-year career. Seen together for the first time, they are also a culmination of the artist's exploration of line, form, and color, and at the artist's favored scale of 22 x 28 inches, the paintings invite close and sustained viewing. Richly hued and textured condensations that eschew any unifying style, they are deeply absorbing worlds unto themselves, and collectively celebrate the artist's oeuvre.

On the occasion of the exhibition, Pace Publishing is producing a catalogue celebrating the late artist. The publication will feature an essay by Marc Mayer alongside remembrances from members of Nozkowski's artistic circle, including Peter Schjeldahl, Jennifer Gross, Karen Wilkin, Joseph Masheck, Catherine Murphy, Robert Storr, and Martin Puryear. The book will be available beginning in September 2021.

Over more than four decades, Nozkowski developed a singular approach to painting that rejected established aesthetic conventions. In the late 1970s, he abandoned the large-scale canvases popular amongst the Abstract Expressionists, with whom he studied at New York University and Cooper Union, in favor of small, 16 x 20 inch and later 22 x 28 inch canvas boards that were, in his words, "scaled for my friends' apartments, that could hang in a three-room walkup tenement on 7th Street." This modest size belied great ambition: each painting must work much harder in order to hold a viewer's sustained attention. To that end, Nozkowski labored for hundreds of hours on each of his compositions, often scraping them down or rubbing them with a turpentine-soaked rag, so new images could float to their simultaneously dense and diaphanous surfaces. "If they get very dry," he told one interviewer in 2015, "I'll generally scrape them down and open them up again physically," suggesting the surgical precision with which he reworked his paintings. Such effort is evidence of Nozkowski's profound devotion to the painterly process, which he instilled in his students at Rutgers University, where he was a much-beloved professor in the Mason Gross School of the Arts.

In addition to his rejection of grand scale, he also refused the heroic individualism of his contemporaries, rarely hewing to a single style. Each of his paintings began with an image or images he observed from life—often on his daily walks near his home in New York's Hudson Valley—and abstracted into forms that had never been seen before. Many of his works were inspired by images from art history, including Pisanello's *The Vision of St. Eustace* (1438–42) and the Baths of Caracalla, though their references are never overt, leaving their meaning open to interpretation.

As the critic John Yau observed, “By carefully loosening the conventions that undergird landscape painting, as well as using abstract shapes, Nozkowski arrives at a visual enigma that nevertheless feels rooted in nature and the everyday world.”

Using small brushes in order to force himself to slow down, Nozkowski found greater freedom in limitations. The Last Paintings showcase Nozkowski’s unparalleled range, with alternating registers of flatness and depth, biomorphism and rigid geometry, muted tones and bright, vivid colors. His suppression of stylistic consistency was also refusal of the pressure for established artists to produce work characteristic of their personal brands, rather than pursuing new ideas wherever they might lead. Instead, Nozkowski was a lifelong learner as well as a teacher, always exploring his medium with patience and perspicacity. As he told the artist Garth Lewis in 2009, “a painter’s project, pursued diligently, will always start to inform itself. The work speaks back to you, takes positions and presents ideas that point in new directions.” The Last Paintings are a distillation of that project, furthering Nozkowski’s radical aim to “free things from their history, from their strategies, from whatever constrains and imprisons painting.”

An online viewing room featuring a curated selection of archival works on paper by the artist will run concurrent to *The Last Paintings* on Pace’s website.

Jane Freilicher and Thomas Nozkowski: True Fictions, curated by Eric Brown, will open at The Milton Resnick and Pat Passlof Foundation on the Lower East Side in New York on November 5, 2021, and will remain on view through February 26, 2022.

Thomas Nozkowski (b. 1944, Teanek, New Jersey; d. 2019, Rhinebeck, New York) is recognized for his richly colored and intimately scaled abstract paintings and drawings that push the limits of visual language.

An awareness of perception and the desire to explore the possibilities of seeing, is at once grounded in reality for the artist and released from specific legibility. His concurrent practices of painting and drawing reflect on specific places and experiences—from the deeply symbolic to the notational—translating sensations and memories into abstract compositions.

Nozkowski began exhibiting in group shows in 1973 and made his solo debut in 1979. By 1982, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, had acquired a painting from an early one-person exhibition for their permanent collection. To date, Nozkowski’s paintings have been featured in more than 300 museum and gallery exhibitions worldwide, including over 80 solo shows.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon. The gallery has also spearheaded exploration into the intersection of art and technology through new business models, exhibition interpretation tools, and representation of artists engaging with technology.

Today, Pace has nine locations worldwide including London, Geneva, a strong foothold in Palo Alto, and two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia, where it operates permanent gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul, as well as an office and viewing room in Beijing. In 2020, Pace opened temporary exhibition spaces in East Hampton and Palm Beach, with continued programming on a seasonal basis.



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