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Leslie Smith III *Reaching for Something High*

September 8 – October 28, 2023
Private View: September 8, 6–8pm



Leslie Smith III, *Black Horseman*, 2021, oil on shaped canvas, 77 x 120 inches (195.6 x 304.8 cm).

“Each painting creates a place to confront one’s relationship with indifference and otherness. Each work requires a different way of looking, another way to assess what rests before us, and relies less on the historical baggage we bring to a viewing experience. In their own way, these paintings reach for the unattainable, working to be something more that challenges how we see ourselves and those around us.”

— Leslie Smith III

CHART is pleased to present *Reaching for Something High*, a solo exhibition by Leslie Smith III. Featuring eight new paintings and six new drawings displayed on both levels of the gallery, this is Smith’s first show with CHART as well as his first solo exhibition in New York City. There will be an opening reception on Friday, September 8, from 6–8pm, and the exhibition will remain on view through October 28, 2023.

Smith’s newest paintings chronicle his exploration of the relationship between abstraction and identity. In his practice, isolated gestures are assembled into rigid structures, reflecting the challenges of deriving meaning from form and color while simultaneously taking shape as objects imbued with emotive sensibilities. The works acknowledge the complexities of Black identity as it relates to personal experience.

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To quote Smith, “I contemplate fractured spaces instead of homogenized areas when making sense of impassioned responses to everyday adversities. *Reaching For Something High* is a collection of paintings that reference being human at a time when social systems and cultural expectations seemingly seek to dehumanize others.”

This recent body of work features sectionalized compositions of paint, sewn fabric, and textured surfaces, expressing a mosaic quality where dissonance between elements creates tension. Led by the architectural lines formed by the edges of large, shaped canvases bolted together and the seams of sewn canvas that organize the compositions, Smith creates opportunities for prolonged and revealing viewing experiences.

This presentation of works indulges familiar painterly languages as tropes to be modified and fractured. Smith welcomes the influence of Post-War Abstract Expressionism, with a particular interest in its performative painting gestures, large paint pulls, stained canvases, and intended flatness. Smith also finds inspiration in artists Edward Clarke and Jack Whitten, among other marginalized and underrepresented Black abstractionists. With an interest in confronting art history and its attendant dogmas, Smith freely assimilates these canonical conversations and creates works that collapse the medium's traditional divisions. In doing so, it suggests that contemporary abstract painting can critically engage its rich history while transcending ideological limitations.

Leslie Smith III is an artist based in Madison, Wisconsin. He was a 2022 Joan Mitchell Foundation Fellow and earned a BFA at the Maryland Institute College of Art and an MFA at the Yale School of Art. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond; the Birmingham Museum of Art; the Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts, Birmingham; and the FRAC Auvergne, France. Smith is a Full Professor of Painting and Drawing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

For more information, please contact us at info@chart-gallery.com

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