

Press Release
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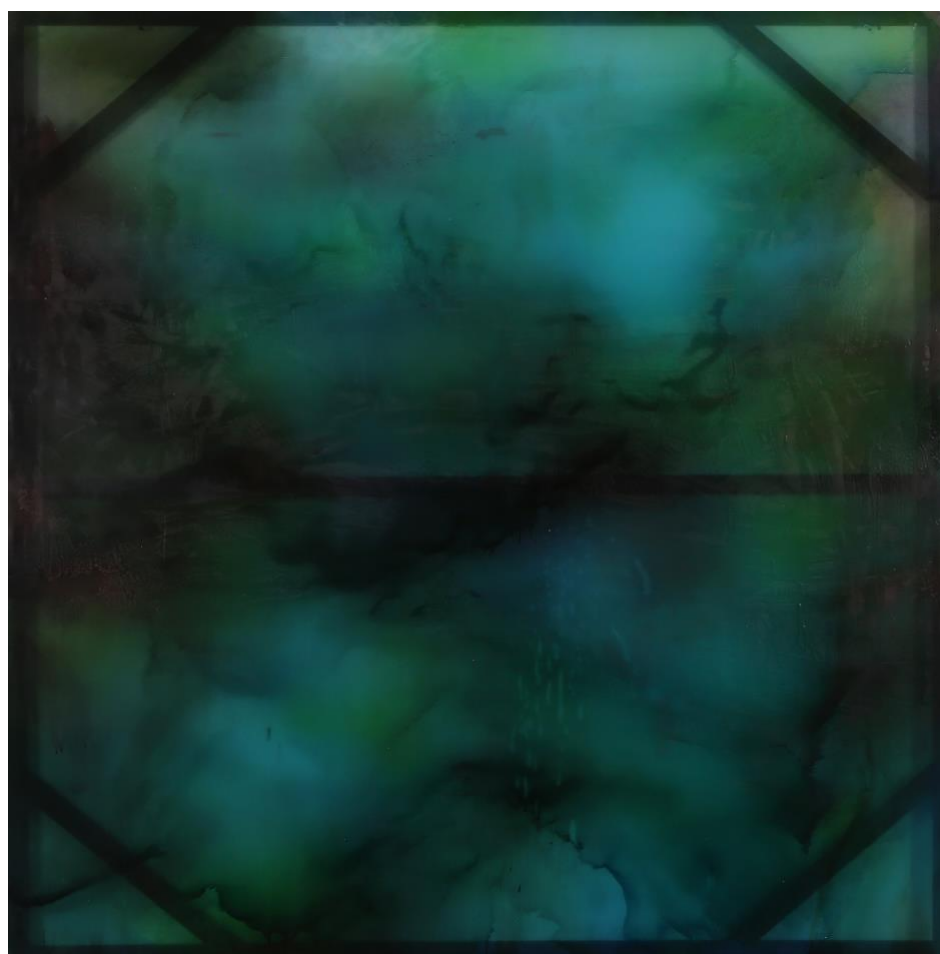
Welancora Gallery
Ceremony: Chris Watts



Ambient Painting I (Ultra), 2023, three panel screen, sapele mahogany, metal fixtures, poly-chiffon, resin, acrylic, natural and artificial pigments, 72 x 24 inches each, 72 x 72 inches full size

Welancora Gallery is pleased to present *Ceremony*, the first solo exhibition at the gallery of work by Chris Watts. The show opens with a reception on Thursday, October 19 from 6pm- 8pm, and will remain on view through Wednesday, December 20, 2023. The exhibition includes several new works called, 'ambient paintings', that are housed within articulated frames made of Nigerian mahogany, held together by hinges, to extend into three dimensional space for the viewer to navigate through and around the work. While other works from this series, and *The Spirits that Lend Strength are Invisible*, present themselves on the wall.

Existing at the intersection of sculpture and architecture, the spiritual and the metaphysical, *Ceremony* is an invitation to restructure perceptions of our immediate environment. Through an interplay of transparency and opacity — darkness and light — wooden structures that frame light, space and formless color, act as guides in the exploration of sacred meditative spaces and encounters with the immaterial. The sculptural forms echo both light-soaked stained glass windows and traditional Asian and European standing screens, historical intermediaries of the unknown in public and private space.



The Spirits that Lend Strength are Invisible XXXVI, 2023, Peruvian pigments, acrylic, resin, poly-chiffon, stained wood, 76 x 64 inches

A native to High Point, North Carolina, home to the world's largest furniture market, Watts uses elements of post World War II mid-century modern aesthetics alongside designs that date back to the Ming Dynasty as points of departure. At its peak, mid-century furniture could be found in a variety of spaces ranging from private homes to the lunch counter where the Greensboro Four sat in a North Carolina diner on February 1, 1960 to protest segregation.

Watts' choice to house his abstractions within wood panels that reflect the color and contours of mid-century design situates the work within both visible and invisible narratives that integrate spatial, temporal and spiritual experience. Illuminating new contexts of reflection, Watts' 'ambient paintings' are screens, windows, and spaces that sculpt materials — wood, poly chiffon, resin, natural and synthetic pigments — into elevated luminous forms that act as ceremonial objects.

The architectural intent of a site as a place to rest, view, and wonder is often associated with the stained glass windows and sacred sites such as: The Baha'i House of Worship, Sainte-Chapelle; Paris; or the Nasir al Mulk Mosque (The Pink Mosque) in Shiraz, Iran. While similar qualities of ease and refined relaxation can be associated with mid-century design, all of these spaces are informed by a larger social context.

Through an exploration of surfaces, sensory perception, and elements of architectural space, a heightened awareness of our bodies and our emotions in relation to spiritual resonance and placemaking emerges in the work. The paintings enclosed within the mahogany frames speak to this lingering ambience just beyond cerebral clarification.

While the panels were made from a Nigerian mahogany called *Sapele*, the artist also takes inspiration from Chinese privacy screens and *ma*, a Japanese word, which refers to the concept of space. Much like the installations by Larry Bell, Sam Gilliam, and James Turrell, Watts' work and the space between and within it becomes an immersive site of mediation, reflection, and ceremony, offering respite from the difficult tensions of coexistence among humans on planet earth.

About the Artist:

Chris Watts was born in High Point, North Carolina. He attended the MFA program at Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT, after graduating from the College of Arts and Architecture, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC, and the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Wroclaw, PL. Watts is alumni of the Art & Law Fellowship Program at Cornell University Art Architecture Planning in New York, NY.

The artist is a grant awardee from the Jerome Hill Foundation and is a 2022-2023 Soros Justice Fellow. He has held various artist residencies, among them the Marek Maria Pienkowski Foundation, Chelm, PL; McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Charlotte, NC; Abrons Arts Center at Henry Street Settlement, New York NY; and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace Program, New York, NY. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally.

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