

## CHRIS WATTS

### *Integration*

April 4 – May 4, 2024

Opening Thursday, April 4, 2024, 6:00pm – 8:00pm



Chris Watts, *The Spirits That Lend Strength Are Invisible XXXVII*, 2024.

Galerie Lelong & Co., New York is pleased to present *Integration*, a solo exhibition of works by Chris Watts, his first at the gallery. Drawing upon four of the artist's ongoing series, the exhibition highlights Watts's practice of creating spaces for introspection, remembrance, and meditation through his use of abstraction, transparency, and subtle subversions of art historical conventions. Referencing the concept of integration as it relates to psychedelic therapies, Watts investigates how the Afro-Indigenous cosmologies of these undefinable yet universal spaces can be internalized to better understand the physical world.

Paintings from the artist's series *The Spirits That Lend Strength Are Invisible* interplay transparency and color as an exploration of sacred meditative sites. The fluid fields of color in these paintings are created using only natural pigments gifted to the artist by a Peruvian shaman. Their mercurial reactions to elements like water and oxygen guide the application process, resulting in a convergence of natural and artistic forces, the present and ancestral past. In *The Spirits That Lend Strength Are Invisible XXXVII* (2024), fields of vibrant purple and earthy green mesh in a watery composition that contrasts with the sharp, geometric form of the frame visible through the poly-chiffon surface. Removing the traditional canvas offers an expanded vision of what painting can be, while the presence of the frame grounds the work in the traditions of the medium.

A new series of works, the "ambient paintings," develops this inquiry in three-dimensional form, with Watts's abstractions housed in freestanding frames of Nigerian mahogany. Displayed away from the wall, the colorful transparencies are illuminated by the light entering the gallery, recalling the stained-glass windows of sacred sites, including the Southern Baptist churches of the artist's native North Carolina. Borne of a desire to further his practice beyond the common conventions of paintings and inspired by the impact of sacral architecture, the works reflect the presence of the body in the gallery, offering the viewer a heightened level of spiritual awareness.

Contrasting the guiding forces of the "ambient paintings," a selection of works on view from the series *Lapis Lazuli Trials: Chapter 1* act as forums for Watts's personal reflections. Lapis lazuli, a stone often associated with wisdom and enlightenment, produces a pigment steeped in history, known for its many uses from ancient decorative items through Renaissance paintings. Through this choice of material, Watts connects himself to artistic masters and movements of the past, while his use of the material in works he considers meditative drawings quietly upends our notions of the storied pigment.

In the small gallery, a selection of works from Watts's *Blahk on Blahk on Blak* series will be on view. Beginning in 2017, the series sources imagery from video footage of excessive police violence against

Black bodies, but in each instance removes the figure, prompting an inquiry into the role of the body in this footage, the impact of viewing it, and the limitations of its perceived truth in legal settings. Composed of mixed media on sheer polyester screens, the paintings expose their frame and wall behind it. Created with the stipulation that they always be exhibited on a painted black wall, the works in this series, in the artist's words, "create realities that only reveal themselves in blackness." A pivotal point in Watts's practice, the *Blahk on Blahk on Blak* series marks the removal of the figure in the artist's work and the commencement of his ongoing exploration of the use of physical transparency to create works that hold metaphysical space evident in the works on view in the main gallery.

### **About the Artist**

Chris Watts is an interdisciplinary artist whose work seeks to revise, interrogate, and re-examine social and personal narratives through the transfiguration of painting and installation. Currently, these projects exist as representations of windows as switches into another, layered, assemblage of spaces that act as guides in the exploration of sacred meditative spaces and encounters with the immaterial. He attended the MFA program at Yale School of Art, New Haven, Connecticut, after graduating from the College of Arts and Architecture, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, and the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Wroclaw, Poland. He participated in the Art & Law Fellowship Program, at Cornell University Art Architecture Planning, New York; and is a 22-23 Soros Justice Fellow. Watts has held various artist residencies, among them the Marek Maria Pienkowski Foundation, Chelm, Poland; McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Charlotte, North Carolina; and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace Program, New York. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally.

Watts was born in High Point, North Carolina, in 1984 and now lives and works between New York City and North Carolina.

## HIGHLIGHTS



**Chris Watts**

*The Spirits That Lend Strength Are Invisible XXXVII, 2024*

Peruvian pigments, poly-chiffon, resin, acrylic

76 x 64 in (193 x 162.5 cm)



**Chris Watts**

*The Spirits That Lend Strength Are Invisible XXXX, 2024*

Peruvian pigments, poly-chiffon, resin, acrylic

96 x 76 in (243.8 x 193 cm)



**Chris Watts**

*The Spirits That Lend Strength Are Invisible XXXXI*  
2024

Peruvian pigments, poly-chiffon, resin, acrylic

96 x 76 in (243.8 x 193 cm)