

ART

In Search of Solitude at David Castillo Gallery

NICOLAS RINCON-DURAN
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Installation view of "Vaughn Spann: In Search of Solitude" at David Castillo Gallery Courtesy of the artist and David Castillo/Photo by Zach Balber

Vaughn Spann's solo exhibition at the David Castillo Gallery in the Design District, "In Search of Solitude," greets visitors with an empty room housing a single painting. Composed of polymer paint and mixed media on canvas, the

seven-by-six-and-a-half-foot canvas, *Composition in Black (Nocturne No. 2 in C Minor)*, stands alone in the barren gallery.

Building on the Florida-born artist's method, which merges traditional painting techniques rooted in formalism, color field painting, and minimalism with a conscious utilization of materials and resources, the curation helps to challenge the limitations of painting as a vehicle of significance. The result is the experience the viewer has alone in the gallery with the artwork: an unsettling encounter with intricately textured surfaces that bear the weight of the artist's reflections on the current era.

As with many of his earlier pieces, Spann's affinity for unconventional materials is attested by the work's striking composition. The canvas is composed of two distinct sections. The first layer is the background or foundation, consisting of a subtle interplay of purple hues juxtaposed with bright reds, greens, and yellows, which, while noticeable, appear to have been applied thinly, suggesting a restrained energy. Above the first layer is an aggressive application of black paint and white streaks, giving a sense of active repression of the underlying tones. The thickness of the paint heightens the effect and gives the visceral impression it was hurled at the canvas. The work's textured surface extends beyond the face of the piece, creating a three-dimensional exterior that conveys a tactile sense of rocks or sediment. Certain areas of the canvas are less heavily painted, creating a feeling of fadedness or weathering that suggests the work's existence within a larger continuum.

Spann's works are not standalone statements but rather part of an ongoing dialogue, with each exhibition serving as an extension of the existing conversations surrounding his art. *Composition in Black*, for example, builds upon earlier pieces like *Nature* (2020) in its use of texture and representation while employing the symbolic language characteristic of his body of work. *Marked Man (Mitchell)* (2019) and his *Dalmatian Painting* series allow his art to take on a charged language, imbuing his canvases and wood panels with inherited meaning from the artist's experiences while complicating any familiar identifications a viewer may have with them.