

# RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC  
515 WEST 26TH STREET  
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RYANLEEGALLERY.COM

RYAN LEE Gallery is pleased to announce it will now represent **George Nelson Preston (b. 1938, New York, NY)**. Preston's work is rooted in the memory and historical trauma of the Atlantic world and his own family legacy, even as his paintings seek to transport the viewer into the spiritual realm. Although Preston has been painting for decades, his work feels vital and urgent.

RYAN LEE exhibited Preston's work in the 2022 exhibition *Afro-Atlantica: The Aqueous Continent*, which was his first solo show in New York City in many years. On September 5, RYAN LEE will present a new solo exhibition of Preston's work, entitled *Ayahuasca Notebook Paintings: Journeys and Returns*.

Preston's paintings from the past decade are focused on what he calls Afro-Atlantica; the artist imagines the Atlantic Ocean as a continent unto itself, with its shores along the Caribbean, Brazil, Africa, and Europe serving as its borders. Some of Preston's paintings feature falling bodies (that at first appear to be calligraphic gestures) and human hair. In his tribute to the souls lost during the Middle Passage, he hopes to recapture something of their existence. Art historian Renato Da Silva Araújo writes, "Preston demonstrates a profound comprehension of the vital link between nature and culture in the Afro-Atlantic world. Whether we speak of Brazil, the Caribbean or any of dozens of tropical African countries, Preston contributes to the prevailing structural links, unifying codes and historical roots of the Afro-Atlantic."

Preston seeks to take the viewer past the surface both physically and metaphysically. He says, "The shifting picture plane (consistent through most of my work) is the 'objective' formal door behind which dwells the 'subjective' spirit that moves all things." Spirituality is at the heart of the artist's work, often conveyed through natural motifs such as mountains, oceans, and flora. Preston explains, "My real subject is the light that lights the light, the mystery of it all, the animus within, beyond and in front of the horizon."

"I first saw Preston's paintings at Nina Johnson Gallery in Miami — they bowled me over," says RYAN LEE co-founder Mary Ryan. "I thought that they were the work of an emerging artist, so I was surprised to learn that he'd been painting since the 1950s. He is in a remarkably productive and fresh period in his painting practice. We're very proud and excited to announce our representation of Preston in New York and we look forward to introducing his work to a wider audience and new generations."

Preston spent years enmeshed in the Lower Manhattan avant-garde art scene (at one time living next door to Claes Oldenburg), and his extensive travels across the Atlantic world (particularly in Brazil and Ghana) have informed his work as an artist, art historian, essayist, and curator. He most recently wrote a catalog essay about his friend, painter Bob Thompson, for the 2022 Colby College Museum of Art exhibition *Bob Thompson: This House is Mine*. He also cowrote a catalog with Adriano Pedrosa and others for the 2018 exhibit *Emanoel Araújo: The Ancestrality of Symbols: Africa-Brazil*. In 2016, he was elected the Pierre Verger Chair of Rio de Janeiro Academia Brasileira de Belas Artes.

Preston's work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions at David Zwirner Gallery, London (2023); Pinacoteca de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2022); Nina Johnson Gallery, FL (2022); Karl and Helen Burger Gallery at Kean University, NJ (2019); Grey Art Museum at New York University,

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NY (2017); Wilmer Jennings Gallery at Kenkeleba House, NY (2016); Merton D. Simpson Gallery, NY (2015); LeRoy Neiman Gallery, NY (2012); and gallery onetwentyeight, NY (2002); among others.

His work is held in museum collections including Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo, Brazil; Musée Khelcom, Saly, Senegal; and Nigerian National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria.

**George Nelson Preston (b. 1938, New York, NY)** has an art practice built upon a foundation of artistic and intellectual mentors and spaces, starting with his parents and his birthplace of Harlem, NY. Having grown up next door to the modernist history painter Charles Alston and meeting social realist painter Robert Gwathmey and expressionist sculptor Chaim Gross while in high school, Preston's work probes racial themes and is rooted in abstract expressionism. In the 1950s, Preston moved to the Lower East Side where he co-founded the Artist's Studio at his storefront loft at 48 E 3rd Street and was a charter member of the Phoenix Gallery. The Artist's Studio became a nucleus for New York's Beat subculture and groundbreaking poets such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and LeRoi Jones.

Preston received a liberal arts BA in 1962 from the City College of New York, before earning an MA and PhD in art history from Columbia University in 1968 and 1973. Preston designed and curated the African Hall of the Brooklyn Museum in 1973, an exhibition which remained on view for ten years. His involvement in the Brazilian art scene led him to collaborate with Dr. Emanuel Araújo in the planning of the I Encontro Afro Atlântico at the Museu Afro Brasil in São Paulo in 2012, a seminal institution for the preservation and dissemination of Afro-Atlantic art and culture.