

GAGOSIAN

ARTFORUM

David Reed

GAGOSIAN / 980 MADISON AVENUE, 980 Madison Avenue, January 10–February 22, 2020

Julia Ribeiro



David Reed, #709 (For Jeremy Blake and Theresa Duncan), 2005–2009/2018–19, acrylic, oil, and alkyd on polyester, 10' 1" x 4' 7".

I didn't notice it at first: a stark-white, totally alien non-brushstroke on a black ground that practically looks like a sticker adhered to the upper half of #710, 2005–2009/2018–19, one of the fifteen canvases in David Reed's latest exhibition. I say "non-brushstroke" because this thing is anything but painterly; in fact, its speed is so out of rhythm in this composition that it's practically an anachronism within the field of swooping marks beneath it. (Perhaps it was executed after the almost decade-long pause in the work's process.) Yet, due to the frame's towering proportions, you hardly notice this anomaly because it's hovering four feet above your head. You might catch it right when you enter Gagosian's sixth-floor gallery, or maybe out of the corner of your eye. But the closer you get to it, the more likely you are to miss what's right in front of you.

Reed has talked about how the viewer's position in relation to a surface can create an entirely new experience of looking and, specifically, how paintings can transform through one's peripheral vision. His point is proven on the fifth floor: a much narrower space with tall, vertical works hanging on the far ends and three horizontal pieces on the longer sides. To the right is the largest painting in the show: a ten-foot-tall, neon-green-and-purple gesture fest. The erratic directions of Reed's brush produce a seemingly endless tangle of marks. Yet, if followed far enough, each stroke comes to an abrupt end, which shifts in space beneath linear planes without emerging on the other side. All the while, I couldn't escape the movement of two other paintings in my periphery. It almost felt like I was being watched: an even more chilling realization after noting that the painting before me was dedicated to Jeremy Blake and Theresa Duncan—a rising art-star couple of the 2000s who, after years of suspecting they were under surveillance by the Church of Scientology and the US government, tragically took their own lives in an alleged double suicide. There was an eerie weight in the room. Before exiting the gallery, I couldn't resist the impulse to peer over my shoulder—just in case.