

# David Novros – Paintings



David Novros (b. 1941, Los Angeles) is known for both his large, abstract paintings on irregularly shaped, multipartite canvases and also site-specific works that push beyond internal pictorial space to engage the surrounding architectural context. His work was first exhibited in a two-person show with Mark di Suvero in 1965 at the Park Place Gallery, and was included in the hugely influential *Systemic Painting* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 1966. His work has been exhibited in prominent venues, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; the Dallas Museum of Fine Art; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Novros's works are owned by international institutions, with significant collections held at the Museum Wiesbaden, Germany, and the Menil Collection, Houston. In 2021, Novros's immersive installation of painted rooms created for the 1975 exhibition *Marden, Novros, Rothko: Painting in the Age of Actuality* was reinstalled for the first time at the Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University, Houston, Texas. Novros lives and works in New York City.

The two works included in *David Novros – Paintings, Boathouse* (2016) and *Untitled (Graham Studio Mural II)* (2006), are large, polychromatic paintings, described by the artist as portable murals. These works relate to imagery that Novros first explored in a fresco he made for the second floor of 101 Spring Street in 1970 and are examples of his ongoing commitment to what he calls “painting-in-place.”

*Untitled (Graham Studio Mural II)* was one of five works Novros made for the sculptor Robert Graham's home and studio in Venice, California, and is one of two that are extant. *Boathouse*, a multipartite painting in oil and murano, was made after a related mural cycle conceived for a boathouse in Middleburgh, New York was destroyed. These works demonstrate Novros's ongoing interest in structural wholeness, the interplay of color, and place.

This exhibition presents new opportunities for considering Novros's portable murals within the context of his permanent fresco at 101 Spring Street, and for seeing anew the importance of place and permanence to his work more broadly. Jörg Daur, Deputy Director of the Museum Wiesbaden, describes Novros's paintings as “distinguished by an interplay with each place that fundamentally allows this place as such to emerge.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1970, two years after Donald Judd purchased 101 Spring Street, he asked Novros to create a work for the second floor. Judd and Novros shared an interest in permanence, and for the relation between a work of art and the architecture in which it is exhibited or for which it was made. As Novros recalls, “Judd was using that space as his laboratory to center on the belief that the placement of a work of art was critical to its understanding. He was thinking of the various paintings and sculptures of the building as a ‘permanent installation.’ It worked out well for both of us, because it suits my concept of how a work of art could exist in an architectural space.”<sup>2</sup> This work, restored by Judd Foundation in collaboration with the artist in 2013, was Novros's first true fresco.

<sup>1</sup> Jörg Daur, “Wall as painting – painting as wall,” in *David Novros*, (Wiesbaden, Germany: Museum Wiesbaden, 2014), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Phong Bui and David Novros, “In Conversation: David Novros with Phong Bui,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 2008, <https://brooklynrail.org/2008/06/art/chuck-close-with-phong-bui-june-08>.



David Novros in Conversation with Caitlin Murray, Director of Archives and Programs \*

CM Why did you select these works for this exhibition?

DN I wanted to show work that demonstrated my ongoing interest in mural painting. I've been thinking a lot about doing something in this space [101 Spring Street] and since the fresco I made is on the second floor, I wanted to show work that was related. The smaller of the two paintings on the first floor was made as a mural in the studio of my friend Robert Graham, when that studio was sold and Graham had died, I removed the painting. The larger painting was made as an evocation of a mural cycle that I made in Middleburgh, New York. It no longer exists as I painted it.

CM How do these murals relate to the spaces for which they were conceived?

DN The *Boathouse* related to its site; to the water, sky, and hilltop. The poetry of the painting is about the place. The fresco I made for 101 Spring Street was made in relation to the architecture, light and windows. The paintings in this show are all the same in that they are based on the kind of drama that is created by the place and the image. Even the most formal paintings that I have made are meant to have this sort of drama.

CM Are the activities of reading or writing poetry related to your painting?

DN There have been times that I have written poetry, but I have stopped. As I read more, I realized that my efforts were like notes, and that if I wanted to develop these ideas, I would have to stop painting so that I could make the poems. I first became interested in T'ang poetry in the early 70's because a lot of the content was about coming and going—being itinerant—giving up a life of success in the court to pursue a rigorous study. During their travels, these poets were able to retain friendships with their fellows. I was very moved by that. A lot of their poems are “hellos” and “goodbyes”. When I first came to New York I was lucky to fall in with a group of painters and sculptors that I admired. It was very exciting, and I suppose it was my memories of those times that inform my thinking. I am a different person, but I am still nostalgic for that kind of scene.

CM Are you familiar with the paintings of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands located at the Texas-Mexico border?

DN Yes.

CM They were conceived in relation to the seasons and the Earth's relation with the sun.

DN That's the kind of thing that I was trying to introduce into my paintings starting in the late 1960s and I am still interested in these ideas. Most people look at painting and think that you stand waiting for it to do something—as though they were

looking out a window. That's a kind of passive response to painting, and that's a problem that has been compounded by a proliferation of screens in our culture. The painting that I most admire encourages movement and engagement.

CM I was interested in something that you had said in a previous interview about the Alhambra in Southern Spain. You said painting didn't need to be made of paint. That idea seems very foundational.

DN I went to art schools that taught painting in a very conventional way. It wasn't until I went to Europe in 1963 that I saw a painting that would lead me out of what I knew—lead me to the Alhambra, Padua, Assisi, Ravenna, and onto a path that ended with Pollock, Rothko, Newman, Still, and Kline, because I thought of them as muralists without commissions and that is what I have become.

CM How does your work relate to the spaces in which they are exhibited or permanently installed?

DN All my exhibitions have been thought of as painted places, that's been the basis of my work. Now I am making paintings in my studio. Originally, I wanted my paintings to be studies for a project, now the studio is the project.

\*This is an excerpt from a conversation with the artist at his studio on September 13, 2022.

*David Novros – Paintings*  
101 Spring Street  
September 30–December 17, 2022

Public hours:  
Thursdays, Fridays, & Saturdays  
1:00–5:00pm

*David Novros – Paintings*  
is made possible with support  
from Paula Cooper Gallery.

#### Programs

Thursday, October 13:  
Reading by poet and translator  
Bill Porter (Red Pine) at 101 Spring  
Street

Thursday, November 10:  
Conversation between David Novros;  
Flavin Judd, Artistic Director of  
Judd Foundation; and Dr. Matt L. Levy,  
Associate Professor of Art History,  
Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts  
program at Penn State Behrend at  
101 Spring Street.

#### Photo Credits

Front:  
Installation view, *David Novros –  
Paintings*, September 30–December 18,  
2022, 101 Spring Street, Judd Founda-  
tion, New York. Photo Steven Probert  
© Judd Foundation. Art © 2022 David  
Novros / Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York. Courtesy Paula Cooper  
Gallery, New York.

Interior:  
David Novros, *Boathouse*, 2016, oil and  
murano on canvas, 7 panels, overall  
dimensions approximately 11 × 20 feet,  
*David Novros – Paintings*, September 30–  
December 18, 2022, 101 Spring Street,  
Judd Foundation, New York. Photo  
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Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Below:  
David Novros, *Untitled (Graham  
Studio Mural II)*, 2006, acrylic on canvas,  
118 1/16 × 118 1/16 inches, *David Novros –  
Paintings*, September 30–December 18,  
2022, 101 Spring Street, Judd Founda-  
tion, New York. Photo Steven Probert  
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#### Exhibition Checklist

*Untitled (Graham Studio Mural II)*, 2006  
acrylic on canvas  
118 1/16 × 118 1/16 in. (300 × 300 cm)

*Boathouse*, 2016  
oil and murano on canvas, 7 panels  
Overall dimensions approximately  
11 × 20 feet  
4 L-shaped panels, each: 102 1/2 × 60 ×  
1 1/2 in. (260.4 × 152.4 × 3.8 cm)  
3 rectangular panels:  
1. 76 × 40 × 1 1/2 in. (193 × 101.6 × 3.8 cm)  
2. 80 × 40 × 1 1/2 in. (203.2 × 101.6 × 3.8 cm)  
3. 76 × 36 × 1 1/2 in. (193 × 91.4 × 3.8 cm)

