

# DOLBY CHADWICK GALLERY

## James Kennedy *Isolated Incidents*

Kennedy is known for building complex paintings that map a stream-of-consciousness mode of thinking as he creates space and connections. His work's intricate, highly layered surfaces—which read as almost three dimensional due to the way in which he applies his medium—cohere as lyrical systems of tension and balance, form and space, tone and hue.

In the past few years, Kennedy has prioritized certain “supporting” gestures by pulling them out and isolating them. He cites Goethe’s dictum “music is liquid architecture, architecture is frozen music” as a turning point in his practice. Though the implications at the heart of Goethe’s observation are manifold, one is the idea that a “universal theme prevails and underscores all creative disciplines.” Regardless of whether a creator paints, composes, constructs, computes, or formulates, something elemental—notational—is always mobilized, built up, and woven together to forge something truly symphonic, auditory or otherwise.

With this idea foregrounded in his mind, the artist has sought to examine the phenomenon of notation, which exists in myriad forms, from the musical to the choreographic, linguistic, mathematical, and beyond. The resulting work, he explains, is “an exploration of how gestures can be more than one thing. They can be directive, informative, a spatial mark. I like to think of them as non-specific and let the viewer make up their own mind about what they’re saying.”

In *Isolated Incidents*, unlike in previous shows, Kennedy is specifically focused on distilling and deconstructing the work to capture its connective and compositional gestures—those elemental moments that are normally secondary in a painting. This process of separating the part from the whole has been encouraged by the repeated observation that his paintings seemingly contain multiple paintings within them, each with their own narrative and sets of meaning. In *Isolated Incident 5* (2020), for example, it’s as if Kennedy has zoomed in on and opened up a specific part of one of his compositions; as viewers, we feel the excitement and intimacy of peering into the body of the machine from such a close vantage point. These parallels to the mechanical, however, give way as the work unfolds to reveal hints of the urban, tectonic, organic, even corporeal. Notations, Kennedy observes, are more often than not multivalent.

By highlighting these microcosms, using color and playing with scale to isolate the nature of their gesture and augment its presence, Kennedy positions them as “leading actors in the spatial structure.” What was once subordinate, even latent, pushes past the labyrinthine totality of the larger painting and rises to the surface.

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Born in Northern Ireland, James Kennedy studied at the Royal Scottish Academy in Glasgow, where he was also active in the worlds of dance and theater. Now based in New York, he exhibits widely both in North America and internationally and is represented in museum collections, including the British Museum, and in private collections such as that of the late Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Edward Albee. This will be his third solo exhibition at Dolby Chadwick Gallery.