

**PRINCIPALS**

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Janet Lehr

Estab. 1972



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891 Park Avenue  
New York NY 10021  
TEL/FAX 212 288 6234  
Vered Gallery Fax 631 324 4455  
[janetlehr@veredart.com](mailto:janetlehr@veredart.com)

19TH and 20TH CENTURY MASTERS  
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**BEAUFORD DELANEY** American 1901 - 1979



Yellow composition, 1957  
Oil on canvas  
16.25 x 13 inches  
Provenance:

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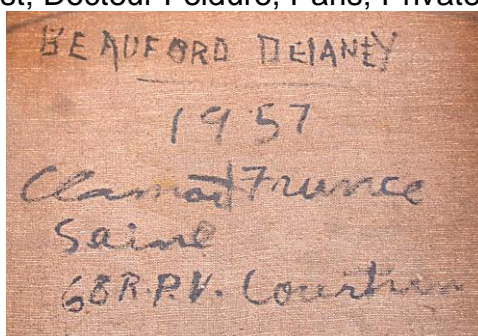


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From the Artist; Docteur Feidure, Paris; Private collection NY



Yellow composition, 1957 (verso )

NOTES:

*"To James Baldwin he was 'a cross between Br'er Rabbit and [Saint Francis of Assisi](#).' To Henry Miller he was 'the summum and [optimum](#) of all the solar energies and radiances combined.' To most scholars and followers of African American art, Beauford Delaney was one of the most gifted men ever to [wield](#) a brush."* Jabari Asim's Delaney's biography Washington Post, art reviewer

*"Delaney's relationship with abstraction predated the notorious Abstract Expressionist movement, positioning him as a forerunner of one of the most important [ideological](#) and stylistic developments in twentieth-century American art. Although he chose not to identify himself with the movement, as the Abstract Expressionists began to gain notoriety in the late 1940s, Delaney's abstract work increasingly gained attention."* Adrienne Childs, Professor of Art History, University of Maryland

In his *Introduction to the Exhibition of Beauford Delaney opening December 4, 1964 at the Gallery Lambert*, James Baldwin wrote, "the darkness of Beauford's beginnings, in Tennessee, many years ago, was a black-blue midnight indeed,

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*opaque and full of sorrow. And I do not know, nor will any of us ever really know, what kind of strength it was that enabled him to make so dogged and splendid a journey."*

In Eleanor Heartney's review of "Beauford Delaney: the New York Years (1929-1953)" Philippe Briet Gallery, New York, from April 9 to June 18, 1994, appeared in Art in America. She wrote:

*The shifting visual rhythms and improvisational quality of the paintings bring to mind the rhythms of jazz, a musical genre which greatly interested Delaney. A number of paintings in the exhibition, like the portrait of composer W.C. Handy, contain explicitly musical subject matter. An untitled scene from a jazz club painted in 1950 offers loosely drawn representations of dancers and musicians playing piano, bass and saxophone. In a different mood, Rehearsal (1952) depicts a gospel choir practicing beneath the gothic arches of brilliantly colored church windows. A 1951 homage to Marian Anderson shows an abstracted street-corner scene dominated by a colorful poster of the singer.*

*Delaney's disappearance from the consciousness of the New York art world seems linked to two factors: his move to Paris at a crucial moment in the consolidation of New York's position as the world's cultural capital and his work's irrelevance to the history of American art as it was being written by critics like Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. Today, as those histories unravel and are replaced by narratives with a more varied and colorful weave, artists like Delaney can be seen in a new light. This exhibition made an important contribution to a more complete understanding of the era that gave birth to our own.*

## **Biography**

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[Beauford Delaney](#) was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, and was encouraged by his first art teacher to move to Boston in 1923. While in Boston, Beauford Delaney studied art at the Massachusetts Normal School, the [Copley Society](#) and the South Boston School of Art and spent time admiring the collections of the [Museum of Fine Arts](#) and the [Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum](#). Hardly the center of the early 20th-century art world, Boston was nonetheless a fine place for Delaney to study painting and sketch the Old Masters' works in museums. African-American cultural life in Boston was then in the midst of a flowering that had later been overshadowed by the Harlem Renaissance.

In 1929, Delaney moved to New York City and studied for a brief time at the Arts Students League with John Sloan and Thomas Hart Benton. His paintings of the 1940s and early 1950s consist largely of portraits, modernist interiors and street scenes executed in impasto with broad areas of vibrant colors. Delaney's interest in the arts also included poetry and jazz, and he formed close friendships with writers such as James Baldwin and Henry Miller, and other artists, including Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keefe, and Al Hirshfeld. Here he formed a life centered around questions concerning the [aesthetics](#) and development of modernism in Europe and the United States; primarily influenced by the ideas of his friends the photographer [Alfred Stieglitz](#) and the [cubist](#) artist [Stuart Davis \(painter\)](#), Georgia O'Keefe and the paintings of the European modernists and their predecessors like [Cezanne](#), [Matisse](#), [Picasso](#) and [Van Gogh](#).

While he worked to incorporate African-American influences during his earlier representational period, such as the "[Negro](#)" idiom of [jazz](#), into his own artwork, he often preferred to visit one of the clubs when he was in Harlem rather than join in the serious socio-political discussions or "Negro art" questions that were taking place at the *306 Group* or the *Harlem Artists Guild*. Though he resisted thinking of himself as a Negro artist, Beauford had tremendous pride in black achievement. He was also pleased to participate in a number of black artists exhibitions

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with fellow artists like [Jacob Lawrence](#), [Romare Bearden](#), [Hale Woodruff](#), [Selma Burke](#), [Richmond Barthe](#), [Norman Lewis](#) and his brother Joseph Delaney.

In 1953, Delaney traveled to Paris, fleeing racism in the United States and making the city his home for the remainder of his life. He joined a community of artists and writers in that city that included Baldwin, Henry Miller, Sam Francis, and Bob Thompson. Delaney increasingly moved away from figuration to explore the emotional power of abstraction, producing an extensive body of work in watercolor and oil on canvas. His years in Paris would lead to a dramatic stylistic shift from the "figurative compositions of New York life to [abstract expressionist](#) studies of color and light."

For a time, expatriate Delaney was a minor celebrity in the expatriate community of postwar Paris, a friend of Colette and Henry Miller, of Jean Genet and James Jones. In those same years, between 1953 and the mid-1960's, he created a remarkable body of work using vibrant color to translate the unique light of Paris into the language of Abstract Expressionism. Exile offered Beauford Delaney the space to work through his sense of being different; it also gave him a new sense of freedom from racial and sexual biases, Delaney focused on creating lyrical, colorful non-objective abstractions. These paintings, consisting of elaborate and fluid swirls of paint applied in luminous hues, are pure and simplified expressions of light.

Following his death, he was praised as a great and neglected painter but, with a few notable exceptions, the neglect continued.

A retrospective of his work at the Studio Museum in Harlem, a year before his death, did little to revive interest in his work. It was not until the 1988 exhibition *Beauford Delaney: From Tennessee to Paris*, curated by the French art dealer Philippe Briet, at the Philippe Briet

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Gallery, that Delaney's work was again exhibited in New York, followed by two retrospectives in the gallery: "Beauford Delaney: A Retrospective [50 Years of Light]" in 1991, and "Beauford Delaney: The New York Years [1929-1953]" in 1994.

Adrienne Childs, University of Maryland wrote, "Whatever Happened to Beauford Delaney?," an article by Eleanor Heartney appeared in [Art in America](#) in response to the 1994 exhibition asking why this once well regarded "artist's artist" was now virtually unknown to the American art public? "What happened? Is this another case of an over-inflated reputation returning to its true level? Or was Delaney undone by changing fashions which rendered his work unpalatable to succeeding generations? Why did Beauford Delaney so completely disappear from American art history?" The author believed that Delaney's disappearance from the consciousness of the New York art world was linked to "his move to Paris at a crucial moment in the consolidation of New York's position as the world's cultural capital and his work's irrelevance to the history of American art as it was being written by critics" at the time. The article concludes, "Today [1994] as those histories unravel and are replaced by narratives with a more varied and colorful weave, artists like Delaney can be seen in a new light."<sup>[15]</sup>

Delaney's works had been shown in many museum shows during his lifetime. In 1961 Delaney's works were shown at Centre Culturel Americain, Paris, in 1963 the Musee d'Art Moderne, Paris in Salon des Realities Nouvelles, Paris, 1964 the Galerie Culturel Americain, Paris, 1967 Morgan State College Baltimore MD, 1970 University of Texas, 1971 The Newark Museum and in 1978, [The Studio Museum](#) in Harlem organized his first major retrospective exhibition. Tortured by alcoholism and schizophrenia, Delaney died in Paris while hospitalized for mental illness in 1979. .

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The 2003 exhibition of Beauford Delaney's work at the Sert Gallery of the Harvard University Art Museums, *Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow*, shows the painter successfully reconciling race, sexuality, and exile, and doing so with a passion for experimentation; a spectacularly successful passion. *Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow* presents the full range of Delaney's art, from the portraits and cityscapes he did in New York's Greenwich Village in the 1940s to the abstract work that followed his 1953 move to Paris, was organized by Atlanta's High Museum of Art, curated by Richard J. Powell, Duke University. The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue are the first to explore this African-American artist's use of the color yellow, which he employed as a pivotal symbolic and expressive element in both his figurative and abstract works. Delaney believed that the various hues held spiritual significance and that the color yellow represented light, healing, and redemption.

During Delaney's lifetime his works were shown in a number of private galleries, one including the Vendome Gallery, [Roko Gallery and Artists' Gallery](#), New York City, in the 1940s; Galerie Paul Fachetti, 1960; 1962 Galerie Breteau, Paris and 1973 Gallery Darthea Speyer, Paris.

David Leeming, who knew Beauford Delaney, wrote an excellent biography of the artist entitled "[Amazing Grace: A Life of Beauford Delaney](#)," Oxford University Press, 1998. Other books on Beauford Delaney are: Patricia Sue Canterbuy: *Beauford Delaney-From New York to Paris* (Minneapolis Institute of Art - 2005); David Driskell, *The Other Side of Color: African-American Art* (2001); *Amazing Grace: A Life of Beauford Delaney* (David Leeming – 1998)

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Works by Delaney are in the following public collections, among others: Arizona African-American Museum, Phoenix AZ; [Art Institute of Chicago](#); [Baltimore Museum of Arts](#); [Beck Cultural Exchange](#), Knoxville TN; Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick Maine; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh PA; Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Paris; [Clark Atlanta University](#), Atlanta GA; C. Kermit Ewing Gallery, University of Tennessee, [Knoxville](#) , [Tennessee](#) ; Delaware Art Museum ; Detroit Art Institute ; Fisk University Galleries, Nashville TN; [Greenville County Museum](#); High Museum of Art, Atlanta GA; Indiana University Art Museum; University of Iowa Museum of Art; [Minneapolis Institute of the Arts](#); [National Gallery of Art](#); Greenville County Museum of Art; Hampton University museum, Hampton VA; James E. Lewis Museum of Art, Morgan State University, [Baltimore](#) MD ; Metropolitan Museum of Art ; Minneapolis Institute of Arts ; National Portrait Gallery ; [Smithsonian Museum of American Art](#); National Centre for Art and Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris; [Newark Museum of Art](#); Philadelphia Museum of Art; Rose Art Museum; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture NY; Smithsonian Museum of American Art; Tampa Museum of Art; Tennessee State Museum,, Nashville TN; [The Heckscher Museum of Art: The Walter O. Evans Collection of African-American Art](#) ; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art ; Whitney Museum of American Art ; Worcester Art Museum; and [University of Michigan Museum of Art](#).

## Synoptic CV –

### Solo exhibitions [ [edit](#) ]

- [Two thousand and five - 2006](#) : *Beauford Delaney: From New York to Paris* , [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#) , Philadelphia, PA.
- [2005](#) : *Beauford Delaney: From New York to Paris* , Knoxville Museum of Art, [Knoxville](#) , Tennessee.



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- [2005](#) : *Beauford Delaney: From New York to Paris* , Greenville County Museum, Greenville, North Carolina.
- [2004](#) : *Beauford Delaney: From New York to Paris* , The [Minneapolis Institute of Arts](#) , Minneapolis, Minnesota.
- [2003](#) : *Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow* , [Fogg Art Museum](#) , Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- [2002](#) : *Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow* , [Anacostia Museum](#) and Center for African History and Culture of Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC
- [2002](#) : *Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow* , The [Studio Museum in Harlem](#) , New York.
- [2002](#) : *Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow* , [High Museum of Art](#) , [Atlanta](#) , GA.
- [1999](#) : *Beauford Delaney, Liquid Light: Paris Abstractions, 1954-1970* , Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York, and Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina.
- [1998](#) : *Beauford Delaney: An Introduction* , Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, Tennessee.
- [1994](#) : *Beauford Delaney: The New York Years (1929-1953)* , [Philippe Briet Gallery](#) , New York.
- [1992](#) : *1991-1992: One of the rooms of my gallery IS Dedicated to the art of Beauford Delaney* , [Philippe Briet Gallery](#) , New York [February 13-March 21] [5-26 June].
- [1992](#) : Gallery Darthea Speyer, [Paris](#) .
- [1991](#) : *1991-1992: One of the rooms of my gallery IS Dedicated to the art of Beauford Delaney* , [Philippe Briet Gallery](#) , New York [October 10 October to 9 November].
- [1991](#) : *Beauford Delaney: A Retrospective [Fifty Years of Light]* , Philippe Briet Gallery, New York.
- [1988](#) : *Beauford Delaney: From Tennessee to Paris* , Philippe Briet Gallery, [New York](#) .
- [1979](#) : *Beauford Delaney: A Retrospective* , The Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia, PA.
- [1978](#) : *Beauford Delaney: A Retrospective* , The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York.
- [1973](#) : *Beauford Delaney* , Darthea Speyer Gallery, Paris.
- [1969](#) : *Evening dedicated to Beauford Delaney by his friends* , organized by [Helen Baltrusaitis](#) American Cultural Center, Paris. Exhibition of works belonging to his friends, accompanied by a concert of [Jazz](#) with ( [Marion Brown](#) and [Art Simmons](#) ).
- [1964](#) : *Tables of Beauford Delaney* , Galerie Lambert, Paris.
- [1960](#) : *Beauford Delaney-: Exposure of June 21, 1960* , Galerie Paul Facchetti, Paris.
- [1956](#) : *BEAUFORT-DELANEY: paintings and pastels ( sic )* , Prism Gallery, Paris.
- [1955](#) : *Beauford Delaney Exposicion* Galeria Clan, [Madrid](#) .
- [1950](#) , [52](#) , [53](#) : Roko Gallery, New York.
- [1950](#) : *Oil Paintings and Pastels by Beauford Delaney* , University of Maine Art Gallery, Carnegie Hall, [University of Maine](#) , Orono, ME.

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- [1948](#) : *DELANEY: An Exhibition of Paintings by Beauford Delaney* , the Artists Gallery, New York.
- [1947](#) : Women's College of Greensboro, [University of North Carolina](#) , [Greensboro](#) , NC.
- [1947](#) : *Seventh Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture* , The Pyramid Club, Philadelphia, PA.
- [1941](#) : Art Café, New York.
- [1941](#) : Vendome Art Galleries, New York.
- [1938](#) : Playhouse Art Gallery, 8th Street, New York.
- [1938](#) : C Gallery, [Washington, DC](#)
- [1932](#) : The New York Public Library, 5th Avenue & 42nd Street, New York.
- [1930](#) : *Portrait Exhibit of Sketches by Beauford Delaney* , The New York Public Library, 135th Street Branch, New York.

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**BEAUFORD DELANEY (AMERICAN 1901 - 1979)**



Untitled (Yellow Composition), 1958-59 (dated to 1958-59 by Delaney expert, Burton Reinfrank)

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Oil on canvas, c.1958-59

76.825 x 51.12 inches 191.31 x 129.84 cm

Signed and inscribed on verso in black oil pigment: "Beauford Delaney/ 68 rue Paul Vaillant/  
Couturie(r)/ Clamart Seine."

Provenance:

Acquired from the Artist in Paris;

Jean-Marc Delvaux Auction, Paris, June 25, 2001 lot 256 for \$20,836;

Private Collection NY;

Private Collection US

Exhibited:

Exhibited: ACA Galleries NY

*Beauford Delaney: From New York to Paris*. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, November 21, 2004 to February 20, 2005; Knoxville Museum of Art, April 8 to June 25, 2005; Greenville County Museum of Art, August 3 - October 2, 2005; Philadelphia Museum of Art, November 12, 2005 to January 28, 2006.

Literature:

Patricia Canterbury, *Beauford Delaney: From New York to Paris*, exhibition catalogue, Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2004, illus. #37

David Lemming, *Amazing Grace: A Life of Beauford Delaney*, Oxford U Press, NY, 1998, PI 12 (variant)

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"Perhaps I should say, flatly, what I believe--that he is a great painter, among the very greatest; but I do know that great art can only be created out of love, and that no greater lover has ever held a brush."

\_\_\_James Baldwin (1924-1987), writer,  
friend of artist Beauford Delaney

**"He has been starving and working all of his life -- in Tennessee, in Boston, in New York, and now in Paris. He has been menaced more than any other man I know by his social circumstances and also by all the emotional and psychological stratagems he has been forced to use to survive; and more than any other man I know, he has transcended both the inner and the outer darkness." - James Baldwin, 1964**

Beauford Delaney (1901-79). An American modernist painter, Delaney produced engaging portraits, landscapes, and abstractions celebrated for their brilliance and technical complexity.

A native of Knoxville, Tennessee, Delaney took lessons from a local artist before moving to Boston in 1924 to begin his formal training at several area schools. In 1929, when the artist arrived in Depression-era New York City, he immersed himself in the lively bohemian scene of Greenwich Village. It was Delaney's pastel portraits of the people that surrounded him in the Village that won the artist public acclaim as well as his first solo and group exhibitions. For the remainder of the 1930s and 40s, Delaney was well-known in the New York art world for his bold and experimental use of color. During this period he developed his style of reducing figures in his paintings to abstracted shapes of brilliant color loosely outlined in black. His circle of friends grew to include Henry James, Georgia O'Keeffe and Delaney's closest friend, acclaimed African-American author James Baldwin. Despite this acceptance, however, Delaney remained discouraged by the racial barriers that he continually encountered in the United States.

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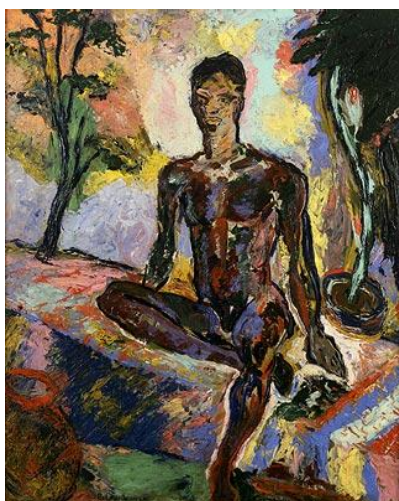


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James Baldwin first met Delaney in 1940 when a friend, who was concerned about Baldwin's emotional state, suggested that he visit the artist at his studio on Greene Street. The sixteen-year-old Baldwin stood at a crossroads in his life, faced with making profound professional and personal choices. The older man served as mentor as well as an example of a black artist who had achieved success and respect within his profession. Both men recognized in one another gifts of intelligence and creativity and the possession of a powerful inherent wisdom. Baldwin expressed as much when he recounted how Delaney opened the door and proceeded to perform an "instant X-ray of my brain, lungs, liver, heart, bowels, and spinal column" before inviting him in to tea. Their friendship would last a lifetime. The rich, vibrant color and strong contrast in *Dark Rapture* certainly convey both the intensity and energy that Delaney perceived in this young man of great promise.



*Dark Rapture* (James Baldwin) 1941 Oil on canvas 34 x 28 inches Bynum & Costin  
Collection NY

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During the 1940s, Delaney's approach became increasingly abstract. In his still life painting, shapes and lines suggest a decorative pattern on a two-dimensional surface, rather than separate elements occupying an imagined space. As in his urban landscapes, Delaney employs diagonals here in the foreground to imply the surface of a table placed at an angle to the patterned space behind the bowl of fruit. However, instead of presenting the bowl from the side in relationship to the table, the artist tipped the bowl upward. Consequently, the viewer is confronted with two perspectives simultaneously: peering into the picture from the side guided by the diagonals, and looking straight down into the bowl from above.

In early September of 1950, Delaney began a two-month fellowship at the Yaddo Art Colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. Founded in 1900 by Spencer and Katrina Trask, Yaddo was intended to support and nurture the talents of writers, painters, composers, and other creative artists. Guests were provided with living quarters and daily meals. A particularly wonderful benefit was the camaraderie that developed among the various guests. Delaney formed long-term friendships with the writers Elizabeth Bishop, May Swenson, and Jane Mayhall on this,

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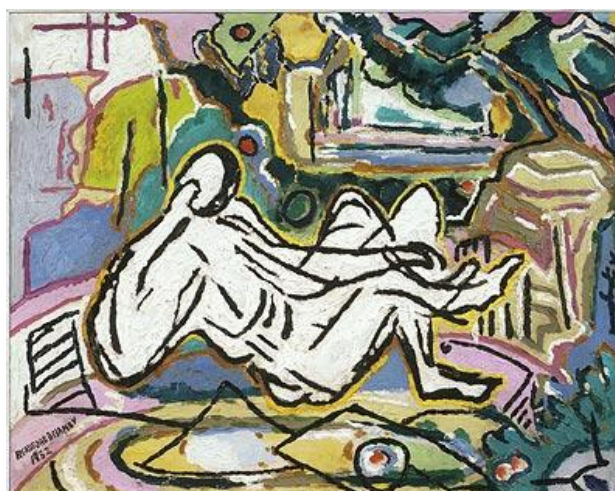
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his first of two visits to Yaddo. His two visits to the art colony (the second occurring in November 1951) were the only times in the artist's impoverished life that he did not have to worry about keeping a roof over his head. This security gave him the time to pay full attention to his art, which was vital to the advancement of his style between 1950 and late 1953. During this period, Delaney painted many compositions based on everyday life in Washington Square while at his studio in New York City at 713 Broadway.

By 1953 Delaney's plans for a trip to Paris were about to be fulfilled. He began to make preparations to sublet, and to make arrangements to store his paintings with various friends. At some point during this period, Delaney's friends held a fund-raiser to help finance the artist's trip abroad. The event was staged at Roko Galleries-a gallery owned by Michael Frielich-where the artist had been exhibiting for several years. The box into which guests put their donations, appropriately, was built in the shape of a boat. Each contributor received a chance at a lottery/door prize. The door prize, like the donation box, was laden with symbolic significance, being Delaney's recent painting, Distant Horizons. The winner of that lottery is the painting's present owner.





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*Distant Horizons* 1952 Oil on canvas 16 x 20 inches Carl L Leeds Collection.

Once in Paris, Delaney decided to stay there, making the city his home for the remainder of his life. Already a mature expressionist painter when he arrived, Delaney began to move away from figuration to explore the emotional power of abstraction, producing an extensive body of work in watercolor and oil on canvas that took his art career to an unprecedented level.

"Beauford Delaney: From New York to Paris" explored Delaney's dramatic stylistic shift from figurative compositions of New York life to abstract expressionist studies of color and light following his move to Paris in 1953. Approximately fifty paintings, including several never before exhibited, illuminate some of Delaney's most innovative years and firmly place his work among the dominant art movements of the day.

From the exhibition catalogue for, *The Color Yellow: Beauford Delaney* at the High Museum, Atlanta GA, exhibition curated by Richard J. Powell, Duke University, and organized by Carrie Przybilla, the High's Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art. *Delaney's color 'yellow' boldly glows with the power to alternately appear transcendent, glaring, tortured or joyous.* After nearly 25 years (the first Studio Museum Delaney exhibition was in 1978), the work of master colorist Beauford Delaney returned to The Studio Museum in Harlem in the exhibition, *Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow*. It was written: *The Color Yellow* is one of the first solo exhibitions of this internationally acclaimed artist's work since a retrospective at the Studio Museum NY in 1978, a year before his death. In 2002, the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum exhibited, *The Color Yellow: Beauford Delaney* October 21, 2002 - January 1, 2003, and the Sert Gallery, Harvard University the following year, from 2003-02-15 until 2003-05-04. The Sert Gallery wrote: "The exhibition of approximately 30 paintings and drawings explores the artist's use of yellow in his figurative and abstract works. Delaney

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Vered  
Janet Lehr

Estab. 1972



**NEW YORK CITY**

891 Park Avenue  
New York NY 10021  
TEL/FAX 212 288 6234  
Vered Gallery Fax 631 324 4455  
[janetlehr@veredart.com](mailto:janetlehr@veredart.com)

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believed various hues held spiritual significance and was drawn to the color yellow, which he felt possessed the properties of light, healing, and redemption. “

Beauford Delaney: The Color Yellow presented the full range of Delaney’s art, from the portraits and cityscapes he did in New York’s Greenwich Village in the 1940s to the abstract work that followed his 1953 move to Paris, where he lived until his death in 1979. to him, Yellow, represented light, healing and redemption.

In his essay for the accompanying exhibition catalogue, Powell notes that: