

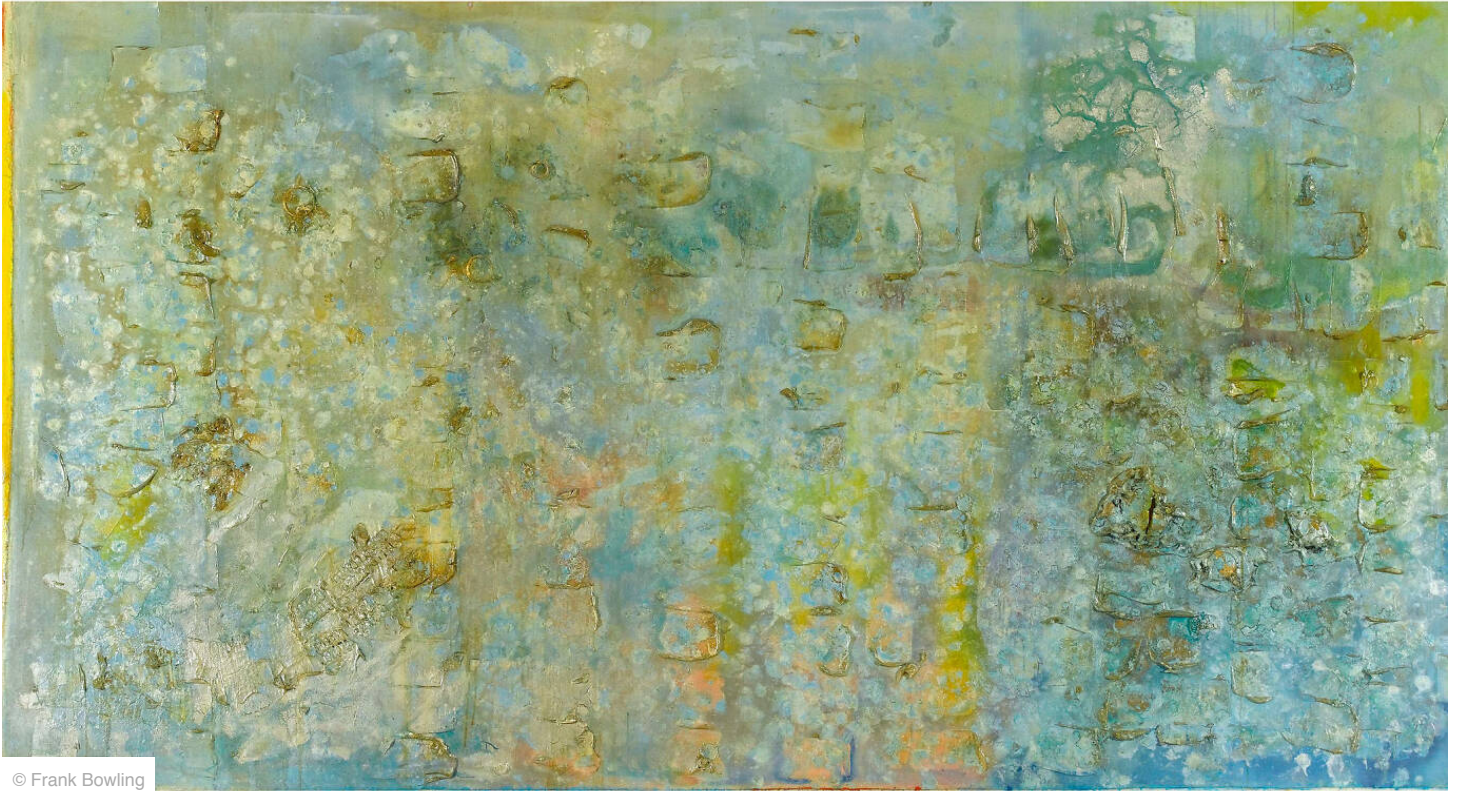


Frank Bowling review

Art  [Tate Britain](#), Westminster  Until Monday August 26 2019 ★★★★★



TIME OUT SAYS ★★★★★

Frank Bowling was an outsider. He still is, really, at 85. But when he arrived in London from Guyana in 1953, he was just a small town black kid from the colonies. He wasn't part of the Soho drinking set, he wasn't some public school rebel, he wasn't an art school-educated formalist. He didn't fit in, and – this is the best bit – he didn't have to fit in.

When you walk through the rooms of early work here, you'll see hints of the American modernists, big nods to Francis Bacon, straight rips of pop art and op art. Bowling wasn't part of those movements, so he didn't have to follow their rules, and he could nick and appropriate with freedom.

The Bacon-y works add elements of black pain – the agony of childbirth in poverty, the misery of destitution in Guyana – to Francis's torment. Then Bowling started screen printing his childhood

home on to his canvasses, mixed with images from photos and adverts. It's a serious whirlwind of pop and modernism and realism, so full of ideas it's almost disorientating.

But as he got older, he calmed things down, concentrating on fewer elements. His giant map paintings are near-abstract washes of colour, with continental shapes poking out of the pinks and greens. They're deeply political works, but I find them a little ugly and obvious.

Things got much better when he ditched representation entirely for pure experimentation. By the 1970s, he'd given up on pop and all that other jazz in favour of pushing paint as far as possible. He poured it in globular pools of pulsating colour, he stained it into canvases to create huge, meditative, cosmic vistas that swallow you up. Later works are caked in transparent sheets of goo or covered in ripped lumps of canvas. Even today, he's still messing about with shape and colour and texture. You don't have to like it all – I don't – but you have to admire his chutzpah.

Frank Bowling is a singular abstract artist, a relentlessly experimental voice. Forget the old boys' club of British art history, Bowling's party is a lot more fun.

By: Eddy Frankel