

**Alteronce Gumby:**

***Somewhere Under the Rainbow /***

***The Sky is Blue and What Am I***

(a dual-site exhibition)

18 March – 25 April 2021

Charles Moffett (511 Canal Street, NYC)

False Flag (11-22 44th Road, Queens)

**PRESS CONTACT**

Molly Krause, krause co.

[molly@molly.nyc](mailto:molly@molly.nyc)

Images: [www.molly.nyc/gumby](http://www.molly.nyc/gumby)

**Book inquiries:**

Hannah Gottlieb-Graham, ALMA Communications

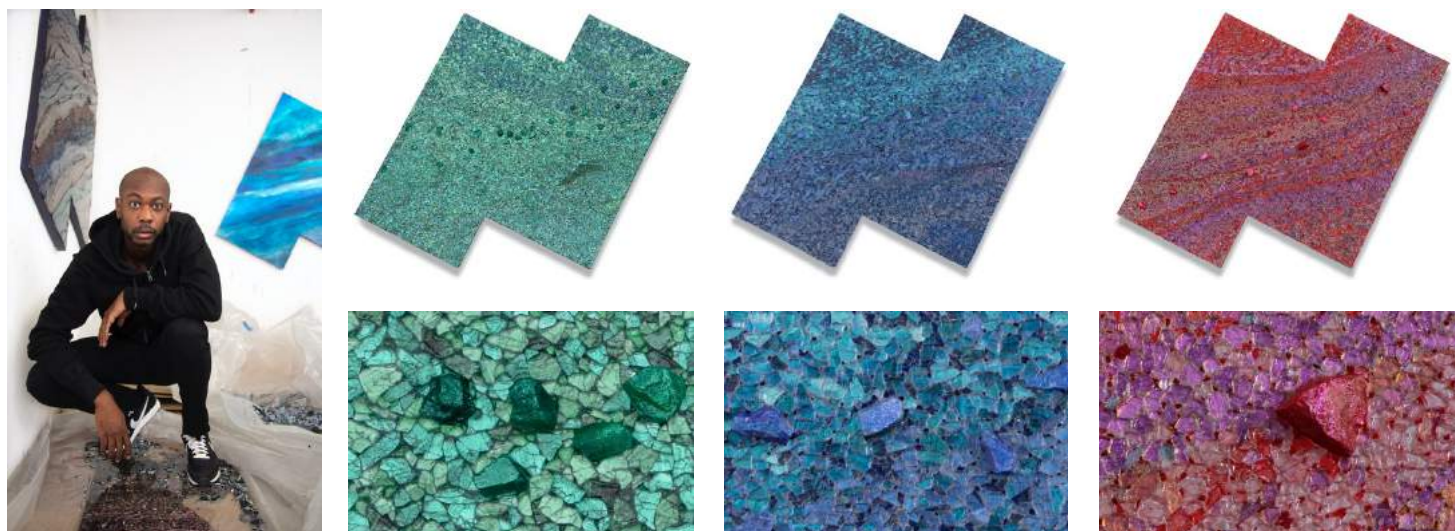
[hannah@almacommunications.co](mailto:hannah@almacommunications.co)

## **Charles Moffett and False Flag stage dual-site exhibition of new works by Bronx-based mixed media artist Alteronce Gumby**

*Somewhere Under the Rainbow / The Sky is Blue and What am I* comprises 15 new works that use uncut gemstones (as they relate to light, color, physics, and astrology) to explore matters of perception, race, and identity. With an integral regard for color theory and panel shapes, the show also puts forth a personal-narrative-imbued reimagination of midcentury geometric abstraction

*Accompanying the show is Gumby's inaugural monograph, Color is a Beautiful Thing, featuring an essay by Ashley James (Associate Curator, Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim Museum) and an introductory interview conducted by critic and curator Antwaun Sargent*

**New York, NY – March 2021** – Charles Moffett is pleased to announce a dual-site exhibition from mixed media artist Alteronce Gumby (b. 1985, Pennsylvania; MFA Yale, 2016). The show employs scale variance in new ways while pushing Gumby's longtime thematic considerations of how light, physics, natural energies, and color can be contextualized into a larger societal conversation about race, as well as social considerations pertaining to the spiritual practices native to the locations from which he sources the gemstones featured across his oeuvre. Also explored is the artist's present-day elucidation of midcentury geometric abstraction; Gumby appropriates the movement's formal qualities while imbuing the work with themes and influences diametric to the reductive nature and prescribed forms of the midcentury canon.



Artist portrait by Elizabeth Brooks. All artwork 2021; 54 x70"; uncut gemstones, painted glass, stained glass, and acrylic on panel.

From left, with detail shots below: *It's not easy being Green* • *The sky was Blue glass* • *Love is Everywhere*

A total of 15 works will be split between the exhibition's dual sites. A selection of gemstone-heavy works on panel, ranging from 12-by-12 inches to six-by-six feet, will be on view at Charles Moffett's Canal Street space, taking advantage of the gallery's sun-drenched positioning to maximize the natural light interplay with the works' highly faceted surfaces. Meanwhile, the second component of the exhibition will exploit the vast size of False Flag's Long Island City space by allowing Gumby to push the boundaries of scale; its centerpiece will be a 24-foot-long canvas work (across six panels) that employs various shades of blue and

focuses on metaphysical considerations that surround subjective perceptions of the sky. Additional works of various dimensions and material combinations will be on view between the two spaces.

In addition to the motif of color as a metaphor for racial identity, central to the show and Gumby's practice is the contemporary reimagination of the white-male canon of early-twentieth-century to midcentury abstract art. Most foundationally, Gumby often employs a square or distinctly shaped canvas (rather than rectangular), in the tradition of seminal artists of geometric abstraction like Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly (and their predecessors, including Josef Albers, Piet Mondrian, and Kazimir Malevich). However, rather than exclusively as a formal device, Gumby uses these storied panel shapes as an exploratory framework for decidedly more complex devices, situating granular materials—stones, broken glass, crystals—into monochromatic arrangements that serve as analogies for multifaceted commentaries on race and other themes.

“The history of monochromatic painting, of color field painting, of art in general is dominated by white-male artists,” explains Gumby. “Especially when you're looking at the rosters of major museum collections. And I feel like the language around the meaning of color in abstraction gets pushed aside.” As one example, Gumby references Ad Reinhardt's seminal monochromatic black works: “Within my culture or my peer group, when we think of the color black, we're not thinking of it as, to quote Reinhardt, as a ‘void,’ as a ‘vacuum,’ as something to just get lost in. The color black, I feel like in a black community holds so much more significance. I think the color black is probably the most diverse and unique color there is. Maybe I was born in a certain culture where there's so many meanings for signs and symbols and signifiers behind color, but as an abstract painter and someone who's involved in this trajectory, I want to add my perspective, or my voice, or my debate to the conversation.”

Of note to Gumby's process is that when he renders what appears from a distance to be a black hue in one of his granular works, it's often a careful combination of brightly painted glass and disparately monochromatic gemstones that, when combined in a specific arrangement, merges together to create a more-or-less monochromatic black surface; “I mix ambers and earth tones, and blues and greens together to try to conjure this essence of blackness within a medium. I discovered that I could get such a diverse range of this color black by mixing all these colors together.” This exercise ties into Gumby's artistic exploration of color and race as a complex amalgamation of energies, as well as his regard for the cosmos and physics.

On view at Charles Moffett, and complimenting the 24-foot piece at False Flag as another conceptual centerpiece of the dual-site show, is a series of five large-scale *Moonwalker* works—a term Gumby uses to describe his signature zigzag-shaped panels, which he developed in 2017. These large, gemstone-filled, monochromatic works each contain distinct energies provided by their constituent gems and minerals. For this body of work, the gemstones he sources are lapis, ruby, amethyst, rose quartz, lemon quartz, fluorite, black tourmaline, and citrine. Each of the *Moonwalkers* in the show contains up to 40 raw, uncut gemstones, which Gumby integrates onto the panel with painted glass before sealing with acrylic. (In general, even when Gumby produces works with painted finishes rather than granular, the paint itself contains ground-down gemstones that are conceptually considered in the same manner as those punctuating the granular works; this is the case with the 24-foot False Flag piece.) Regarding the incorporation of painted glass across his works: one of Gumby's core materials is shards of glass panels that he painted before shattering. This practice and resulting shard integration represent cycles of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

An additional layer of meaning in this set of five individually colored *Moonwalkers* stems from Gumby's childhood love of the Power Rangers. In this case, the significance of the Power Rangers specifically rests in Gumby's continued fascination with color theory and the type of sci-fi storyline first introduced to him by way of the franchise—a fascination he retroactively attributes to the Power Rangers' emphasis on color as a reference for race. Explains the artist:

“The Power Rangers for me is another reference for color in its relationship to race. As a kid, I loved the show. My brothers and I took karate classes at the Y and the sci-fi nature of the storyline is something I think about today. Looking back, you can't help but to notice the relation between race and the colors each ranger wore. The leader of the group, the Red Ranger, having the most diverse ethnicity of them all. For a black kid to see the Black Ranger kicking ass every Saturday morning definitely had huge

influence. Each ranger held their own in battle but when the enemy or trouble was too big, they had to unite their strengths to create Megazord to finally destroy the monster. I think there's something about the colors or race coming together to overthrow an evil. Everything on earth is made of star stuff, even us. And we have the theoretical power within us to overcome any evil that threatens us. We would just have to come together to defeat it.”

Gumby named the *Moonwalker* pieces as such because their “gravity-defying nature” reminded him of Michael Jackson’s moonwalk when he developed the panel shape in 2017. Subsequently, “Moonwalker” became a double entendre; “My fascination with the cosmos and other worlds has led me to consider the relationship between light and color in distant galaxies,” he explains. “The process of painting helps me get there.”

Astrology and the cosmos are fundamental to not only Gumby’s spirituality and worldview, but to the actual fabric of his compositions. When he is starting a new work, after his initial steps of determining what mood he wants to evoke; what his dominant painted-glass shard color should be; and what gemstones might most effectively conjure the right energy for the piece, Gumby first charges the stones in direct sunlight for several days to manifest their full energies, then lays them on the canvas or panel surface in the form of particular constellations. The constellations often correlate with his own sun, moon, and rising signs, but are sometimes simply dictated by his mood or the season. While the final compositions’ constituent glass and stones might appear to be arbitrarily scattered, there are, in fact, multiple specific star sign constellations within the material arrangement. This tangible integration of celestial energy furthers the artist’s overall examination of the universe’s cosmic interrelatedness.

Regarding the dual-site exhibition’s two-part title, *Somewhere Under the Rainbow/The Sky is Blue and What am I*, the artist explains: “If you look at the perspective of the light that we get from the sun—this phenomenon that we call a ‘rainbow’—there’s this huge spectrum of color that we, as human beings, have chopped up and prescribed various meanings. We radicalized color.”

He continues: “It’s about color, it’s about light, it’s about perspective. We take it as a societal given that ‘the sky is blue,’ but isn’t it just a reflection of light being cast across our atmosphere at a certain angle from the sun? Most of the time, like at night and in bad weather, the sky *isn’t* blue. And when it is, people looking at it from different places will still see it differently. That’s just a beautiful metaphor for me, for the way each and every person views the world and their own perspective on life. So I just want to bring the experience of just looking at light, and experiencing color for color, for what it is. And maybe thinking of ourselves as unique individuals, stars in the universe. It’s really about perspective, light, and color, is what I can say.”

*Due to the pandemic, the exhibition is on view by appointment only. Press may make an appointment by emailing [molly@molly.nyc](mailto:molly@molly.nyc), and others are encouraged to book via the [SeeSaw app](#).*

# # #