

Joan Witek

Black as a Living Colour

October 23 - November 12, 2025

Bartha_contemporary is proud to present **Black as a Living Colour**, a focused survey of recent works on paper by **Joan Witek**, on view from 23 October to 12 November. Widely recognised for her rigorous exploration of black, the New-York artist has transformed a single hue into a rich, expressive language over nearly five decades.

From early figurative woodcuts to shimmering rice-paper drawings and atmospheric watercolours, Witek shows that black is anything but void. *“Black is sophisticated and primitive, emotional and intellectual—it’s a colour everyone responds to,”* she remarks. Indeed, after working at both the Brooklyn Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the department of African, Oceanic, and the Americas, Witek dedicated her career solely to the study of the colour black.

This exhibition showcases Witek's recent rice-paper works, where ink is absorbed on the topology of delicate, wrinkled sheets, creating a mesmerizing dance of light and shadow. A selection of exceptional works from the 1995 *Albee Suite*—watercolours made during a residency at playwright Edward Albee's Montauk retreat—offers a unique insight into Witek's use of watercolour, translucent film and paper. These works evoke coastal horizons, ploughed fields and surfaces of tree bark, inviting the viewer to explore the depth of her artistic techniques.

Critics have long celebrated Witek's ability to unlock the optical potential of black. The New York Times praised her 1980s works for their theological undertones, while Art in America wrote that her surfaces range from velvety depth to diaphanous lightness. Hyperallergic recently noted that her compositions buzz with subtle energy, rewarding patient viewing.

Black as a Living Colour runs from 23 October through 12 November at Bartha_contemporary, 7 Ledbury Mews North, Notting Hill, London W11 2AF - by appointment. For press enquiries, images or further information, please contact: Niklas von Bartha, niklas@barthacontemporary.com, +44 20 7985 0015

Please see our latest Journal article on barthacontemporary.com for an indepth insight into the artist's unparalleled practice.