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Will Barnet, *Overview*, 2005,
 oil on canvas, 40" x 28". Alexandre

Will Barnet
Alexandre

Over the course of his long career, Will Barnet has maneuvered with skill and conviction from socially conscious works in the '30s to abstract canvases in the '40s and '50s, to flat, Japanese-style scenes in the '60s and '70s. Now 99 years old, he is once again exploring the paths he embarked on more than half a century ago. Sixteen abstract paintings from the past seven years made up this handsome exhibition. Rooted in a fascination with African and Native American art, Barnet's works are filled with mysterious symbols and anthropomorphic shapes that suggest body parts and bones. With their beauti-

fully balanced positive and negative spaces, some compositions evoke maps of ancient burial grounds, while others are reminiscent of the painted pottery of the Hopi Indians.

Earth tones, ranging from brick reds to mustard yellows to chalk whites, are the common denominator. In *Terracotta* (2003–4), black, purple, and blue pictographs float on what looks like a caramel-colored wall of kiln-baked tiles. The calligraphic garden of *Landscape with Hicus* (2008) deploys olive green and burnt orange, those symbiotic hues that can drive the color-blind to distraction. In *Overview* (2005), cryptic green and blue patterns are juxtaposed with equally weighted gold and brown ones. The paintings are as gloriously decorative as they are enigmatic. Only the black, white, tan, and red *Inauguration* (2009), with its abstracted suggestion of a head and dancing limbs, hints at commentary. Painted during the first year of the Obama presidency, the canvas seems to vibrate with jubilation.

—Mona Molarsky