

HAUSER & WIRTH

Catherine Goodman's New Paintings

by Jennifer Higgin

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Catherine Goodman, Somerset, 2023, Oil on linen

Catherine Goodman's monumental new paintings conjure landscapes and seascapes and states of mind: turbulent one moment, calm the next, impossible to summarise. For decades she's been described as a figurative artist, and her move into abstraction has resulted in a sustained rush of energy, which emerges in swift, swirling colours, tangled reveries and flashes of light as fresh as dawn. The titles of these recent works – such as *Sing While You Sleep*, *Night Beekeeper II*, *The Land of Lapis Angels* (all works 2023) – privilege mood and evocation over blunt explanation. While the artist is wary of too much narrative – she wants the paintings to work within their own logic and is open to different readings of them – Goodman sees the titles as being helpful; a kind of 'doorway for people to walk through'.¹

Drawing from life has long been central to Goodman's approach; she believes that 'we draw

¹ All quotes recorded by Jennifer Higgie at Catherine Goodman's studios in London and Somerset, December 2023 and January 2024.

the world in order to go inwards'. As a trustee of London's National Gallery, she's allowed to visit the paintings after closing hours, and she spends hours studying and sketching at night. She often references artists of the deep past – in particular Titian, whose vivacity is her lodestar, and Veronese's large history paintings – and cinema, in particular the writings of the late Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky, the films of Satyajit Ray and scenes from *Bicycle Thieves*, *The Spirit of the Beehive*, *8 ½*, *In the Mood for Love*, *The Leopard* and others. If one thing unites these myriad works, it's that all of them explore, from various angles, the human condition via a range of everyday actions that become, in retrospect, symbolically laden with meaning. Goodman 'loves working big because it's like drawing on a huge cinema screen. It's so much



Catherine Goodman, *The Land of Lapis Angels*, 2023, Oil on linen

easier to enter it.' Painting, for her, is an exercise in deep immersion, a way of processing what she describes as 'looking and receiving'. As an art student, she rebelled against her teachers' belief that 'there was an objective truth out there'. Making pictures 'was never about problem solving. It's about releasing something.'

Goodman paints rapidly, 'diving straight in' without preliminary sketches; a long-time practitioner of meditation, she allows her intuition to guide her. She often works across

four canvases simultaneously, to let layers dry before she re-works them. She pre-prepares 34 oil colours in tubs – from manganese and Payne's grey, bubble-gum pink and alizarin to Indian yellow, dark violet, sap green, cadmium brown and more – so as not to have her concentration broken by having to mix pigments. 'It releases something completely different,' she says, 'because you don't need to think. You're not squeezing things out or mixing things up. So you can work much more quickly and intuitively. It's made all the difference.'



Catherine Goodman, Burgundy Beekeeper , 2023, Oil on linen

Goodman's working method is as tactile as it is visual, as meditative as it is urgent. Her images emerge from reverie and restlessness, snatches of memory and conversation, the view from the window, the time of year; from atmosphere and feeling. Peer into the surfaces of her paintings and worlds appear in fragments, stutters and drips; tumultuous brushstrokes, lumps of pigment and delicate lines. (For still objects, they are full of movement.) Goodman feels that the most compelling paintings – which emerge,

it should be remembered, from a fusion of body and mind – emanate life, in all its mystery and contradiction. The tension this generates is tangible in Burgundy Beekeeper, which was inspired by the 1973 film *Spirit of the Beehive*, a study of a girl's inner life. It's a choppy swirl of cadmium oranges, Indian yellows, blood reds and pale blues that ascend to a peak of scarlet impasto, flanked by a wash of vivid yellow. In the horizontal *Solstice Morning* the intimation of a naked pink body dissolves in golden light amidst

Weakness is a great thing, and strength is nothing. When a man is just born, he is weak and flexible. When he dies, he is hard and insensitive. When a tree is growing, it's tender and pliant. But when it's dry and hard, it dies. Hardness and strength are death's companions. Pliancy and weakness are expressions of the freshness of being. Because what has hardened will never win.

Andrei Tarkovsky



mystery

Image

ICOP

Imagination

TARKOVSKY

Fight for the speed
Image -
spacious drawing

Imagination

What do you want to say...

Play the music
Turn for you
Muent





Catherine Goodman, *Sasha*, 2023, Oil on linen

a kaleidoscopic mesh. By contrast, *Scarlet Shig* evokes a dense thicket of undergrowth and a welter of vivid detritus projected heavenward. *Somerset* recalls the landscape of the title: rain-soaked fields animated with bursts of soft pinks and yellows and hints of old bark. There are layers here that run deep into the earth and shoot up to the stars. It's at once abstract, a landscape, a state of mind, a view.

Visiting Goodman's London studio on a cold day in December, I ask her if she sees her recent paintings as abstract. She agrees but then pauses and adds 'even though there are portraits in there'. (It's painting's prerogative to

be contrary: a restless medium, it rarely toes the line.) The artist regularly paints her family, explaining that her close relationships are a 'microcosm of what's going on in the world at the moment with politics; the pain and the anxiety that one is fully aware of and carries into the studio whether or not you like it'. (I think of Tarkovsky's famous maxim: 'Art would be useless if the world were perfect.') Goodman's painting *Sasha*, for example, is a case in point: a study in both exuberance and anxiety. An homage to one of her teenage nieces, it's a landscape formed of feverish reds and lemon yellows, leavened by glimpses of a turbulent blue canopy.





Catherine Goodman, *Scarlet Shig*, 2023, Oil on linen

Abstraction, for Goodman, takes her to uncharted waters, a place where free association flows freely. Her move away from figuration is a way of shifting her expectations of what of an image might be, and what it might be capable of doing; a way of seeing if

she 'could reach something that felt more true to the experience without it'. She explains: 'It's to do with trying to make the essence more personal. You just don't know with your unconscious what's going to emerge. And I like that sense of absolute freedom.'



Catherine Goodman

New Works

Hauser & Wirth, Downtown Los Angeles
27 February – 5 May 2024

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About Catherine Goodman

For more than four decades, Catherine Goodman CBE has developed a unique visual language that communicates a powerful visionary response to her lived experience and memory. Goodman's intensely expressive painting process uses strongly pigmented oil paint, brushwork, oil sticks, drips and washes to create atmospheric and immersive paintings which explore both figuration and abstraction.

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About Jennifer Higgie

Jennifer Higgie is an Australian writer and former editor of frieze magazine who lives in London. Her recent books include *The other side: a journey into women, art and the spirit world* (2023) and *The Mirror and the Palette: Rebellion, Revolution and Resilience: 500 Years of women's self-portraits* (2021). She was guest curator of the 2023 exhibition *Thin Skin* at Monash University Art Museum in Melbourne and is host of the National Gallery of Australia's new podcast, *Artist's Artists*.

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