



ANN PURCELL'S EXHIBITION ROCKS BERRY CAMPBELL'S CHELSEA GALLERY

In Pursuit of Abstraction

DECEMBER 26TH, 2017 by Jean Lawlor Cohen

When Ann Purcell was a young painter and art teacher in Washington, D.C., she came to know two artists she now considers mentors—Gene Davis, famed for his vertical stripes, and Jacob Kainen, who influenced generations of artists with his wisdom, independence and work ethic. Those two, in their prime years, had solved their own formal problems during the heyday of America's most influential critic—the legendary Clement Greenberg. Much later, Purcell had a five-hour encounter with Greenberg, a studio visit when the man pointed to “Lascaux,” her first so-called “Caravan,” and said, “Do more of these.”

His few, simple words only later resounded, but soon enough propelled and now confirm the rightness of Purcell's career-long exploration of abstraction. To scan the vibrant canvases she has produced over the last four decades is to be reminded of gesture's legacy and fresh power. At Chelsea's Berry Campbell Gallery, opening Jan. 4, paintings from the 1980s document this ongoing pursuit of what the medium will allow, in the artist's words, a process of “thinking but not thinking, loose and free but controlled.”

The current exhibition features the “Caravan” series, a term that relates to actual and aspirational travel. Some titles imply this—“Darjeeling,” “Raja,” “Mah Jongg,” “Lascaux,” “Balthazar,” “Geisha.” But “Caravan” also signals Purcell's desire to capture movement through space in paint. She acknowledges the impact still of early training as a dancer, time spent assisting filmmakers and lifelong sensitivity to music. Matters of rhythm, sequence and time help to create “a dialogue between the paintings, sometimes chaotic, sometimes flowing.”

In her Brooklyn studio, Purcell initiates new work and revisits the serial concepts that she has never abandoned. Music fills the air, often the sounds of Yo-Yo Ma's “Silk Road,” a fitting track for this artist's journey of self-discovery.

**Jan. 4-Feb. 3, 2018: “Ann Purcell,” Berry Campbell Gallery, 530 W. 24th St.,
212.924.2178, www.berrycampbell.com, Tu-Sa 10 am-6 pm**