

The New Criterion

Gallery chronicle January – February 2018

by James Panero

On the controversy surrounding the Berkshire Museum, and on “Ann Purcell: Caravan Series” at Berry Campbell, “Ben Godward: Sculptures” at Sean Scully Studio, and “Katherine Bernhardt: Green” at Canada.

The paintings of Ann Purcell are a tour de force of abstract mechanics. At Chelsea’s Berry Campbell gallery, an impressive selection from her “Caravan Series” of the late 1970s and early 1980s is now on view.¹



Ann Purcell, Race Point, 1982, Acrylic and collage on canvas, Berry Campbell

Born in Washington, D.C. in 1941, Purcell studied with the Washington Color School painter Gene Davis, who became a mentor. Color and movement have likewise been hallmarks of her own work. The force of Purcell’s compositions is not so much based on a tension of in and out, surface and depth, but of up and down. Her paintings owe much to a sense for the choreography of shapes and the effects of gravity on forms. In particular, she uses collage, with strips and squares of canvas adhered to free-form acrylic designs, to explore the implications of movement. These forms seem to hang and swing, twist and turn, as though pinned at odd angles. The blue rectangle of *Gypsy Wind* (1983) tips like a lever. A jumble of shapes leap from the ground in *Race Point* (1982). These actions then appear to interact with the paint beneath, wiping and stirring her colors into dynamic compositions.

¹ “Ann Purcell: Caravan Series” opened at Berry Campbell, New York, on January 4 and remains on view through February 3, 2018.