

**STATEMENT ON “THE CARAVANS“ Series of Paintings by Ann Purcell
November 2017**

I love art. One of the things that is so *wonder*-full about art is that art history is an endless resource – one cannot consume it all – and one is never bored. There are thousands of years of art to mine and a challenging and supportive foundation for the artist. I believe art is essential and a rewarding experience for mankind.

With my love of learning and exploring art history and so many artists, in the early 1980s I came to think that no one had really done anything to expand the new ideas in the Matisse paper-cutouts which I so admired. I thought these were exceptionally innovative. I always loved that inspiring picture of the ill Matisse in his bed, cutting the beautiful forms and colors; and with a long wooden pointer telling his assistant where to move and place them. I thought of the playfulness of this process he invented while very sick, yet still working, and the expansive technique it could affect by this movable process. Of course, Matisse is an idol.

In the mid-1980s I saw an exhibit at Knoedler Gallery of Frank Stella’s “Indian Bird Series”. These were painted sculptures that I thought emanated from these cutouts and triggered excitement in me again.

I began working on this idea in the early 1980s in the smaller Tapestry Series that led to the “Playground Series” paintings - huge, informal, shaped-canvas by adding cut pieces to the paintings. These were deliberate abstractions I made, some from leftover paintings - and some influenced by art and artists I admire --a Rothko here, Motherwell, Gene Davis stripes, Pollock drips, Joan Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler, Hoffman, Still, Gauguin, Turner, Whistler, Asian art--- the possibilities were open and endless. Sometimes I would create a piece for a placement. Other times randomly I’d see the extensive collection I was gathering push-pinned to my studio wall; and I could (like Matisse) test something first, find color combinations one might not normally choose, juxtapositions that were jarring or harmonious, surprising contrasts, play with textures, etc. The choices seemed endless and were so much fun to produce.

From these Playground paintings, I later attempted this process as stretched canvases – a different challenge which seemed difficult at first. These became the “Caravans”. (Note: all my series are ongoing) The process was similar to the Playgrounds but more formal. I loved the idea of a Caravan – one travels many exotic countries, picking up something here, selling it elsewhere, finding new things, place influences, buying old things, ancient histories -- an open and joyous discovery! This process in the caravan trade or nomadic lifestyle is so similar to this Caravan painting process. I use music and dance as painting influences -- eclectic music and sometimes Yo Yo Ma’s “Silk Road”; and I had read many books on Marco Polo and other exotic travelers. Having been an early, exotic and adventurous personal traveler myself, I savor and learned so much from these experiences.

This process achieves a different new space that can be very deep and atmospheric, bounce in and out, the positive becomes the negative and vice versa. New space and relationships are uncovered between items – paintings within paintings - cacophonous, harmonious. The painting is *alive* in movement, change, duality, contrast and ambiguity.

They are titled to have a reference to my intention or instincts but I only want to guide the viewer to a feeling, and leave the viewer open to their own experience.

GET YOUR BACKPACK READY!!! I hope you enjoy them as much as I enjoyed making them.

An aside: I also remember on a studio visit requested by Clement Greenberg in the 1980s, he stayed 5 hours and went all through my very filled-storage racks. Usually commenting on formal elements in much detail such as shallow space, soft colors, contrast bothered him, etc. – to which I didn’t agree. But he landed on I think my first “Caravan” called “Lascaux” and just simply said “Do more of these”. At the time I thought it went in one ear and out the other as there was no further elaboration - but still worth remembering.