

'The Long Wait for the Angel'

by Ted Snell

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Jennifer Goodman refers constantly to the principles of harmony, balance, geometry, stability, structure, symmetry and asymmetry. They are the foundation that underpins her practice. In the past this dance with equilibrium was played out within the structure of the grid, but since her 2010 exhibition *Ocular Spectra* she has dismantled that stylish geometry and fabricated a space in which arabesques loop elegantly. Captured within the strict rectangular frame of the canvas this exploration of pictorial space extends endlessly in a parallel universe of non-referential, abstract meandering.



At first her recent paintings seem like a complete break, a rupture with a previously stable world and headlong entry into one in which forms play with each other, lock and uncouple, find their place then shift, never to fix rigidly. If Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg could split irreversibly over the introduction of a diagonal into the strict geometry of the grid, how must the Jennifer Goodman of the geometric works come to terms with her arabesque self? However, in truth there is much that links these bodies of work and while the containing geometry has receded into pictorial space its organising principles remain.

The same freshness and energy that informed those earlier works is still evident and her meticulously and methodically painted works retain a vibrancy that belies their long gestation and fabrication. I have a passion she says, "...to mix all my colours in order that they be specifically emotionally and idiosyncratically mine". This is the moment of recognition and acquaintance when the family resemblance infiltrates and the relationships become clear. Like siblings with different personalities and characteristics, their DNA is slowly revealed after a considered engagement of any of these new works. We come to see their similar idiosyncrasies, their common traits, their nuanced harmonies and in myriad ways we come to understand their genetic structure.

Collage is the “formal thinking device” that has provided the catalyst for this evolution. Cutting into coloured paper has enabled Goodman a freedom in decision-making that has opened up these new pictorial possibilities, “... something you would not have thought of, a new direction, discovering a new personality” she explains. Within these collages she is free to push at the boundaries, play with the options of tone and colour, suggest new meanings and identify alternate points of reference. Goodman chooses pre-coloured papers rather than hand-painting them, “... so they provide a different option” and from this found palette her new paintings have matured, “... each with a unique presence, but resonating with the overall rhythm and energy of its generational contemporaries”.

In *Zephyr* the forms within the frame of the canvas have found their resting point with an effortless surety, as if deposited by the fortuitous wind of the title. These floating shapes hover in a moment of stillness before another unforeseen gust that may reposition them and likely assign new partners or companions. Although not referential — this is not a landscape — the stabilised shapes echo the processes of the natural world. There is no narrative concept that directs their form Goodman insists, “... the inspiration is purely internal and intuitive. Art is a sensory experience and my work is an exploration of the senses. Abstraction provides the position to experience an emotive space beyond representation”. Her exploration of these spatial relationships is driven by an intense investigation of colour theory and by her deep absorption in the history of abstraction in Western art. It’s hard not to be swept up in the maelstrom of Matisse, Kandinsky, Stella and Marsden while finding a way through, the delicious complexities of *Zephyr*.

Autumnal Ages and *Musing* offer similar intellectual buoyancy, though the subtle veil-like transparencies of these works suggest a mellower tone. Although every line is sharp, almost razor-edged, the closeness of tone softens and blurs their point of contact to create a shifting openness and breathe of wind. These shifting tonalities generate a new sense of speed and energy as our eyes glide back and forth, activating the space.

Pairings and partnerships are another springboard for generating work. *Orfeo* and *Eurydice* are partners that sing to each other. Although not a diptych, Goodman conceives of these paintings as companions that complete each other, like a marriage. Each panel brings complimentary elements that resonate and amplify to create something more complete and resolved. “My work evolves gradually in nuanced shifts, I’m currently working in two distinct overlapping styles. There are the solid colour forms, which fill canvases with biomorphic shapes and explore interlocking and overlapping transparencies that settle into position in a calm and controlled manner. Then there are the open and flowing works, emphasizing the energetic movement created as the forms find their position on the canvas”. Often these works engage in that conversational pairing or in the case of *Orfeo* and *Eurydice* two works from the first category communicate through inference, reference and familiarity. Brooding *Orfeo* echoes back the sweet refrains of *Eurydice*, their characters locked forever in a harmony of tertiary colour relationships and resonating forms.

Like all successful relationships they take time to develop, time to grow and time to morph into each other. “Painting for me is an intense and methodical process,” Goodman explains, “... creativity can’t be summoned, as suggested by the title of my show, which is part of a line borrowed from Sylvia Plath’s poem *Black Rook in Rainy Weather*, ‘The Long Wait for the Angel, for that rare, random, descent’”. *Orfeo* and *Eurydice* finally find their voice and communicate to us and to each other after a

period of receptivity fuelled through diligence. As Vincent Van Gogh knew “It requires a certain dose of inspiration, a ray on high which doesn’t belong to us, to do beautiful things”¹.

Tristan and Isolde, two other partners, have found similar resonance through this long process when knowledge and informed understanding finally align. “It is through the working and the making that creativity comes forward and work is made magic” Goodman explains, when these silent transformations, the subtle shifts and considered changes quietly announce themselves in the painting.

Through her exploration of colour, movement, tone, surface and form Goodman is articulating a pictorial space that opens up a dialogue with the natural world. While not portraits or landscapes her new works occupy a parallel space of empathy and resonance in which our experience reverberates. We find echoes and cadences from our daily lives that amplify and reinforce our sensual intelligence. Each work is “fine tuned”, in her own words, each shape is determined to have its impact, each colour chosen to facilitate a reaction, each tone pitched perfectly so we as viewers can become active participants in reframing these works as part of our experiential universe.

Jennifer Goodman’s leap into the openness and expansiveness of this new pictorial venture is indicative of a heightened level of sophistication and technical dexterity in her practice. Building on the solid foundation of her earlier works she has literally thrown open the casements to allow invigorating zephyrs to billow in, bringing with them opportunity, possibility and potential. The Angel’s rare, random, descent has brought with it wondrous rewards.

Ted Snell

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¹ Vincent van Gogh, letter 850, to Theo van Gogh. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Saturday, 1 February 1890