

## ArtSeen

# Lisa Corinne Davis: *You Are Here?*

By Barbara A. MacAdam

Lisa Corinne Davis's new paintings, created between 2022 and 2023, represent an evolution from her earlier works. Not a change in direction or an abrupt turn, but rather a development expressed in an extended, nuanced conversation with herself.

And the work comes off as fresh and exciting, albeit familiar to Davis viewers and consistent with her earlier paintings. It's a delicate balance. What stands out is how honest and straightforward her art is, while built on layers of intersecting grids and lines, and colors and patterns with often contradictory rhythms. The layers expose bare compositional and emotional complexity while demonstrating Davis's path not to resolution or conclusion but to a kind of realization. There is a distinct openness to her work, which Davis has said explores "race, culture, and history;" it is psychological and not political. In that way, the paintings are more emotional than declarative and remain determinedly open-ended and essentially borderless, even to the point of inconclusive edges that often look as if they might continue indefinitely.

Davis's fluid but concise work is founded in her own intellectual and artistic intricacy, indirectly addressing both her roots and her art historical associations. From modernism to Abstract Expressionism to neo-geo, Pattern and Decoration to technographics and, of course, to her viewers and their readings of her work, her paintings are like mosaics, bringing to bear biography, design, statistics, fences, grids, and fractured geometries. She builds depth through layers of abstraction, letting us peer through each as if we were voyeurs. We feel like explorers when examining a painting like *Episodic Precision* (2023), directed, or perhaps misdirected, through avenues via a long, sharp, jagged blue highway.

In a 2021 interview in *BOMB Magazine*, Davis told artist Leslie Wayne how confusing it was to be brought up in a white community. Her father died when she was four, and her mother raised her alone and sent her to a Quaker school. Her mother, who had a law degree and a PhD and lived to be 100 years old, strongly influenced Davis's intellectual and analytic approach to art and life.



The painting *Phantasmal Precept* (2023) is a tricky creation, bringing to bear flashes of near-representation in the form of biomorphic black blobs sitting in or emerging from small white boats or set on flying carpets, presented as gestures atop frenzied patterns of intersecting lines floating above a sea of flat green. This work is the closest in the show to figurative allusion. Though Davis resists direct narrative, we could possibly read a poignant evocation of history and the current moment in her enigmatic black forms and uneven strokes. She offers potential bridges between past and present, between pattern and gesture, between mind and matter, all held together with a strong linear netting. The result is like an update of Escher perspectives. Topping the surface and softening the linear severity of the geometric patterning are floating solid-color shapes that might have been plucked from a synthetic Cubist still life or clouds in a skyscape.

Playful and speculative, her paintings contain a kind of mapping that leads to extended mental journeys for both herself and the viewer. There is a sense of landscape conveyed through color and line and, at the same time, a quality of contemporary expressionism evocative of an artist like Chaim Soutine, who himself bridged Expressionism and Abstract Expressionism. It's almost as if Davis conceived a contemporary abstract outline for Soutine's vertiginous paintings.

With titles like *Phantasmagoric Rationale* (2023) which we might construe as "Phantasmagoric irracionale," and *Episodic Precision* (2023), which we might rephrase as "Intended imprecision," Davis brings unstable words and puns into the mix, and in so doing, messes with our minds. One thinks of an experimental novel in which we can shuffle the pages and begin, at any point, an unplotted story that has no ending. Davis has long sought a comfortable spot in such a matrix, and in this body of work, she seems to have found one.

