

AT THE GALLERIES

By Karen Wilkin

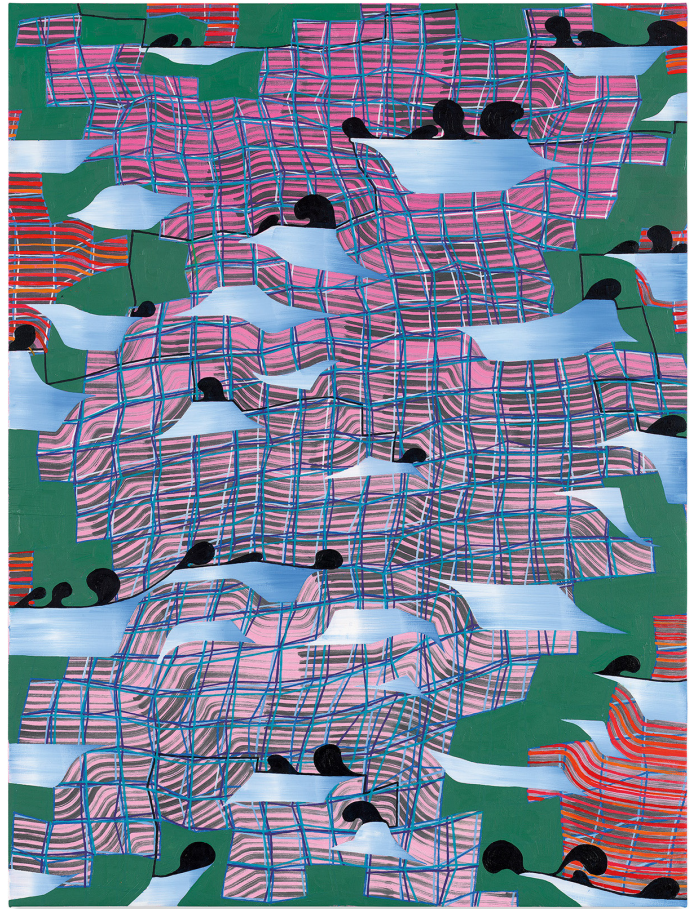
Attention to Artificial Intelligence and NFTs notwithstanding, the past season was dominated not by computer generated effects, but by paintings. Wide-ranging exhibitions bore vivid witness to the persistence and health of work made by hand by passionately committed individuals. Some of the most compelling shows were by noteworthy artists working today, including James Little (a star of the most recent Whitney Biennial), Lisa Corinne Davis, John Walker, and Julian Hatton, plus an unexpected, illuminating pairing of Rackstraw Downes and Stanley Lewis, but we also were offered work by less frequently exhibited painters from the recent past, such as the Italian-born Horacio Torres (1924–1976) and the American Bob Thompson (1937–1966), as well as, from an earlier generation, the Russian-born, Paris-based Serge Charchoune (1888–1975). And if anyone felt that the possibilities of twenty-first-century technology had been ignored, a large survey of Frank Stella’s studies and maquettes presented ample evidence of how contemporary materials and experimental techniques could be put into the service of high aesthetic ideals.



Lisa Corinne Davis, *Episodic Precision*, 2023, oil on canvas

Lisa Corinne Davis has written extensively about her use of abstraction to create metaphors for what she describes as her highly individual experience as “a light-skinned Black woman who grew up in an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood.” In an illuminating essay, “Towards a more fluid definition of Blackness,” published in the online magazine *Artcritical*, she wrote, “Many African-American artists feel the obligation to represent Blackness. My position as an abstract painter allows me to manifest my own sense of self—my black self—as an expression of self-determination and freedom, while avoiding an oppositional stance.” She has been a painter to reckon with for years, but her most recent exhibition “Lisa Corinne Davis: You Are Here?,” at Miles McEnery Gallery in Chelsea, included some of her most assured and accomplished works to date. As she has taught us to expect, her

complex, layered compositions played subtle variations of wonky grids and networks against larger pathways and punctuating elements. Her unstable, all-over expanses pulse and shift, sometimes evoking aerial views and mapping, sometimes suggesting the intricacy of textiles or the complexities of nature. They keep us off balance, making us question our understanding of our relationship to what is before us, always demanding and rewarding close looking. In Davis' recent works, the component elements seemed particularly generous and muscular; the rhythms notably assertive. Large and small incidents wrestled for preeminence, making it impossible to decide what was on top of what and insisting that we keep paying attention. At times, contemplating Davis' networks of marks was like watching the active surface of the ocean, but each painting announced a fresh conception of structure. In *Phantasmal Precept* (2023), luscious pink stripes solidified into broad bands, locked into a jagged surround of green, turning a flotilla of delicately shaded rectangles into waving handkerchiefs. Against the warm peach "field" of the airy *Episodic Precision* (2023), tangled grids clenched and expanded, lightened or darkened, either corralled by larger gestures or generating them.



Lisa Corinne Davis, *Phantasmal Precept*, 2023, oil on canvas

And in the energetic pale yellow *Beguiling Basis* (2023), one of the most complex and sensuous of the canvases, overlapping nets at once spread across the entire canvas and seemed to capture a spattering of ample white ovals, themselves surrounded by nested loops of unpredictable color.

The sense of dislocation that Davis' paintings evoke can be read as a powerful means of transmitting her awareness of the instabilities and inequities of our society to her viewers, even though it may be perceived only subliminally, wordlessly. But it can also be argued that Davis' paintings are most memorable not for their social and political allusions, but rather for their unexpectedness and multivalence as paintings, their mesmerizing drawing, their often surprising color, their disarming rhythms, and more. Her works exist brilliantly on both levels.