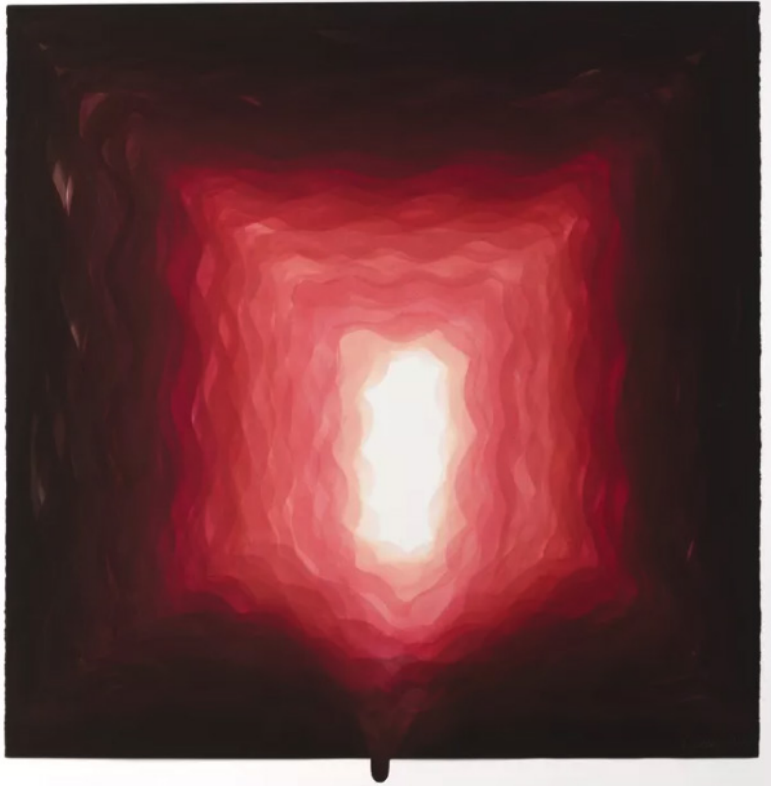


the Stranger

Spooning and Dripping The Bodily Grandeur of Karin Davie

By Jen Graves | 29 February 2012



Liquid Life no. 1. COURTESY OF JAMES HARRIS GALLERY

On a vast expanse of white wall facing the Seattle Art Museum entrance at Hammering Man, there's only one painting: Karin Davie's *Distraction*. It performs its title, acting as an immediate distraction from the business of getting up and into the galleries to see the other art. Its swooping lines laugh down from the imperious perch, giving the slapsticky impression that a colossus has come by and simply swiped his arm up and down a few times holding a titanic loaded paintbrush, leaving behind a line that's squiggling and bunched like a hardworking worm.

Davie has said she thinks of her paintings as parodies of the motions her body has to do to make them. In this way, she's conjuring but diverging from gestural abstractionists like Jackson Pollock or Morris Louis, who left behind the products of their body movements but didn't so much *reenact* those movements for the viewer. What distinguishes Davie's works is that extra layer of hyperbole. In *Distraction*, which measures six feet tall and five feet wide, one imagines her whole body rising and falling to create this wormy line, in a mimicry of the act of a single arm painting or writing—like she's creating a big, juicy blowup of the basic human instinct to leave even the smallest, dumbest mark.

In *Distraction*, what looks at first like a very fat striped line crossing the canvas soon reveals itself to be many stripes spooning each other across the whole visual field. Some segments got subsumed or momentarily tucked under others as the colors followed the movements of her body, gravity (there are drips), and time (the brush would need reloading, creating visual breaks).

Distraction was made in 1999. That year, Davie showed at Mary Boone Gallery and Marianne Boesky Gallery, both in New York, on the heels of being featured at the Museum of Modern Art. In 2001, she would show at White Cube in London, and in 2006, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo organized a major retrospective of her work. What's probably least known about Davie is that the Toronto native, who lived in New York for 20 years, three years ago moved to Kirkland. (Her family is in Victoria, BC, and she "just felt like I needed a break and something different," she wrote in an e-mail. She's bicoastal now.)

In what one hopes will be the first in a series of Seattle solos is her presentation of three paintings this month at James Harris Gallery in Pioneer Square. Titled *Liquid Life No. 1*, they differ from *Distraction*—each is 41 inches square, a single color rather than the milky blue-green-coral-peach flow of *Distraction*, and gouache on paper rather than oil on canvas. Still, they again simultaneously depict and invoke body movement. They're sensate visions.

Imagine standing at the bottom of a cave with sunlight streaming in a rectangular hole above you, except you're tired and hungry and dizzy or maybe drugged, so the light seems to shiver and shake. That's what looking at *Liquid Life* feels like.

Davie left the centers blank. She started at the edges of the paper and worked her way inward—to a certain point—sliding the brush in a wavy motion dictated by the paper's edges as well as little cuts or additions she made to the bottom edge of each painting. The thumblike appendage on *No. 1* pulled the stroke of the wave downward, so the deep red gouache now appears to rush out like lava. This painting is extruding itself in your direction. If I didn't know better, I'd say it wants you. This feels like a perfect Daviean obscenity.