



Exhibitions at  
PAAM

# Ann Purcell in Provincetown The Caravan Paintings (1983-1985)

CURATED BY JEAN LAWLOR COHEN  
ON VIEW SEPTEMBER 20 – DECEMBER 8, 2024  
IN THE HAWTHORNE GALLERY

## On Caravans:

**Ann Purcell (b. 1941)** first showed her work in Provincetown 40-plus years ago. Far from her New York milieu, she found herself in 1982 at the Fine Arts Work Center, surprised to be given a studio once occupied by Hans Hofmann. Immediately the Cape's crystalline light recharged her palette, and its landscape triggered freshly intuited forms. Yet even from the start, Purcell resisted the canon of Abstract Expressionism. Although she admired that previous generation, "heroines and heroes" like Helen Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell, she set her own course, and that pursuit has led to surprising configurations that surface from her imagination and defy beauty too easily won.

The "Caravan" paintings confirm her appetite for large scale. Thanks to early years as a student and teacher of dance, Purcell brought full-body engagement to empty canvases, sometimes circling them on the studio floor and consistently unrolling cotton duck beyond her height and arm span. The 22-foot length of one work within this series was dictated only by the point at which a wall ended. "It's hard to contain energy within a small frame," she says. "I like to be engulfed by my paintings."

Purcell insists that she learned about color by "rebell[ing] against my teachers' theories. I was a contrarian. I'd make dark colors come forward and bright colors stay in the distance. Like Henri Matisse, I think color is about relationships. I can put down one color, and it calls for what it needs." She also credits Matisse for her signature "movable process" and claims that his cut-outs anticipated her own spontaneous placements.

One way to enter a painting by Purcell is to choose a single element and follow its trajectory, reading the work in time. Another is to let her titles spin out free associations:

"I never want my labels to lock into something specific. They're poetic references meant to evoke a viewer's own responses."

Almost always concocted after a work is finished, her titles spring from sensory experiences—listening to eclectic music, the retinal impact of light on landscape, the arc of a dancer’s body, the hues of floating ship sails, the shifting atmosphere of shorelines.

Just as no preliminary study dictates the movement of her wrist, no message or narrative blocks her “in-the-moment” response to the paint. Intuition, instinct, and whim have always generated the forms, colors and textures with which she plays. This signals the process she calls “thinking but not thinking, being loose and free but controlled.” Ultimately the paintings themselves derive their energy from her dual impulses, the self-knowledge that “I can be analytical and intuitive at the same time.”

—Jean Lawlor Cohen, Curator

Unless otherwise indicated, all artwork is courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery, New York, © Ann Purcell

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## ARTWORK LIST

*Moody Blues (Caravan Series)*, 1982  
Acrylic, silveroil, copperoil, and pieced paper on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

*Race Point*, 1982  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

*Fast Summer*, 1982  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

*Harbour*, 1982  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

*Shaman*, 1982  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

*Night Bay*, 1982  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

*Gypsy Wind*, 1983  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Collection of FAMM Museum, Mougins, France/The Levett Collection

*Balthazar’s Gifts*, 1983  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

*Harting*, 1983-99  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

*Heron’s Flight*, 1985  
Acrylic and collage on canvas  
Courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery

