

MARGARET GARRETT *Tuning Fields*

“When I begin work on a piece, I see the canvas as an empty stage and the line as movement.”

To see Margaret Garrett’s work for the first time is to hear an orchestra in full measure or a choir in perfect pitch. Music inhabits her work, animating color, form and most importantly, those lyrical marks and brushstrokes. If there is real rhythm in painting it is here in these graceful compositions that seem to come alive with movement.

So it should come as no surprise that Ms. Garrett began her creative life as a dancer. Or that she is married to a composer. But her elegant translation of music-related creative impulse to visual imagery is more than just a deft extension of the creative life. Influence is not imagination and Garrett’s pictorial sensibility is filled with animation and refinement, potent with imagined energy. Her brushmarks are pure, like contrary notes in perfect syncopation.

Tuning Fields began with the artist’s realization that her draftsmanship—in reality, the draftsmanship of all artists is like a signature, a unique, individual characteristic. From this idea, came a sense that her new paintings should be controlled by the drawing, driven by the mark-making. It is the marks that dictate and dominate Margaret Garrett’s paintings. At once elegant yet powerful, they coalesce in rhythmic patterns across her compositions.

The brushmarks are visually complex but not studied. They appear extemporaneous but have the formal quality of language, in their earliest form even resembling a kind of calligraphy. As the body of work progressed, Garrett’s visual language increasingly found a charged energy, with contrasts in color and shape becoming more pronounced. The artist’s most intricate paintings are composed of marks with such strength they could be asemic writing, meaning forms or lettering that are not readily understandable words. But even if they are not words or text, the choreography and gesture of Margaret Garrett’s marks possess a sophistication that suggests language with a pure emotional meaning of its own.

But to intellectualize these paintings is perhaps to miss the point. They are pointedly beautiful. Garrett’s sense of movement is impeccable (that dancer’s grace is in her hand and her head.) *Tuning Fields 172* might be called “Rhapsody in Red” with its undulating crimson background setting off turquoise, blue and white marks that seem to skip and sway.

The modestly-sized canvas *Tuning Fields 293* is an intricate pattern of swirling brushwork, while the large-scale *TF 290* is a similar work of tightly coiled marks that recall Mark Tobey. Yet the patterns here are authentic, Garrett's voice is original.

Tuning Fields 276 is orchestral, a large, lush tour de force in broad strokes of soft yellows, pale blues and occasional red set against a black background. The marks here are subtly layered but seem to be in constant movement. It is a painting with quiet force that commands attention the way an orchestra opening Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* might.

Margaret Garrett's love of choreography has found a home in this series of wonderful paintings. Like notes in perfect counterpoint, improvisation and color and instinctive gesture have been integrated here in a visual language with deep rhythmic sensibility and remarkable allure.

--Patrick Dawson