

Margaret Garrett: In Constant Motion

Movement is a throughline in Margaret Garrett's work. Creating abstract paintings, prints, collages, and videos, she uses shapes and lines that resemble motion, such as the body moving through space, a nod to her background as a professional dancer. Like a reprise, Garrett's work mirrors the methodical and rigorous training inherent in ballet, as if her compositions contain hidden timelapses of hours of practice. Not unlike the cut paper forms of Henri Matisse, glimpses of performance seem to unfold across her compositions. In Garrett's *Dancing in the Street* (2024), acrylic blue lines twist and curve over a vibrant pink background with hints of orange peeking through. In *Dance #4* (2015), white and red lines sweep from side to side in front of a backdrop of red, the motions wide and delicate on the paper. This style that Garrett has honed over decades also recalls movement seen in nature, like the wind-blown seagrass that surrounds her studio on Shelter Island.

At times, Garrett's forms recall calligraphy. In *Tuning Fields 291* (2013), an acrylic painting on paper from her "Tuning Fields" series that explores draftsmanship and mark-making, a swath of white lines covers the composition, as if revealing the words to an unknown poem. Try as the viewer might to parse meaning, Garrett resists offering a clear message, instead drawing the viewer in to reflect on the gesture itself, achieving a captivating sense of calm not unlike the chalkboard paintings of Cy Twombly.

Containing just a handful of colors, *Tuning Fields 291* is emblematic of Garrett's relatively restrained palette. Indeed, while she uses a wide range across her entire practice, she limits herself to just a few colors for each piece, like the red and white seen in *Dance #4*. In choosing her colors, Garrett responds to an intuitive process informed by what she calls their vibrational quality. She also embraces contrasts, perhaps to create a sense of push and pull, like the yellow and pink lines of *I Sing the Body Electric* (2025) that seem to jump off the canvas, while the darker red lines and ruby background juxtapose this frenetic energy. Or perhaps she might opt for more complementary colors to slow the movement on the surface and offer a moment of tranquility.

Garrett also plays with energy through her application of paint. In *Harmonics* (2018), soft strokes of red and blue acrylic in the background contrast with the layers of bolder, thinner lines of the same colors, joined by dashing white marks in the foreground. *Harmonics*, as the title suggests, points to the influence of music on Garrett's work. The inspiration is seen in the composition itself, the background building to a crescendo in the foreground, as if representative of a deep bass and scintillating percussion of an orchestra. In her recent "Score" series, Garrett takes this reference to music further with vast acrylic paintings spanning over six feet long. Unfolding on the canvases in this series, which includes *I Sing the Body Electric*, are horizontal fields of repeated marks that resemble a musical score, as well as enigmatic calligraphy.

Garrett frequently evokes a meditative quality in her work. Indeed, the artist herself practices meditation, another form of training improved by repetition, yet one that includes a focus on the mind. With her "Mantra" series, Garrett draws inspiration from elemental forms and patterns that suggest both physical and mental states, which might be a positioning of the body or a design like a maze. In *Blue Mantra* (2023), the duality of body and mind seems to be present, the white lines creating a maze-like flow of a wandering mind and the overall form recalling a body slowly moving, perhaps breathing deeply and slipping further into meditation.

This open-ended nature of Garrett's work is an invitation for the viewer to meditate just as she did while creating it. Each motion, mark, and color reveals itself the longer one looks. What exactly one sees or interprets is up to them. Though she draws inspiration from specific practices—dance, meditation, music—ultimately Garrett offers the viewer much-welcome moments of calm and repose.

- Annabel Keenan, 2025