

A Former Dancer's Gestural Paintings Bring the Motion of Dance to Canvas

Painter **Margaret Garrett**, who makes all-over abstractions filled with live-wire strokes and lyrical patterns, spent her childhood as a professional ballet dancer. When Garrett's focus shifted to painting at the age of 22, her intention remained the same—to embody the atmospheric, emotional qualities of movement.

Fusing spontaneity with syncopation, marks drip, arc, and overlap across Garrett's linen and paper surfaces. Similar to the work of **Joan Mitchell** and **Cy Twombly**—whom Garrett cites as influences—her paintings revolve around the dynamism of gesture, bolstered by an exploration of color and texture.

In her newest body of work, “Tuning Fields” (an ongoing series begun in 2008), Garrett teases out the rhythmic potential of line. Varying in color, size, and density, strokes build on each other in compositions that range from serene to frenetic. No matter the cadence, each piece emits a vibratory quality that alludes to energies beyond the flat plane of the painting. En masse, the series feel like the arc of a jazz or dance arrangement, with quiet moments and big crescendos.

In *Tuning Fields 170* (2010), thin white lines speckle a background built from wide strokes of varying shades of blue. The push-pull action of delicate and deep areas of the canvas issues a sense of calm fluctuation, recalling slow waves or bird-speckled skies.

This sense of motion is enhanced in *Tuning Fields 298* (2013). While similarly skinny, bright strokes dart across the surface, here they become longer and more scattered. Against a warm field of reds and purples, the lines limber and acquire a greater sense of fluidity. Some melt into a state smooth enough to mimic contours of the human body.

Strokes diversify and multiply in *Tuning Fields 172* (2010) and *Tuning Fields 299* (2013). In the former, hundreds of blue marks dash across a red surface with momentum that verges on abandon. Each stroke (with its own curve or splatter) evokes a small action. When taken in as a whole, the painting reads as a humming, fluttering field of unbridled expressiveness. In the latter, line takes over completely, usurping the autonomy of the background and filling the canvas top to bottom, side to side. Here, Garrett brings us our crescendo—a gestural fever pitch ready to burst beyond its canvas boundaries.

—**Alexxa Gotthardt**