

Karin Davie: To Boldly Go Where No Man's Gone Before Opens at Two Galleries: Chart and Van Doren Waxter

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(L–R) Karin Davie, *Fight-or-Flight, Fight-or-Flight no 1*, 2022; *Itsy Bitsy Universe no 2*, 2022, installation view at Van Doren Waxter, Karin Davie: “To Boldly Go Where No Man’s Gone Before”, May 12–June 30, 2023. Courtesy Van Doren Waxter.

Karin Davie
May 12 – June 24, 2023

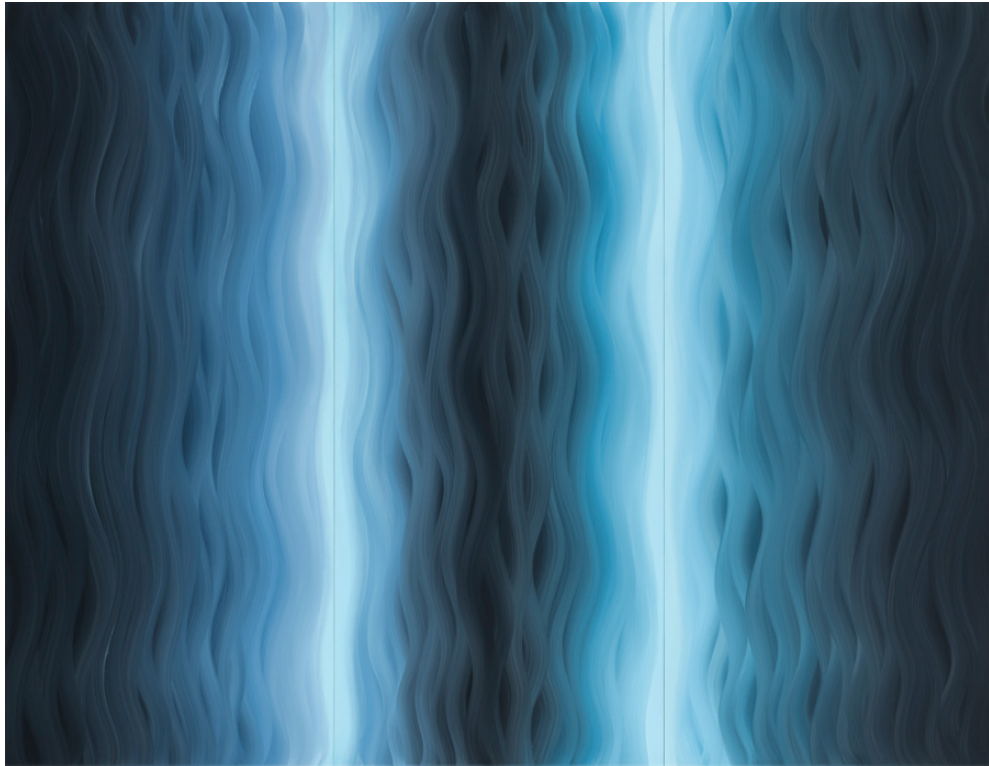
[Chart](#)

[Van Doren Waxter](#)

By **ROBERT C. MORGAN** June, 2023

What I glean from the remarkable paintings of Karin Davie is something more than what we might expect. It is a sensibility that imposes a way of seeing in relation to how art functions within our consciousness. Davie’s paintings reveal what we might call a stand-still experience, one given to a silence beyond the incidentals that get in our way, the everyday trends that come at us from all directions. I doubt this was a conscious intention in her work, but it is a curious one to consider. What we see is what we see. We can make of it what we want. Remove the duress and open the doors to another way of seeing, another way of thinking about painting, less in terms of a representation than as a presence that goes from the outside inward.

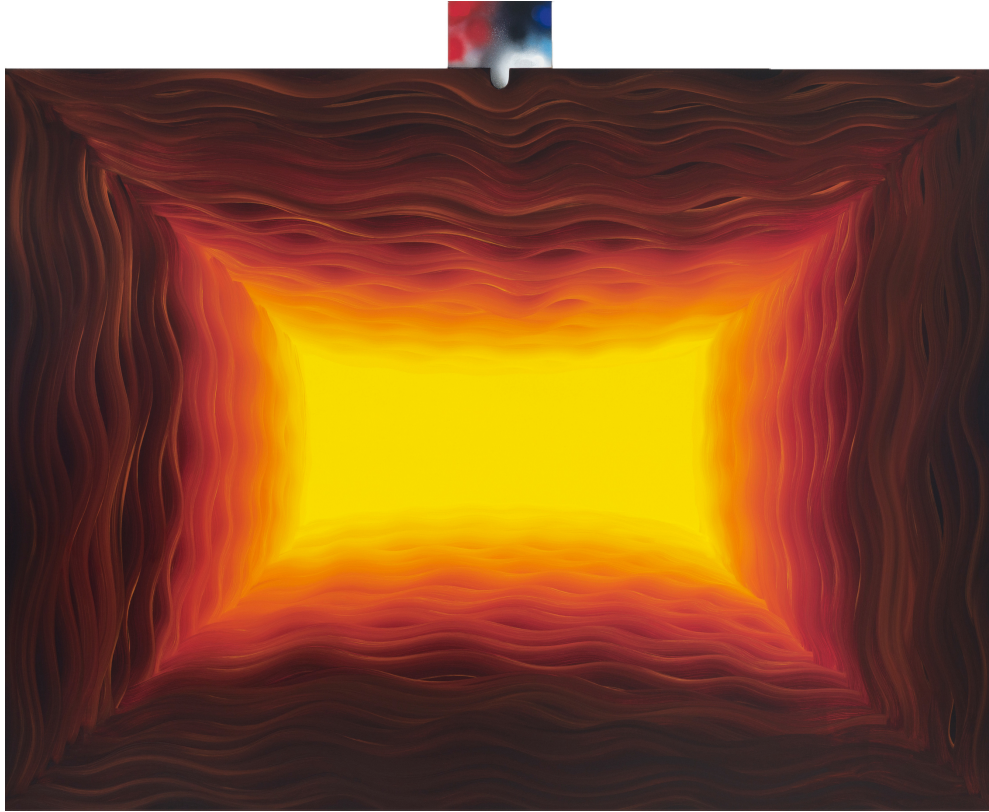
Upon visiting Chart gallery in lower Manhattan for the first time, I was struck by the delivery of Davie's plasticity of form, in essence, how she produced the work on view. Some of my colleagues understand her work as a point of departure somewhere between op art and abstract expressionism. This, of course, has evolved as a historical interpretation, which seems less relevant to the kind of experience I felt upon entering those ground-floor doors only to catch the power of the light generating from these paintings. Rarely do I think of color at the outset of seeing new paintings I have not seen before in the context of a first encounter. Somehow, in this case, it proved unavoidable. My visual attention literally bounced back and forth from one painting to the next.



Karin Davie, *Beam Me Up no 1*, 2022, Oil on linen, 84 x 108 inches, 213.4 x 274.3 cm, Each panel: 84 x 36 inches, Courtesy the artist and CHART/Van Doren Waxter

One of the first paintings that comes into view is *Beam Me Up, No. 1* (2022). It fundamentally appears as an ultramarine painting suggesting two wavy vertical shapes that model themselves one after another. The linear structure employed in this painting allows the shapes to balance one another. Davie's focus on maintaining a sense of optical movement throughout her paintings is impressive.

It reads as a means to identify her work stylistically throughout the exhibition both in the downtown Chart gallery and uptown at Van Doren Waxter. Given the uniqueness of Davie's works, her focus on identity in her paintings – in contrast to repetition – has, over time, played an important, if not, increasingly, dynamic role.



Karin Davie, *Small But Deadly (Parasite Painting) no 1*, 2022 Oil on linen on shaped stretcher & polymer on canvas over shaped wood panel, Large panel: 72 x 96 inches (182.9 x 243.8 cm) Small panel: 6 1/2 x 10 inches (16.5 x 25.4 cm) Courtesy the artist and CHART/Van Doren Waxter

A second painting from the Chart exhibition titled *Small but Deadly (Parasite Painting), No. 1* (2022), continues the wavy lines with colors, but in direct opposition to *Beam Me Up*. Rather than a cool ultramarine, *Small but Deadly*

reveals a red and yellow rectilinear format that suggests intense heat. The outer frame contains wavy lines that continue into and through an interior red frame that eventually opens up on to an over-heated yellow. This painting is mounted more or less directly across from a third painting, *The Metabolic No. 9* (2022). Here the impact of color diminishes into a greenish gray on a white painted square with a slight notch at mid-point on the bottom edge. The addition of the notch also appears in other works, sometimes on the bottom, and sometimes on top, The meaning of the notch is not entirely clear, whether it has a purpose or simply is given to the painting as a point of reference in relation the painting's composition. Otherwise, *The Metabolic No. 9*, has no obvious reference to color.



(L–R) Karin Davie, *Beam Me Up no 3*, 2022; *Strange Terrain no 2*, 2023, installation view at Van Doren Waxter, Karin Davie: “To Boldly Go Where No Man’s Gone Before”, May 12–June 30, 2023. Courtesy Van Doren Waxter.

The continuation of “To Boldly Go Where No Man’s Gone Before” at Van Doren Waxter offers viewers one of the truly majestic paintings in the show, titled *Fight-or-Flight, Fight-or-Flight no. 1* (2022). Not only does the painting return to color, but, in addition, offers a visual spectacle that takes us back to *Star Trek* which is the source of the title selected for the exhibition. The force and speed of special effects were being seen for the first time, as suggested in the painting. In addition, there is a kind of feminist irony that suggests only men are bold in outer space, not women.

Other paintings at the Van Doren Waxter location worth the viewer’s time are *Strange Terrain no. 2* and *Strange Terrain no. 3* (both 2023). While these landscapes have yet to be seen by most of us in reality, Karin Davie has given us a fairly good account of what we are likely to see on the moon, Mars, or elsewhere in outer space. The view is stunning, whether or not Davie was able to borrow photographs already in existence. In fact, this is irrelevant. In terms of what the artist is striving to achieve, it is the interior point of view that defines her reality. Again, in art, it is the sensibility that counts. It is the reality we might call painting. **WM**