

# HYPERALLERGIC

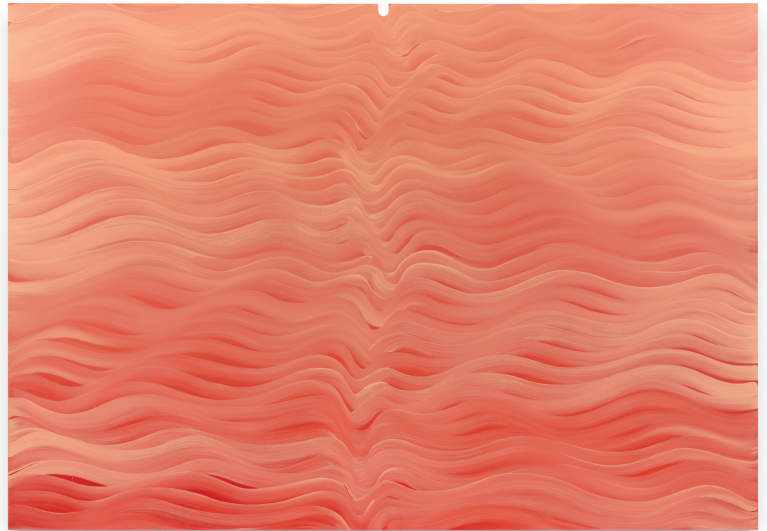
## Karin Davie's Oceans of Color

17 November 2025 | By John Yau

Karin Davie has been a masterful brushstroke painter since she first began exhibiting in the early 1990s. She creates in series, establishing a distinct linear form that the brushstroke takes, and repeating it. She has worked in lines, loops, and slow, undulating waves. The paintings teem with paradoxes, starting with her synthesis of two divergent styles, the painterly mark of Abstract Expressionism and the opticality of Op Art. For more than three decades, these genres have defined and occupied singular and inimitable places in abstract art. Despite her signature approach, Davie holds the viewer's attention. She has not repeated her brushstrokes or color choices. She can gradate the tone as the brush moves across the canvas. I have always been struck by how she lays everything bare in her brushstroke, while withholding how she controls sometimes two or more colors within a single mark.

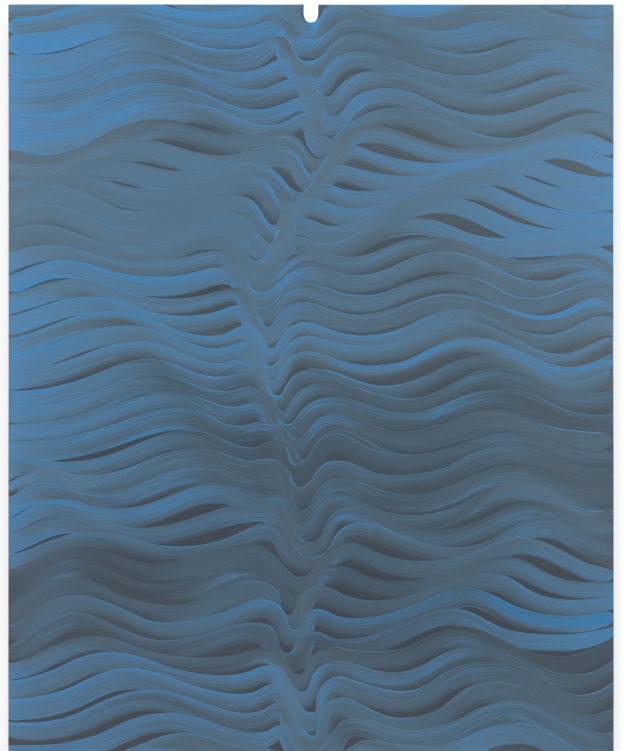
All of these qualities are featured in her aptly named exhibition "It Comes In Waves" at Miles McEnery Gallery. The show consists of eight tonally monochromatic paintings, six of them on a shaped canvas (all 2025). Each piece is composed of horizontal strokes that span the width of the canvas, resulting in an overall image of sensuously wavy ribbons.

Painted on a dark rose ground, *Trespasser 1* has a pinkish-rose palette with white mixed in. A rounded, thumb-like shape is missing from the top edge, which alters the direction of the first brushstroke. By conforming the wave to the missing space, Davie sets up what will happen in the subsequent brushstrokes, each of which tries to copy the one that preceded it, with little luck. As a result, a deep, rounded groove appears in the painting, gently winding down the surface.



*Trespasser no. 1*, 2025, Oil on linen over shaped stretcher, 84 x 120 inches.

All images courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery.



*Trespasser no. 2*, 2025, Oil on linen over shaped stretcher, 84 x 68 inches.

Coloristically, each brushstroke slightly modulates as it traverses the canvas. Every subsequent line partially covers the one before it, culminating in a visual field that seems to tilt back in space. There is an unevenness to this perceived surface, as the bands jump from one tonal density to another, while adhering as closely as possible to the contour of the previous one. As much as Davie controls what happens in her compositions, complete command escapes her, creating a sense of tension.



*Trespasser no. 4*, 2025, Oil on linen over shaped stretcher, 72 x 96 inches.

The combination of modulating color and undulating brushstrokes transforms the painting's bands into a terrain. What we literally see invites us to make associations and seek metaphors. This is the most compelling and pleasurable aspect of Davie's work. Up close, you seem to be looking at the lines made by individual hairs of the paintbrush, which adds to the luxurious surface of each band. This is partly because Davie mixes white in with the color, but does not blend them, instead creating a highlight. Are these long braids of hair or carefully groomed fur, or are they clusters of thread? From a distance, you see the distinct identity of each brushstroke, as well as a topography.

Davie has never wavered from her incremental process. And yet, her work always feels fresh. Describing nothing but themselves, her brushstrokes have aged well. While her art can be associated with Minimalism, particularly in her use of monochrome, as well as Abstract Expressionism in her gestural marks and Op Art in the visual vibrancy, she continues to stand apart.



*Trespasser no. 5*, 2025, Oil on linen over shaped stretcher, 60 x 86 inches.