

Two Coats of Paint

Karin Davie: *Totally tubular*

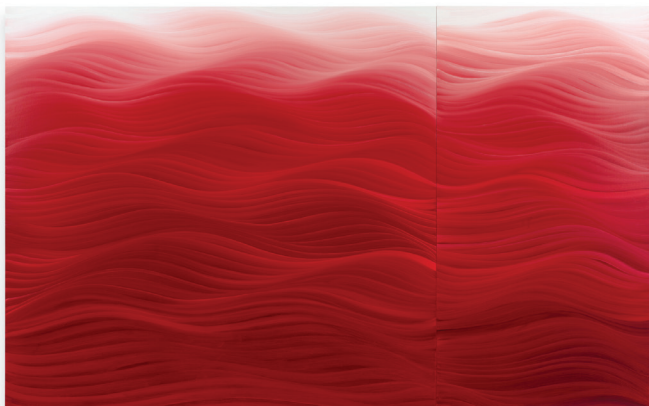
28 November 2025 | By Amanda Church

Conjuring The Cure's 1987 song *Just Like Heaven* – which proclaims “you're just like a dream” – Karin Davie's eight new large-scale paintings on view at Miles McEnery Gallery, all oil on linen, transport us to a realm of sensation and association. Here her wavy imagery, which she has been developing in one form or another since the 1990s, immediately evokes the swells and dips of the ocean's surface as well as recalling the fluid lines essential to the work of painters like Sol LeWitt, Brice Marden, Bridget Riley, Moira Dryer, and late de Kooning, albeit to varying effect. Davie's version consists of smooth, sensuous brushstrokes that make paint behave in almost magical ways. Their twists and turns, muscular with curvy bulges, also come across as somehow delicate and feminine. Landscape and portraiture, mind and body, space and time – all are activated through the compression and release of Davie's mind- and space-bending forms.



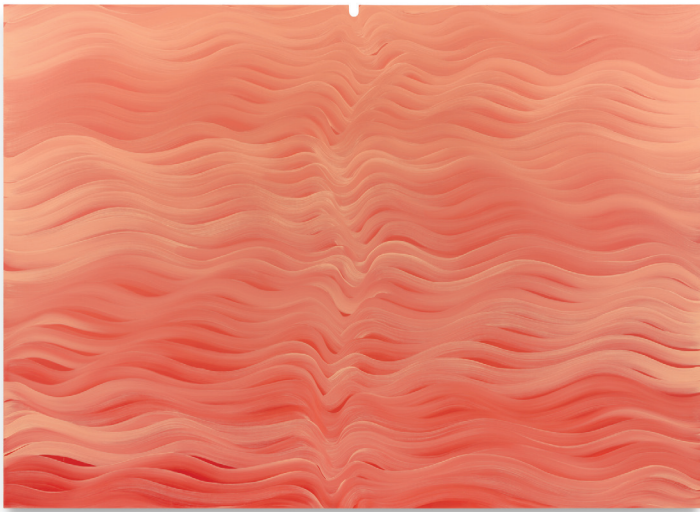
Trespasser no. 1 (Small), 2025, Oil on linen over shaped stretcher, 40 × 32 inches, 101.6 × 81.3 cm.

All the paintings, in mostly monochromatic palettes ranging from light-emanating dusky pinks to muted golds, have an erotic underpinning that confirms the show's title “It Comes in Waves” as slyly orgasmic, notwithstanding any Looney Tunes allusions. *Strange Terrain no. 5*, with its tiny spill of pink-red paint peeking out from the bottom right folds, has a particularly fleshy sense and suggests some sort of risqué activity in progress. In *Trespasser no. 1*, as in the other five paintings with similar cutouts, the notch at the top is a literal tracing of the artist's thumb, pointing down the center of the painting where the curves meet and intimating incipient eroticism. The notch may also be a nod to Frank Stella's *V Series* cutouts, though Davie's intent seems more sexy and cartoonish than strictly formal.



Strange Terrain no. 5, 2025, Oil on linen, 60 × 105 inches, 152.4 × 266.7 cm.

As a whole, “It Comes in Waves” conveys an immersive experience in which the viewer is drawn in and washed over, metaphorically akin to being tumbled by a crashing wave. Superficially, Davie's paintings may seem elegant and minimal, but the subtle action within each belies that characterization. So does the sly physical humor suffusing her twisting tubular strokes of paint, a comedic form that has always interested Davie. “One of the less discussed aspects of my recent work is its subtle slapstick quality. When I was a child, I remember watching Lucille Ball and



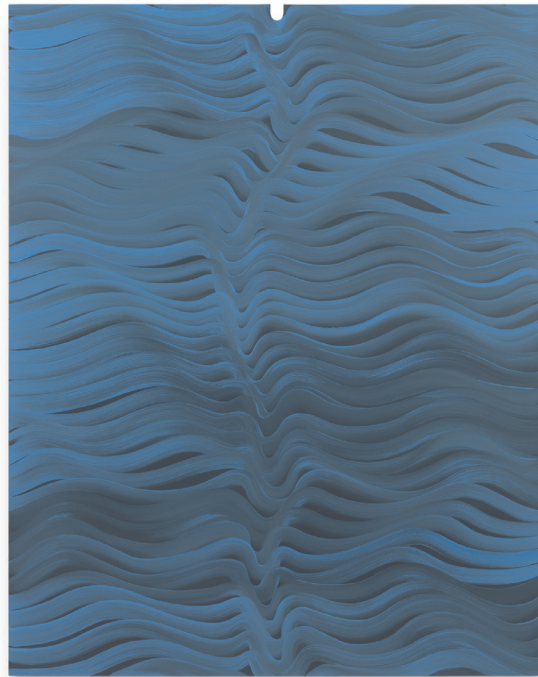
*Trespasser no. 1, 2025, Oil on linen over shaped stretcher;
84 x 120 inches, 213.4 x 304.8 cm.*



*Trespasser no. 4, 2025, Oil on linen over shaped stretcher;
72 x 96 inches, 182.9 x 243.8 cm.*

Carol Burnett on TV, identifying with their humorously cartoonish actions, physically exaggerated bodies, and precise timing, thinking, I'd really like to be one of those bawdy broads!"

Clarissa Dalrymple was quoted in *ARTnews* as saying, "Humor is the light that has to shine out of art to make it work." While obviously not a universal rule, it's an interesting proposition, especially in the context of abstract art. With notable exceptions including Amy Sillman, Fran Shalom and Elizabeth Murray, whose forms are often cartoonishly comical, abstract work is not usually all that funny. Davie's smooth, sumptuous strokes of paint serve disparate sensibilities, suggesting an impeccable topography of body and landscape as well as slithering snakes or slippery strands of spaghetti that invite us to leave chuckling, if not laughing out loud.



Trespasser no. 2, 2025, Oil on linen over shaped stretcher, 84 x 68 inches, 213.4 x 172.7 cm.

All images courtesy of Miles McEnery Gallery.

"Karin Davie: *It Comes in Waves*," Miles McEnery Gallery, 525 West 22nd Street, New York, NY. Through December 20, 2025.