

# Color VISION

Artist *Lucy Bull's* paintings are getting *bigger* and *better*, with vibrant hues *and* methodical, trance-like abstractions.

On social media, artist Lucy Bull's landscapes read like tuned-up Impressionism with shades of Mark Bradford. Or maybe late Monet lily pads on acid. In person, there is something more sinister going on. Bull's psychedelic paintings hiss and vibrate like Bridget Riley stripes on a hot sidewalk. They dominate the room with a ferocious joy.

The same could be said of Bull, who at 31 is a fixture of the Los Angeles art scene, a position she held long before her recent sold-out solo debut at the David Kordansky gallery, and one that extends out past the purview of the artist.

Her beloved eponymous desk gallery, which she runs out of her house in Echo Park, is infamous for turning exhibitions into all-night parties, which Bull doesn't mind, but she confesses to be more inclined to throwing an intimate dinner. Despite being a New Yorker educated at The Art Institute of Chicago, Bull passes for a native Angeleno, perhaps because she aligns so well with the city's preoccupations: Bull is a compulsive cinephile and a color mystic; she is matter-of-fact and intimidatingly optimistic. Her abstract paintings seem to hold, however precariously, the euphoria she and Los Angeles naturally radiate.

By KAT HERRIMAN





despite the conspiratorial vibe here, there are no hidden symbols lurking in her furious brushwork. *But are there any dicks?* "Probably."

In the past, Bull has described her practice as that of falling into a trance state; maybe it's more accurate to imagine it as a kind of hard-won fluency. Through hours of hands-on learning, Bull developed the ability to make material and color adjustments so rapidly that, to the viewer, they read as fluid gesture. This sense of movement is then transferred to the viewer, which is to say that if you've encountered her work, you remember. The raw-edged canvases glow neon hot. They have a transfixing kinetic quality that has made at least one collector of Bull's work physically sick when a piece was shown under fluorescent lights.

The paintings in *Skunk Grove*, at David Kordansky, showcased a shift in Bull's scale. After years of working on canvases approximately her own height, Bull feels drawn to working on mural-sized stretchers. The artist likes the way the larger scale teases out the sensation of falling. "It is almost easier for me to paint [the mural-sized ones] because they just force me into this more physical process, where with the small ones, I get carried away with the detail," Bull says. "The big ones force me to confront these larger areas and be a little bit more brutish about the mark-making."

So immediate is the aesthetic of Bull's work, it sometimes comes as a shock that her process-based abstractions can take weeks, months, and sometimes years to complete. This is a casualty of their subtractive methodology. She begins each piece by painting an image and then painting over it again. She sometimes uses her brush like an eraser, pulling up her new work to reveal the old. This goes on for countless layers. As a result, each painting represents a series of destructive decisions and subsequent resurrections. She promises that,

ABOVE, LEFT—*Sisper*, 2020, by Lucy Bull. Installation view, High Art, Arles, France. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles (throughout)  
BELOW—*"Pussy Willow,"* 2021, by Lucy Bull  
PREVIOUS PAGE—Lucy Bull photographed by Sofie Kjarum Austlid



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Distractions also tend to go quiet at night, which is a blessing, Bull tells me. As the city shakes off its COVID restrictions, people are out again and calling. Because of the layering of her work, breaks from the paintings are a necessity and Bull revels in them. Friends are her preferred method of release. When the artist first moved to LA, she was too shy to karaoke, but now it's a ritual she's looking forward to returning to—especially when followed by late-night Thai food. In quarantine, she ran a Los Angeles chapter of a British film club. They meet every week, but she's had to log off the group chat until she's further into this next body of work. Los Angeles' unshakeable pulse is central to Bull's work, and as it gets back up and running again Bull feels the vibes reverberating in the studio, much to her delight.

Maybe it's the beast within that Bull is courting in the studio. She confesses she'll never be able to take on an assistant because she's too shy to paint in front of others. Her idiosyncratic style requires an unhinging that can't happen when someone else is looking. "It has really always been getting to that point where I can actually surprise myself," Bull says. "They're finished when I get lost, when I lose track of how I made them."

This fall Bull's work will be featured at a solo booth at Frieze London, and then soon after she'll be part of a two-person institutional solo show at the Pond Society in Shanghai. The good news is that her new studio affords her the flexibility to paint at night. Previously, she toiled in the alleyway of her home where she had to contend with the sun's temper and schedule. "I've finished so many paintings between 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m.," she confesses. "It's this magical period of time where you're completely alone and it feels almost like time stolen from sleep. There's something really empowering about not being asleep. It seems almost wrong that you're finishing a painting at that hour. Maybe it's also an easier time to get lost."



ABOVE, FROM TOP—*Skunk Grove*, 2021, by Lucy Bull. Installation view, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Photograph by Jeff McLane; Lucy Bull photographed by Sofie Kjørum Austlid  
RIGHT—"*Crooked Coda*," 2020, by Lucy Bull