



PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

**JUDITH GODWIN**

Art Basel 2025 | Feature Sector | Booth D8  
19 - 22 June 2025



VIP Preview: 17 – 18 June 2025

Public Days: 19 – 22 June 2025

For Art Basel 2025, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is pleased to announce a solo presentation of paintings by American artist Judith Godwin. Highlighting works across her six-decade career, this is the late artist's first solo presentation in continental Europe, following a solo exhibition with Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London, in 2024. Godwin has long been recognised as a pioneering figure in the landscape of American art. Her contribution to the New York avant-garde began in the 1950s when she became associated with the Abstract Expressionist movement, forging a unique visual language of modernism and abstraction. Her legacy defies the challenges she faced as a result of both her sex and sexuality.

Godwin moved to New York in 1953 to study at the Arts Student League under Hans Hofmann, whose early influence can be seen in her dynamic approach to composition and colour. *Duet with Hofmann* (1953), spiralling and daring, and the sun-drenched *Parrot* from the same year, pay tribute to her tutelage under Hofmann, whose approach to 'push and pull' in painting invested Godwin's painting with bold colour and spatial depth. In the years prior to this period, Godwin began a life-long friendship with the modern dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, inviting Graham to perform at her Alma Mater Mary Baldwin College. As Godwin transitioned to life in New York, her painting became increasingly inspired by Graham's performances, her circular forms and sweeping arcs becoming painterly translations of Graham's body in motion.

As the 1950s continued, the artist's work took on larger proportions and a darker palette, all the while maintaining an organicism and proclivity for light and space in her evocation of the spiritual in nature. Introduced to Zen Buddhism by AbEx painter Kenzo Okada, such philosophies began to play a larger role in Godwin's painting, encapsulated by calligraphic brushwork, redolent too of Franz Kline, another close friend of Godwin. The influential art dealer Betty Parsons included Godwin as the youngest artist in the inaugural exhibition at Section Eleven Gallery in 1958, one of four artists alongside Agnes Martin, and went on to present solo exhibitions of her work in 1959 and 1960.

Painted in 1958, the year that catapulted Godwin to broad art world recognition, *Series 7, No 9* is exemplary of the monochromatic influence of Kline's black struts and girders, and her own interest in depth and opacity. Godwin's bold areas of black brushwork project above layered washes of ultramarines and pinks, a faint light shining through the drips and hollows between forms. Other examples from this series can be found in the collections of Yale University Art Gallery, CT, and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX.

During the 1960s, as Pop Art and Minimalism began their ascent, Godwin distanced herself from New York, retreating to Connecticut where she trained in masonry, carpentry, and landscape architecture.

*Red Lightning* (1966) draws from this period, with dominant flashes of red marking a departure from her late 1950's black and white studies as the physicality of her manual labour translated into a bolder palette. Her return to the city in 1974 demonstrated a robust communion with the outdoors that invoked the power of nature.

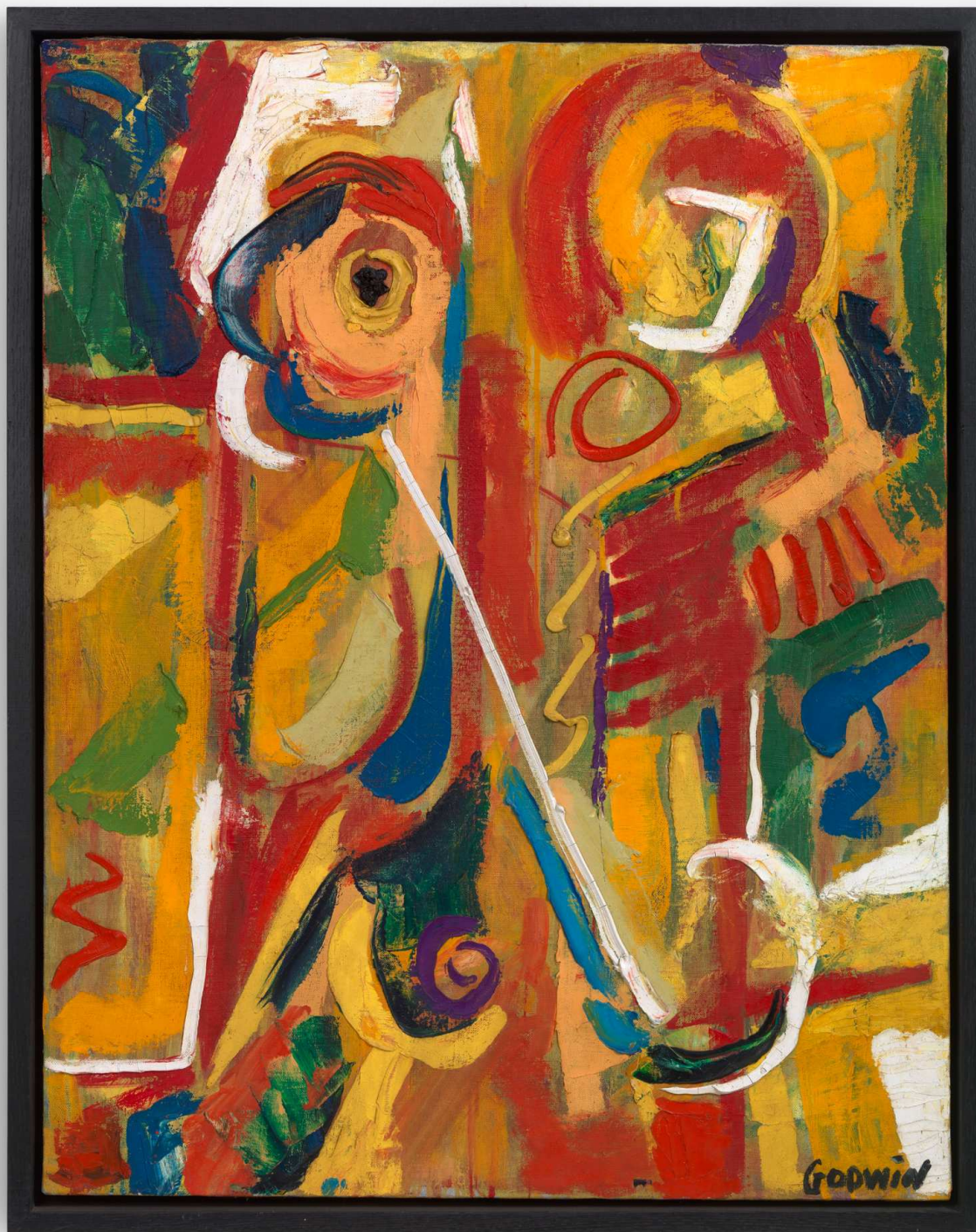
Working through to the early 2000's, Godwin increasingly became emboldened to integrate varied brushwork, collaged elements and studio detritus into her works. In *Polar Night* (1994) trimmings of spare canvas and a thick circle of synthetic brush hairs adorn the artist's textural medley of diluted splashes, staining and drips, or impasto touches of oil straight from the tube. Ever inspired by Martha Graham's freedom of motion, the liberation of the body and its inherent sensuality became a hallmark of Godwin's late practice. She died in 2021 at the age of 91, just as her work began to reach new audiences worldwide.

Her lasting legacy is in the transformative nature of her practice, which successfully recalibrated the masculine language of gestural abstraction, shifting representations of womanhood and sexual identity on the canvas.

Judith Godwin (b. 1930, Suffolk, Virginia, d. 2021) studied at Mary Baldwin College, Virginia; College of William and Mary, Virginia; Art Students League, NY; and the Hans Hofmann School, NY. She received an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, and an Honorary Doctorate of Human Letters from Mary Baldwin College, VA.

Recent institutional exhibitions include *Action/Gesture/Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-1970*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, travelling to Fondation Vincent van Gogh, Arles and Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Bielefeld (2022-24); *Something Wicked*, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX (2022); *Postwar Women*, Art Students League, NY (2019); *A Gesture of Conviction | Women of Abstract Expressionism*, Setareh Gallery, Düsseldorf, Germany (2019); and *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, Denver Art Museum, CO (2016). Godwin has also had solo exhibitions at Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX; The Delaware Contemporary, DE; Albany Museum of Art, NY; and the Amarillo Museum of Art, TX.

Collections include the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; The Museum of Modern Art, NY; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Yale University Art Gallery, CT; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.; National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan; National Museum of Wales, Cardiff; and Museum of Modern Art Fort Worth, TX, amongst others.



*Parrot*, 1953, oil on canvas, framed, 92.7 x 71.4 cm, 36 ½ x 28 in (PH11059)

\$115,000









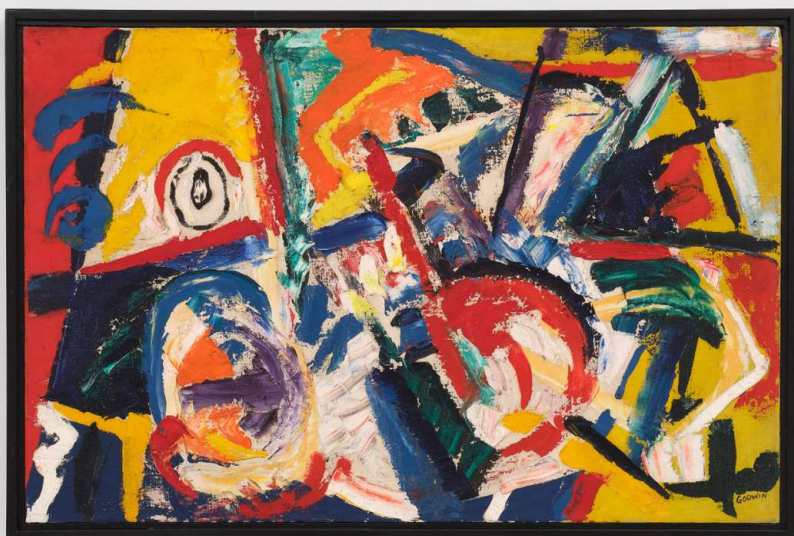
*Duet with Hofmann*, 1953, oil on canvas, framed, 116.8 x 87 cm, 46 x 34 ¼ in (PH11063)

\$150,000









*Provincetown Summer*, 1953, oil on canvas, framed, 63.2 x 96.2 cm, 25 x 38 in (PH11198)

\$115,000 Museum Only









Series 7, No. 9, 1958, oil on canvas, framed, 184.8 x 125.7 cm, 72  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 49  $\frac{1}{2}$  in (PH11277)

\$325,000









*Red Lightning*, 1966, oil on canvas, framed, 153 x 132.7 cm, 60 ¼ x 52 ¼ in (PH11050)

\$245,000

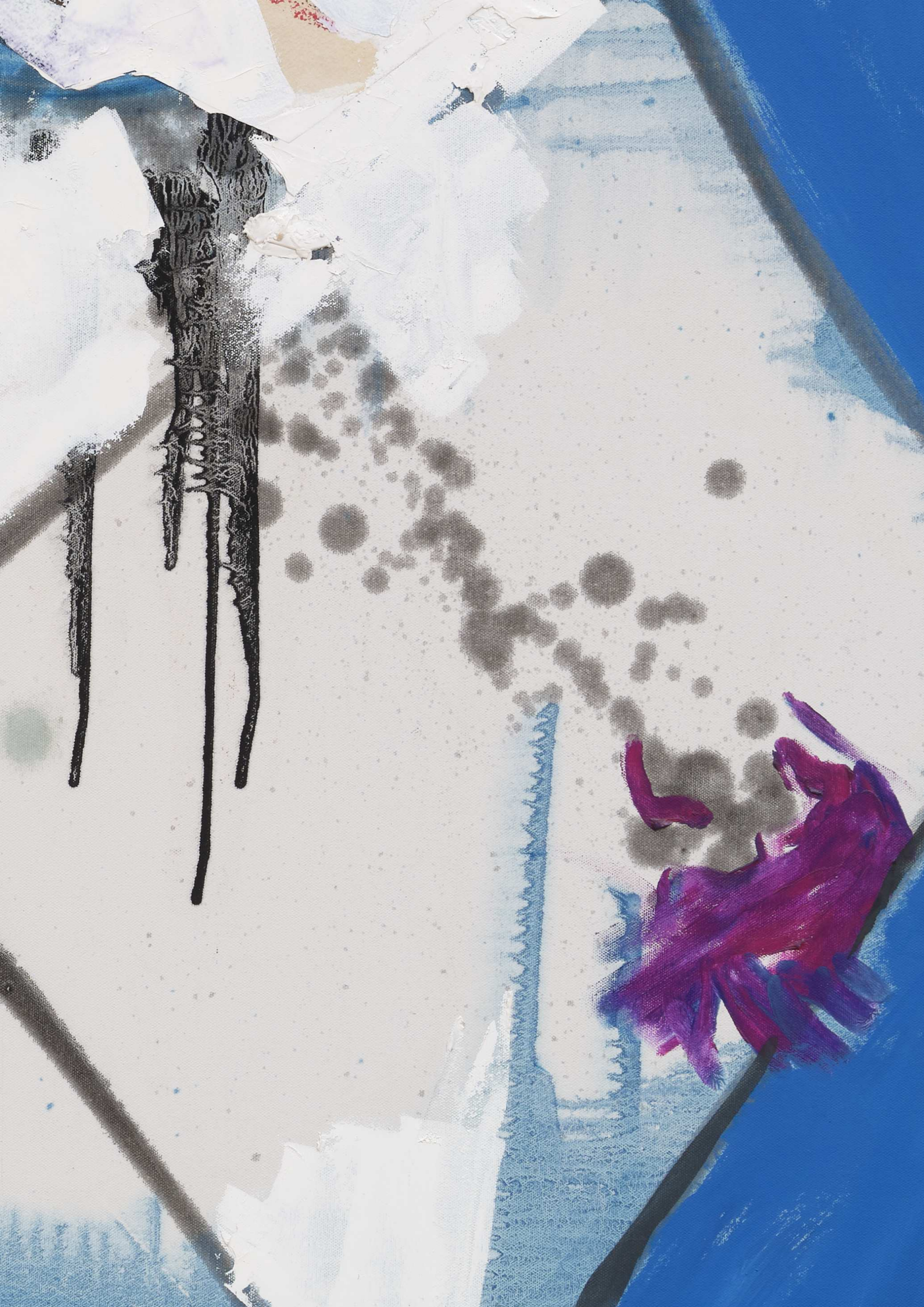




*Polar Night*, 1994, oil and mixed media on canvas, framed, 132.1 x 182.9 cm, 52 x 72 in (PH11034)

\$195,000









*Grey Flow II*, c. 1990, acrylic on paper, framed, 89 x 69 cm, 35 x 27 ¼ in (PH12606)

\$30,500





2001, c. 1979, acrylic and collage on paper, framed, 37 x 47 cm, 14 ½ x 18 ½ in (PH12192)

\$16,500





*Lacuna Suite 1*, c. 1976, acrylic on paper, framed, 29 x 37 cm, 11 ½ x 14 ½ in (PH12600)  
*Lacuna Suite 2*, c. 1976, acrylic on paper, framed, 29 x 37 cm, 11 ½ x 14 ½ in (PH12601)

Each \$14,500





*Lacuna Suite 3*, c. 1976, acrylic on paper, framed, 29 x 37 cm, 11 ½ x 14 ½ in (PH12602)  
*Lacuna Suite 4*, c. 1976, acrylic on paper, framed, 29 x 37 cm, 11 ½ x 14 ½ in (PH12603)

Each \$14,500





*Lacuna Suite 5*, c. 1976, acrylic on paper, framed, 29 x 37 cm, 11 ½ x 14 ½ in (PH12604)  
*Lacuna Suite 6*, c. 1976, acrylic on paper, framed, 29 x 37 cm, 11 ½ x 14 ½ in (PH12605)

Each \$14,500



PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY



# JUDITH GODWIN



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## Judith Godwin

Judith Godwin has long been recognised as a pioneering figure in the landscape of American art. Her contribution to the New York avant-garde began in the 1950s when she became associated with the Abstract Expressionist movement, and it continued well into the 21st century. Acutely aware of the challenges she faced due to both her sex and sexuality, Godwin crafted a visual language that was liberated from the conventions of a movement anchored in masculinity and heteronormativity. 'If you were a [woman] painter at the time', she said, 'you had to paint as strongly, as violently, as the men did'.<sup>1</sup> Godwin sought to redefine such values by way of gestural abstractions that brought a loose geometry into dialogue with nature, dance and Zen philosophy. Her innovative reorientation of the language of Modernism remains a radical statement today. 'My paintings are personal statements – extensions of myself. I take a truth, an intimate emotion, a question, an answer – and paint it'.<sup>2</sup>

### Arrival in New York and studies under Hans Hofmann

Godwin settled in New York in 1953 to study at the Arts Student League under Hans Hofmann, whose early influence can be seen in her dynamic approach to composition and colour. *Provincetown Summer* (1953), executed in an energetic, primary palette, is evocative of her experience as a student at Hofmann's summer school in the small Cape Cod town of the same name. Likewise, the sun-

drenched *Parrot*, from the same year, pays tribute to her tutelage under Hofmann, whose approach to 'push and pull' in painting invested Godwin's painting with bold colour and spatial depth. She credited Hofmann with instilling in her a sense of artistic freedom and emboldening her to experiment with form, shape and colour, as seen in the dynamic palette and lively composition of both *Provincetown Summer* and *Parrot*.

*Duet with Hofmann*, also painted in 1953, speaks to the artistic dialogue that grew between Godwin and Hofmann under his mentorship. Interlocking shapes – here spiralling and daring, seen in a cool palette inflected with dashes of fiery red – would become a recurring feature of her painting throughout her long career, a testament to Hofmann's enduring influence over Godwin's work.

### The mid- to late-1950s

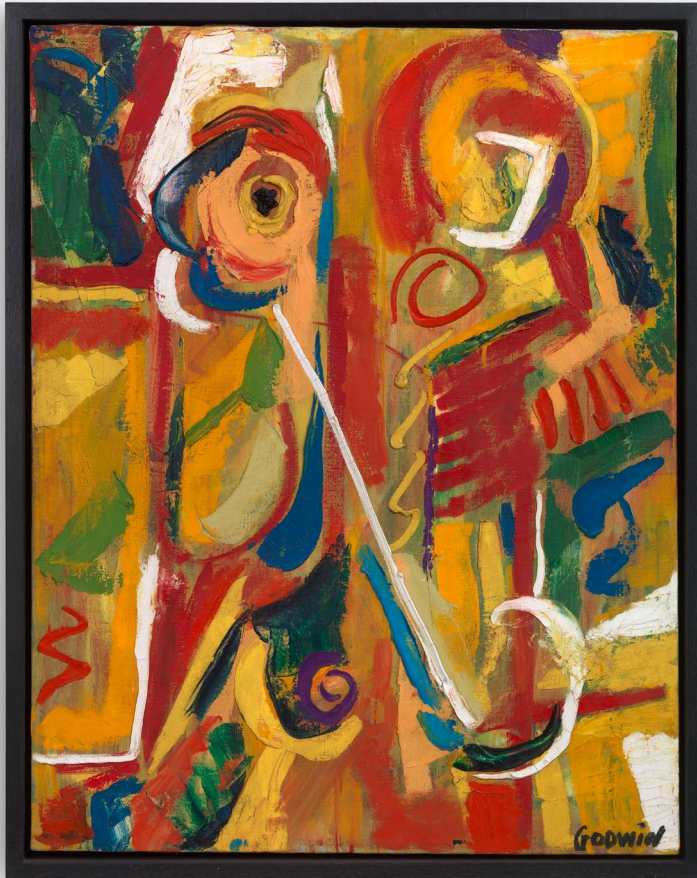
In the years before her move to New York, Godwin had made the acquaintance of the modern dancer and choreographer Martha Graham. Godwin's invitation to Graham to perform at Mary Baldwin University, where she was a student, laid the foundations for a lifelong friendship between the two, and Graham's trailblazing path in a world dominated by men became a touchstone for Godwin. The diaphanous washes of colour, colliding forms and sensuous arcs which characterise Godwin's works from the mid 1950s are indebted to Graham,



above: *Series 7, No. 9*, 1958, oil on canvas, 184.8 x 125.7 cm

front: *Duet with Hofmann*, 1953, oil on canvas, 116.8 x 87 cm





*Parrot*, 1953, oil on canvas, 92.7 x 71.4 cm

whose performances she frequented in New York, often watching from the wings.

Introduced to Zen Buddhism by Abstract Expressionist painter Kenzo Okada, Godwin's painting incorporated such philosophies, encapsulated by calligraphic brushwork, redolent too of Franz Kline, another close friend of Godwin's. As the 1950s continued, the artist's work took on larger proportions and a darker palette, all the while maintaining an organicism and proclivity for light and space in her evocation of the spiritual in nature. Her vigorous abstractions caught the attention of influential art dealer Betty Parsons, who included Godwin as the youngest of four artists, alongside Agnes Martin, in the inaugural exhibition at Section Eleven Gallery in 1958, and went on to present solo exhibitions of her work in 1959 and 1960.

Painted in 1958, the year that brought Godwin to broader art world recognition, *Series 7, No. 9* is exemplary of the monochromatic influence of Kline's black struts and girders, and her own interest in depth and opacity. Godwin's bold areas of black brushwork project above layered washes of ultramarines and pinks, a faint light shining through the drips and hollows between forms. Other examples from this series can be found in the collections of Yale University Art Gallery and the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

#### **Time away from New York and later years**

During the 1960s, as Pop Art and Minimalism began their ascent, Godwin distanced herself from New York, retreating instead to Connecticut where she trained in masonry and carpentry. Works from this period are rare and, while they employ many of the same compositional strategies of her painting of the late 1950s, they diverge significantly in tone.

*Red Lightning* (1966) is characterised by dominant flashes of red, marking a departure from the monochromatic studies of the late 1950s as the physicality of her manual labour in the countryside translated into a bolder palette. Godwin's return to the city in 1974 saw a change in her style owing to these experiences, demonstrating a robust communion with the outdoors and a physicality that invoked the power of nature.

Working through to the early 2000s, Godwin became emboldened to integrate collaged elements and studio detritus into her works. In *Polar Night* (1994) trimmings of spare canvas and a thick circle of synthetic brush hairs adorn the artist's textural medley of diluted splashes, staining and drips, and impasto touches of oil straight from the tube.

(cont'd)





*Polar Night*, 1994, oil and mixed media on canvas, 132.1 x 182.9 cm



Ever inspired by Martha Graham's freedom of motion, the liberation of the body and its inherent sensuality became a hallmark of Godwin's late practice. She died in 2021 at the age of 91, just as her work began to reach new audiences worldwide. Godwin's lasting legacy is in the transformative nature of her practice, which successfully recalibrated the masculine language of gestural abstraction, shifting representations of womanhood and sexual identity on the canvas. 'The act of painting is', she stated, 'for me, as a woman, an act of freedom, and a realisation that images generated by the female experience can be a powerful and creative expression for all humanity'.<sup>3</sup>

### Biography

Judith Godwin was born in 1930 in Suffolk, Virginia. She was educated at the Mary Baldwin College, and the Virginia Commonwealth University, both in her home state, before moving to New York to study under Hans Hofmann at the Art Students League and at the School of Fine Art. In later life, she received Honorary Doctorates from the Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond and the Mary Baldwin College.

In 2016, Denver Art Museum's landmark *Women of Abstract Expressionism* exhibition was instrumental in reigniting public interest in Godwin's work, following which she was a notable inclusion in *Action/ Gesture/Paint: Women Artists and Global*

*Abstraction 1940-1970* at Whitechapel Gallery, London, which travelled to Kunsthalle Bielefeld, and Fondation Vincent van Gogh, Arles (2022-2023).

Godwin's solo exhibitions include Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX; The Delaware Contemporary, DE; Albany Museum of Art, NY; and Amarillo Museum of Art, TX.

From early in her career, Godwin's work was collected by major museum collections including Art Institute of Chicago, IL; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; The Museum of Modern Art, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Yale University Art Gallery, CT; and National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., amongst many others.

Judith Godwin died in 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Godwin interview with Ann Gibson, New York, cited in Ann Gibson, *Judith Godwin: Style and Grace*, exh. cat. (Roanoke, VA: Art Museum of Western Virginia, 1997), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Godwin, statement made for *Celebration of Women in the Arts* (Northern Michigan University, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



*Red Lightning*, 1966, oil on canvas, 153 x 132.7 cm





*Provincetown Summer, 1953, oil on canvas, 63.2 x 96.2 cm*

‘Godwin’s art is animated through an emphasis on gesture; by zeroing in on explosive, cathartic moments – of violence, of movement – her paintings have a remarkable sense of clarity, taking something complex, or unsettling, and crystallising it, for all of its contradictions, into a single moment.’

**Sam Moore**, *ArtReview*, 2024

‘That history has so often obscured and overwritten the creative and intellectual output of women is by now a very well-known observation that, nevertheless, continues to sting. “The men simply said, “Women can’t paint,”’ recalls Judith Godwin, who began her artistic career in the 1950s in New York—Abstract Expressionism’s heyday— alongside contemporaries including Helen Frankenthaler and Grace Hartigan. The men, simply put, were wrong.’

**Tausif Noor**, *Artforum*, 2021

‘Ever inventive and self-assured, Godwin’s extensive creative output reveals her drive, determination and steadfastness of spirit. Her enduring approach was towards liberation: liberation from the ubiquitous machismo of the art world she inhabited.’

**Laura Smith**, Director of Collection and Exhibitions at The Hepworth Wakefield, *Judith Godwin: Expressions of Life*, exh. cat. (London, UK: Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, 2024)

‘Despite the macho bravado generally associated with Abstract Expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and others, Godwin was determined to forge her own path through such machismo in order to find a more nuanced consideration to the energetic gestures of this approach. Her intention was always to be true to herself, recognising the need to “emphasise what is important by painting the image of my feelings on canvas – to accept my feelings honestly, and not falsify”.’

**Beth Williamson**, *Studio International*, 2024



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