

Celia Paul: *Memory and Desire*

Exhibition 6 April–7 May 2022

Victoria Miro, 16 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW



Celia Paul
The Path Home, 2020
Oil on canvas
56.2 x 63.5 x 3.6 cm
22 1/8 x 25 x 1 3/8 in
© Celia Paul
Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Victoria Miro is delighted to present *Memory and Desire*, an exhibition of new paintings by Celia Paul.

Celia Paul's art is founded on deep connections – familial, creative, threading back and forth across time – to people and places, and is self-assuredly quiet, contemplative and ultimately moving in its attention to detail and intensely felt spirituality. This exhibition of new paintings coincides with the publication of *Letters to Gwen John*, a new Jonathan Cape book by the artist which centres on a series of letters addressed to the painter Gwen John (1876–1939), who has long been a tutelary spirit for Paul. Through the epistolary form, Paul draws fruitful comparisons between John's life and her own: their shared resolve to protect the sources of their creativity, their fierce commitment to painting, and the ways in which their associations with older male artists affected the public's reception of their work.

Completed while writing *Letters to Gwen John*, in which Paul describes her first exhibitions in America, her search for new forms, her husband's diagnosis of cancer, and the onset of the global pandemic, the paintings on view share many of the book's themes. The period from October 2020 to April 2021 was one of profound sadness for the artist. Paul worked in complete isolation and saw no one other than her beloved husband, Steven Kupfer, who died of cancer on 29 March 2021, the day lockdown restrictions began to lift. The title, *Memory and Desire*, is a reference to the opening lines of T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*: 'April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain.'

In the new works, the artist addresses abiding subjects: self-portraits, the artist's studio and a last portrait of her husband. Mountain-scapes, pathways and flowers also feature prominently, their presence acting as touchstones for thoughts about transience and mortality, grief, loss and the solace of nature's renewal. Above all, Paul speaks to painting's unique relationship to time, where kinship might be felt acutely, reaching deep into the past, and, equally, its sense of an enduring present – always being in the here and now, as avenue of communication, place of conversation or co-existence.

***Letters to Gwen John* by Celia Paul is published in the UK by Jonathan Cape on 7 April 2022 and in the US by New York Review Books on 26 April 2022.**

About the artist

Born in 1959 in Trivandrum, India, Celia Paul lives and works in London. Major solo exhibitions include *Celia Paul*, curated by Hilton Als, at Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut (2018) touring to The Huntington, San Marino, California (2019), *Desdemona for Celia* by Hilton, Gallery Met, New York (2015–16); *Gwen John and Celia Paul: Painters in Parallel*, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester (2012–13); The Grave's Art Gallery, Sheffield (2005) and Abbot Hall, Kendal (2004). She has participated in institutional group exhibitions including *All Too Human: Bacon, Freud and a Century of Painting Life* at Tate Britain (2018); *NO MAN'S LAND: Women Artists from the Rubell Family Collection*, Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2015-2016); *Recent acquisitions: Arcimboldo to Kitaj*, British Museum, London (2013); *The School of London: Bacon to Bevan*, Musée Maillol, Paris (1998) and *British Figurative Painting of the 20th Century*, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (1992).

Her work is in collections including Abbot Hall, Kendal; British Museum, London; Carlsberg Foundation, Copenhagen; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Frissiras Museum, Athens; Herzog Ulrich Gallery, Brunswick, Germany; Metropolitan Museum, New York; Morgan Library and Museum, New York; National Portrait Gallery, London; New Hall Art Collection, Murray Edwards College, Cambridge; Ruth Borchard Collection; Saatchi Collection, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Rubell Family Collection, Miami; and the Yale Center for British Art, Connecticut.

In 2019, the artist's memoir *Self Portrait*, praised by notable critics including Zadie Smith in the New York Review of Books, was published by Jonathan Cape; in 2020, the book was published in the US by New York Review Books. *Self Portrait* by Celia Paul will be published in paperback by Jonathan Cape on 7 April 2022. 2019 also marked the release of a documentary film *Celia Paul: self portrait* about the artist by Jake Auerbach.

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