

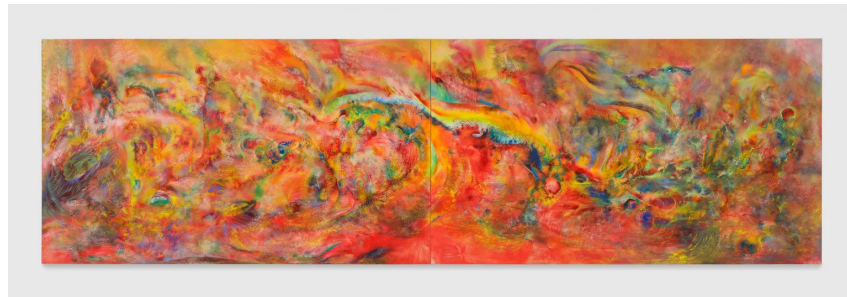
## OBSERVER

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# Behind the Gravitational Pull of Her Electric Abstractions: An Interview with Lucy Bull

With abstract paintings that tantalizingly suggest associations with the material world, Bull has bewitched collectors and art enthusiasts around the world.

By Elisa Carollo • 12/13/24 4:43pm



Lucy Bull, *3:13*, 2023; Oil on linen diptych, overall, 54 x 192 x 1 1/4 inches/ (137.2 x 487.7 x 3.2 cm). Photo: Elon Schoenholz Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery

A spellbinding surge of swirling colors has swept over the entire stairwell wall of ICA Miami with the opening of artist Lucy Bull's first U.S. museum show, "The Garden of Forking Paths," timed to coincide with this year's Art Basel Miami Beach. As visitors ascend the stairs, they're immediately ensnared by a synthetic vortex of motion, a gravitational tug-of-war that alternates between rising and falling, emergence and submersion. The sheer dynamism of the 39-foot-tall abstraction leaves viewers in a hypnotic state, as though confronting some otherworldly beast or alien energy field. This immersive experience culminates in a disorienting blend of vertigo and heightened awareness of the unseen forces that tether us to the earth. Bull's signature style—intensely physical, unapologetically sensual and electrically charged—captivates while simultaneously transcending the terrestrial.

In just a few short years, Bull has carved out a meteoric path in the art world. Since her 2021 debut show with David Kordansky in Los Angeles, the 34-year-old New York-born, Los Angeles-based painter has become one of the market's most sought-after stars. Her visionary abstractions, both hypnotic and otherworldly, have bewitched collectors, commanding seven-figure prices at auction. On September 26, Bull shattered her own record at Christie's in Hong Kong, where a piece fetched \$2.38 million (HKD18.52m), eclipsing her previous high of half a million.



Lucy Bull recently shattered her auction record at Christie's in Hong Kong. Photo Kobe Wagstaff. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery

While in Miami for the opening of her first U.S. museum exhibition, Bull took a moment to reflect on her work. "It was definitely a brain teaser to figure it out. My studio has very high ceilings but, still, I had to divide the painting into three different panels. I tried scaffolding for the first time," Bull tells *Observer*, gazing up at a massive, multi-panel painting.. "Honestly, I hated working with the scaffolding because it changes your relation to the painting. My process is very physical: I'm constantly walking back and forth while working on the canvas. And I'm totally immersed in the process while working. So it gets scary when you're on a rickety platform."

Bull explains that the monumental work was mostly created horizontally in her studio, with the canvas being rotated or inclined as she worked to understand its flow. There's a prodigious energy coursing through the painting, like a cascading waterfall of abstraction that here transforms the ICA's stairwell into a vortex of color and movement. As her first-ever site-specific commission, the piece perfectly marries the artist's sensibility with the space it inhabits. Reaching the third floor, the gravitational pull of the painting intensifies, gripping the viewer's gaze in a rollercoaster-like plunge before shooting back up, resulting in an aesthetic overload and disturbing yet electrifying dissonance.

Following the artist to the exhibition room, we encounter sixteen paintings created between 2019 and 2024, offering a comprehensive look at the artist's evolving practice. Bull typically works on multiple canvases simultaneously, in

a process of gestation where works influence one another organically, but this is the first time she has experienced paintings fresh from the studio alongside older pieces loaned from private collections and her personal archive—a milestone for any artist. "Looking at them, I honestly feel like I'm coming full circle. The process is constantly evolving, but I've recently been embracing the looseness of the earlier works," she says. "Being able just to revisit them has been rewarding. With more time, I've been able to digest them more clearly."



Lucy Bull's "The Garden of Forking Paths" is on view at ICA Miami. Courtesy ICA Miami

In Bull's paintings, chaos reigns—but it's chaos with a gravitational pull, as painterly tides, swirling marks and magmatic matter rotate and churn restlessly across her canvases. The apparent disorder reveals itself to be something more deliberate when you take the time to linger. In her more recent works, Bull's compositions have grown notably less dense, her gestures more loosely dispersed, creating atmospheric fields that invite the eye to wander and rest. "I think it's really important to have empty space, and it gives the eyes somewhere to rest while I'm taking them in this sort of dense landscape of marks," she explains.

The artist describes her abstraction as both a dreamscape and a mindscape, channeling her unconscious through an intuitive process not unlike the surrealists' automatic writing. "I want to hold onto the directness that comes from the first few gestures of a painting," she says. "The entire process is very intuitive. I usually start with just one or two colors, but then the painting starts to dictate its own evolution. It's a lot about the application and the manipulation of the paint on the surface; and then how the various layers interact."

The accumulation of marks on Bull's canvases doesn't just build composition—it builds time itself. Her works carry a temporal dimension, the result of long hours of mark-making in which the artist completely abandons herself to the process. "I just love the long stretches of time. Sometimes, it takes all day. I really keep on going until it's a new day, 4 a.m., 5 a.m. or 6 a.m.," she says. "I just love that headspace when no one is going to bother you. I'm totally immersed in the painting." It's in this state of immersion—almost a ritual possession—that Bull's process transcends the act of painting and becomes a portal to another order of reality, one capable of revealing its own unexpected truths.



Lucy Bull, *16:23*, 2024; Oil on linen, 86 x 68 x 1 1/4 inches, (218.4 x 172.7 x 3.2 cm). Photo: Elon Schoenholz Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery

Bull's open abstract fields are in constant motion, evolving and mutating like living organisms caught in the perpetual swirl of cosmic energies. Her paintings become powerful metaphors for the fluidity of existence, reminders of the ever-shifting nature of matter and energy. "I'd like to stop when I start to feel they really open up and give me this idea that they're going to shift and morph and transform over time," she explains. "At that point, they start to become living, breathing creatures."

Her process involves an intense negotiation with her dynamic fields of shape and color, where she scrapes, removes and pulls at the paint with gestures that feel both deliberate and raw. These incisive actions echo the frottage techniques of Max Ernst, as she excavates symbols and forms from the dense layers of her compositions. By juxtaposing marks with open spaces, Bull creates a dissonant yet harmonious tension, opening endless avenues for experimentation within her richly stratified canvases.

As she recounts, her inventive approach to brushes and tools emerged from a project focused on artist processes. "I really wanted to take a single brush and try to expand all the different kinds of marks that could be made with that single brush," she says. "Then I introduced color, started to confuse colors and layered so that the depth could really open up."



Lucy Bull, *Most Attractive*, 2019; Oil on linen, 50 x 60 1/8 x 1 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the Artist and David Kordansky Gallery

The depth Lucy Bull describes stems from her uncanny ability to plumb the subconscious, conjuring symbolic elements from the rich tapestry of dreams or surreal, altered states, opening up possibilities of clairvoyance. Immersed in Bull's dense abstract fields, animal patterns and secret systems of symbols begin to emerge before us, her canvases suspended between the tangible world of sensory reality and something more elusive. "I'm always searching for that level of generosity," she shares. "I want them to have that density that allows the viewer just to get lost in the mark-making."

As her first museum survey unfolds around us, it becomes evident that Bull's genius lies in the enigma of her openness. Her intricately layered compositions elude definitive interpretation, yet they tantalizingly suggest infinite associations with the material world. The paintings, always in flux, reject fixed definitions or traditional narratives, embracing instead the fluid and interconnected nature of existence. By defying singular or rational description, they reveal a deeper truth about reality: it is perpetually in motion, ungraspable, and alive with endless possibilities.

**"Lucy Bull: The Garden of Forking Paths" is on view at ICA Miami through March 30, 2025.**