

Press release

Liza Lou

i see you

27 April—3 June 2023
Opening Thursday 27 April 2023, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Marais
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



Liza Lou, *for myself*
Oil paint and graphite on gessoed linen. 127 x 129.5 cm (50 x 51 in)

i see you is an exhibition of new paintings by the LA-based artist Liza Lou in which she methodically draws sequences of circular shapes across delicate grounds of gesso and oil paint. With subtle layers of pale, calming tones, the large-scale paintings will surround visitors on the sunlit ground floor of Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais, inviting them to enter a visual meditation on colour, line, and form.

In her new works, Lou purls together hand-drawn shapes to form a large graphite tapestry in which gently

undulating patterns seem to fade in and out of view. Pale grounds of blue, yellow, green, purple and pink resemble the changing light of Southern California, anchoring the paintings in the place and time of their making. Lou embraces the legacy of Colour Field painting and the California-based Light and Space movement of the 1960s and 1970s in her approach to colour, exploring its emotive, spiritual potential and its capacity to alter perception. As the paint-coated gesso interacts with the feather-light markings on the surface, vision becomes unfixed; the eye unable to focus on a single knowable

detail. Sight overcomes reason to generate an experience that is beyond theory, encouraging viewers to abandon their need for analytical control.

in, is, possible, each day... Lou has named each of the paintings after a singular preposition, adjective, or temporal signifier. The titles cement Lou's contemplative approach to this body of work. They point to an almost transcendental philosophy of mark-making, tracing a connection back through a feminist engagement with Minimalism to the work of early 20th-century painters such as Hilma af Klint, for whom painting was a spiritual act in itself, rather than simply a means towards the realisation of an idea. In a recent interview, Lou described the heart of her practice as 'making something beautiful in a beautiful way'. That same mantra guides the creation of her new paintings, but seems to take on a more personal meaning in *i see you*. Working alone in her studio, as opposed to the community-driven methods of production that characterise her earlier work, Lou shifts the focus in *i see you* from the structural paradigms of collective creativity to a more elemental reflection on the act of making itself.

Labour, repetition and endurance remain central to Lou's way of working. Like predecessors such as Agnes Martin, she engages with a mode of making rooted in a feminist approach to Minimalism that highlights, rather than hides, the labour-intensive process of creation. Lou



Liza Lou, *i am alive*
Oil paint and graphite on gessoed linen. 127 x 129.5 cm (50 x 51 in)



Liza Lou, *in*, 2021–22
Oil paint and graphite on gessoed linen. 127 x 129.5 cm (50 x 51 in)

began exploring the visual tradition of Minimalism in her *Waves* works, composed of square white cloths woven with beads, which she then hammered away to reveal an intricate net of thread to form her *Cloud* paintings. 'These days, I'm peeling back the layers', she stated in an interview with Carrie Mae Weems for her new Rizzoli-published monograph. The paintings in *i see you* are a further paring back of the artist's practice, where only the trace of a sequence of ovals remains on the canvas. Lou observes, 'I have gone from the extreme materiality of life-size beaded environments to its barely perceptible essence.'

A moving net of graphite from afar, up close the gentle variations of the line bear witness to the slow process of mark-making, inviting viewers to follow along with the artist's hand. Doing so with Lou's paintings allows us to experience the canvas as a space of contemplation and meditation, where intensity is conveyed through small, patient movements rather than grand emotive gestures. Carefully built over more than 20 different layers of colour, the almost translucent grounds draw the eye further into the painting, compounding the sense of disorientation created on the surface. By allowing themselves to become lost in Lou's large, intricate paintings, viewers are invited to experience pure perception. Painting becomes a place for thought both for the artist and for viewers, not by inviting interpretation or conveying a message, but through moving, mark-making, and seeing.



Liza Lou. Photo: Mick Haggerty.

About the artist

Born in New York in 1969, Liza Lou lives and works in Los Angeles. She first came to prominence in 1996, when her room-sized beaded sculpture *Kitchen* was shown at the New Museum in New York. This groundbreaking work is now in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum, New York. The monumental installation represented five years of solitary labour and established the principles of materiality and social consciousness that would come to define her practice. *It* was followed by *Back Yard*, 1996-99, now in the collection of Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris and *Trailer* (1998-2000), also life-size, which was acquired by the Brooklyn Museum, New York in 2023, where it will go on permanent view this fall.

From 2005 to 2020, Lou worked in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. More recently, she founded the Apartogether community art project to foster connection and creativity during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lou's work has been featured in solo exhibitions at institutions including the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona (1998); Bass Museum of Art, Miami and Aspen Art Museum, CO (1998); Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (2002); Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo (2002); Savannah College of Art and Design, GA (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (2013); and the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY (2015). She is the recipient of the Anonymous was a Woman Award and a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

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