

Celia Paul

Exhibition 13 November–20 December 2019

Victoria Miro, 16 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW



Celia Paul, *My Sisters in Mourning*, 2015–2016

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro, London/Venice

Victoria Miro presents new and recent works by the celebrated painter in an exhibition that coincides with the publication of Paul's memoir, *Self-Portrait*, published by Jonathan Cape.

Celia Paul's art is founded on deep connections – familial, creative, looping 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, the artist's fourth with the gallery, focuses on the two key tenets of her work: portraiture and landscape. Alongside a body of new paintings, on view for the first time in the UK are a number of works from an acclaimed exhibition on the artist curated by Hilton Als, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, staff writer and theatre critic for *The New Yorker* and associate professor of writing at Columbia University, which originated at the Yale Center for British Art, Connecticut, in 2018 and subsequently toured to The Huntington, San Marino.

These works address the abiding themes of Paul's art – memory and family, the gulf between outward appearance and inner life – while offering touchstones for wider thoughts about time, transience, spirituality and mortality. Begun in 2015, on the thirty-second anniversary of her father's death and five months after the death of her mother, *My Sisters in Mourning*, 2015–2016, depicts the artist's four siblings dressed in shroud-like white dresses. United yet private in their grief, they sit in the space, a corner of Paul's studio opposite the British Museum, in which the artist painted her mother, her main sitter for many years. Paul thinks of this painting as a companion piece to an earlier work, *Family Group*, 1984–1986, painted shortly after the death of her father, in which her sisters huddle protectively around their mother. In the new work, her mother's absence is palpable, London's pearly light assuming a numinous dimension as her sisters contemplate their absent parent, a devout Christian who had used the hours spent in Paul's studio for prayer.

Paul, born in 1959 to missionary parents in South India, moved with her family to England during childhood, living in north Devon, where her father was head of the Lee Abbey religious community, and near Haworth, West Yorkshire. An affiliation with the Brontës, creative sisters and the children of a clergyman like the Pauls, intensified while Paul's father was Bishop of Bradford, when the artist

would visit the Brontë parsonage at Haworth. Based on recent studies of the house made during winter, *The Brontë Parsonage (with Charlotte's Pine and Emily's Path to the Moors)*, 2017, shows the building dwarfed by surrounding trees, the gravestones of the neighbouring church in the foreground and, in the distance, a hillside track glinting in the February light – motifs that signify mortality, longing and escape. A love of Branwell Brontë's work, especially his painting of his three sisters, in which the artist appears as a spectral presence (c1834, in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London) was an early influence, one that encouraged Paul to make paintings of her own sisters.

Paul has produced a number of evocative self-portraits over the course of her career. Works such as *Self-Portrait in a Narrow Mirror*, 2019, and *Self-Portrait, Standing*, 2019, open up a painterly and conceptual dialogue between the dual role of subject and artist – caught between self-possession and self-scrutiny – as well as offering an extended consideration of the essential dualities of the medium – its ability to capture qualities of form, light and atmosphere, and its material presence. Seascapes, similarly, have played an important role, especially since the death of Paul's mother in 2015. Taking the idea of portraiture in a more elemental direction, paintings such as *Shoreline*, 2015–2016, completed while Paul was working on *My Sisters in Mourning*, are permeated by a sense of mortality, of matter becoming dissolute and consciousness shifting into energy. Aligned here are the transformative powers of paint, light and creativity, and the consolatory beauty of nature – its patterns and flows offering reassuring form against life's inevitabilities and unknowns.

About the artist

Celia Paul was born in 1959 in Trivandrum, India. She 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 group exhibitions including *All Too Human: Bacon, Freud and a Century of Painting Life* at Tate Britain (2018), *La Diabliesse*, Tramps, London (2016); *NO MAN'S LAND: Women Artists from the Rubell Family Collection*, Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2015-2016); *Forces in Nature* curated by Hilton Als at Victoria Miro (2015); *Recent acquisitions: Arcimboldo to Kūtaj*, British Museum, London (2013); *Self-Consciousness*, curated by Peter Doig and Hilton Als, VeneKlasen/Werner gallery, Berlin (2010); *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.

***Self-Portrait* by Celia Paul is published by Jonathan Cape. Celia Paul's paintings are on view at Victoria Miro from 13 November to 20 December 2019. Concurrent with the artist's solo exhibition at Victoria Miro, a selection of works by Celia Paul, including a number of self-portraits, are on view at Victoria Miro New York – Office.**

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