

Celia Paul: *Myself, Among Others*

Exhibition 28 October–9 December 2023

Victoria Miro Venice, Il Capricorno, San Marco 1994, 30124 Venice, Italy



Celia Paul, *Overwhelmed by Beauty (Self-Portrait)*, 2023
Oil on canvas
95 x 100 cm
37 3/8 x 39 3/8 in
© Celia Paul
Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Victoria Miro is delighted to present *Myself, Among Others*, an exhibition of new paintings by Celia Paul completed during a recent residency with the gallery in Venice. The exhibition is accompanied by a new text by Eleanor Nairne.

‘Venice is full of memory – my own memories, everyone’s memories. Nothing has changed since the time Proust visited Venice with his mother – later transforming the visit into the chapter in the fifth book of *In Search of Lost Time*, titled *Sojourn in Venice*. It is a heartbreaking passage. Both he and his mother are grieving for lost loved ones. The grief washes through his experience of being in Venice, just as the water of the canals washes constantly through and against the decaying grandeur of the buildings.’ – Celia Paul

Celia Paul’s art is founded on deep connections – familial, creative, looping back and forth across time – to people and places, often finding in literature and art history tutelary spirits that resonate with her career-long enquiry into the complexities of interior and exterior life, constancy and change.

Against a backdrop of Venice, a city where liquid and solid, past and present, art and actuality, are held in fragile balance, the essential themes of Paul’s work, its focus on memory and mortality, and the formation of self as part of a broader continuum of creative expression, assume extraordinary resonance.

Proust was a constant presence during the artist’s recent stay in the city. So too were the Venetian masters Tintoretto, Giorgione and Carpaccio. Giorgione’s beguiling work *La Tempesta*, 1506–1508, on view in the Accademia, is a touchstone in Paul’s painting *That Obscure Object of Desire*, in which she delves into the painting’s

strange aura of eroticism and vulnerability in its depiction of mother and child, and the feelings she herself experienced as a young single mother. Struck by Carpaccio's *The Visitation*, 1504–1506, seen in the Museo Correr, depicting the Virgin Mary embracing her elderly cousin Elizabeth, Paul responded with *Old Woman Embracing Her Young Self*, in which the same figure offers support and is consoled across time. Shown alongside and expanding on the theme of life captured at various stages are portraits of young women, Pia, Lola and Clem.

The exhibition's shifting relationship to time is underscored by a still life capturing the incandescently short lifespan of a peony as it sheds its petals, while depictions of Venice, the light on the water seen from Paul's studio in a trio of *Laguna* paintings, are completed in different conditions as spring progresses to early summer.

One might think of Paul's paintings as portals through which we are invited to enter the inner world of the artist. She describes Venice as 'the most beautiful place in the world. Everything is centred around beauty. The light, the art, the water, the architecture', yet she concedes that 'It can feel overwhelming.' It is this feeling she distils in her self-portrait *Overwhelmed by Beauty*. Her hand is placed on her heart, while the dawn glow that suffuses the work suggests that this might be an inner light as much as an actual one. Equally, it might be the light of others, past and present, illuminating the ways in which one is seen or comes to see oneself.

As Eleanor Nairne writes in an accompanying text: 'These are paintings that grow from the soil of your immediate self, but also stem from your many shadow selves that appear sometimes unbidden. They relate to the conundrum by which we can only ever really know ourselves through how we are known to others...'

About the artist

Celia Paul was born in 1959 in Trivandrum, India. She lives and works in London. Recent major solo exhibitions include *Celia Paul*, curated by Hilton Als, at Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, USA (2018) touring to The Huntington, San Marino, California, USA (2019). The artist's work has been featured in recent group exhibitions including *Joan Didion: What She Means*, curated by Hilton Als, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA (2022–2023); and *Pictus Porrectus; Reconsidering the Full-Length Portrait*, Bell House, Newport, Rhode Island, USA (2022).

Her work is in collections including British Museum, London, UK; Carlsberg Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK; Metropolitan Museum, New York, USA; Morgan Library and Museum, New York, USA; National Portrait Gallery, London, UK; Rubell Family Collection, Miami, USA; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK; and the Yale Center for British Art, Connecticut, USA.

The artist's work is currently on view in the group exhibition *Real Families: Stories of Change* at The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK until 7 January 2024. A solo exhibition, *Celia Paul: Life Painting*, will be held at Vielmetter Los Angeles, 13 January–9 March 2024.

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