

GLADSTONE

"Painting may find its subjects in everyday life, but it removes from them, precisely, their reality, like the moisture extracted from flowers in order to preserve them."

—Barry Schwabsky

Though the artworld in recent years has privileged explicit narrative over formal nuance, Gillian Carnegie has long insisted that her subject matter remains secondary to the act of painting itself. The artists recurring motifs— cats, staircases, dried flowers, portraits, and trees—serve merely as the foundations for her process. Liberated from narrative convention, Carnegie's approach allows the viewer to focus solely on the paintings themselves, inviting us to experience her imagery as a series of ephemeral moments that document pure visual perception.

Carnegie's work doesn't demand excessive analysis yet paradoxically offers a wealth of analytical possibilities. The artist's quiet demeanor and avoidance of the artworld's spotlight manifests in works that are introspectively evocative of stillness. Carnegie once remarked, "I never felt the need to feel informed about the experience of seeing a painting in order to understand it... I'd like to think someone would still want to look at a painting rather than inform themselves about it beforehand."

Carnegie makes just two to three paintings a year, and though she consistently revisits a handful of motifs, she is also known for presenting strikingly novel interpretations of her subjects within these confines. The artist utilizes a similarly enigmatic approach to titling, often reusing names across different subject matters so that her works are distinguishable only by the year of their creation. Deeply emotional and unwavering in their focus on form, these paintings communicate powerfully through their silence.

Deftly navigating the semiotic structures that frustrate a perfect union between the signified and the signifier, Carnegie's paintings knowingly invite varied interpretations. Her recurring inclusion of her black and white cats, Prince and Elgar, evoke parallels to both Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and Charles Baudelaire's feline poetry. This literary and art-historical analogy enriches these paintings, which she has been creating since the early 2000s, exploring themes of perception, recognition and perspective. By complicating her seemingly simple subjects with layered symbols of cultural and philosophical meaning, Carnegie demonstrates her ability to imbue the ordinary with extraordinary meaning, inviting a rich dialogue between past and present, art and literature.

The solemn melancholy that permeates Carnegie's paintings is particularly evident in her still lifes, which depict the desiccated bouquets she has kept in her studio for over 20 years. Bridging the gap between portraiture and memento mori, these works signify the passage of time, the idea of life itself, and the notion of the trace. This idiosyncratic practice is not mere repetition; it serves as a documentation of the essential mundanity and banality of life. Formally, these dried flower paintings differ not only in lighting and angle, but also in their stylistic approaches—sometimes more naturalistic, other times more geometric, they represent a conflation of observation and imagination.

Carnegie's portraits typically depict herself or those within her inner circle. These subjects are captured in contemplative poses and against minimalist backdrops, exuding an air of self-possessed elegance. Though painted in color, the portraits are executed with a subdued palette, echoing the restrained beauty found in her other works. Intriguingly, these figurative pieces share a kinship with Carnegie's enigmatic cat paintings, and the emotional states of the sitters remain as inscrutable as those of the cats. This deliberate—or perhaps instinctive—evasion of overt emotional display imbues the works with a hallmark restraint and invites us to return to the fundamental act of seeing, encouraging a direct and unmediated engagement with the visual world.

G L A D S T O N E

About Gillian Carnegie:

Gillian Carnegie (b. 1971, Suffolk, United Kingdom) lives and works in London. In 1998, she graduated from the Royal College of Art, London, and in 2018 was a Teaching Fellow in Fine Art Painting at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College, London. Her work has been subject to solo exhibitions at Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne, Germany; dépendance, Brussels; Cabinet Gallery, London; and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. Her work has also appeared in group shows at Gladstone Gallery, New York; Hayward Gallery, London; Greene Naftali Gallery, New York; Galerie Sebastien Bertrand, Geneva, Switzerland; Plateau Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; and Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris; and Tate, London. She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2005, and in 2016 was the recipient of the Jury of John Moores Painting Prize 2016, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, United Kingdom. Institutional collections include: Tate; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Government Art Collection, United Kingdom; Arts Council Collections, United Kingdom; San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art.

Exhibition Details:

March 12 – April 26, 2025

Opening Reception: March 12, 6–8pm

130 East 64th Street

New York, NY 10065

About Gladstone Gallery:

Gladstone Gallery is recognized for its embrace of experimentation and visionary practices. The gallery has long been an active partner with artists pursuing catalytic ideas and engaging with pressing issues. Headquartered in New York, Gladstone's impact extends globally with galleries in Brussels and Seoul, enabling it to present new bodies of work and evolve its program to advance the practices and reach of its artists through time. Alongside its work with contemporary artists, the gallery is a steward of the legacies of pivotal historical artists and an advocate for the enduring power of their work. Gladstone is led by a team of partners who spearhead its long-term vision and program, building on the values of its founder Barbara Gladstone.

Press contact:

press@gladstonegallery.com