

ART SPIEL

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Ashley Garrett: Psyche at September



Welling, 2025, oil on canvas, 65" x 115"

Psyche, Ashley Garrett's exhibition of paintings at September Gallery in Kinderhook, has a mix of large and small oil paintings, and pastels. The small works have a restless energy emphasized by Garrett's staccato mark-making. The large canvases give Garrett's brush plenty of room to deliver longer, more fluid gestures. This freedom allows her paint strokes to slide over and under each other in a flow that can give her compositions a quiet intensity, like tall grass seething in a high wind. Garrett has lightened up her palette to include more pinks and a range of whites and pale grays.

Reproductions do not do justice to the pearlescence of these lighter passages that shimmer like the sunlight of early spring in the Hudson Valley, where Garrett lives. As much as these paintings demonstrate Garrett's mastery of oil painting, their power lies in her skill to evoke her subjective experience of the natural world through abstract means: gesture, color, shape. In a word, they are, as the title *Psyche* would have it, soulful.

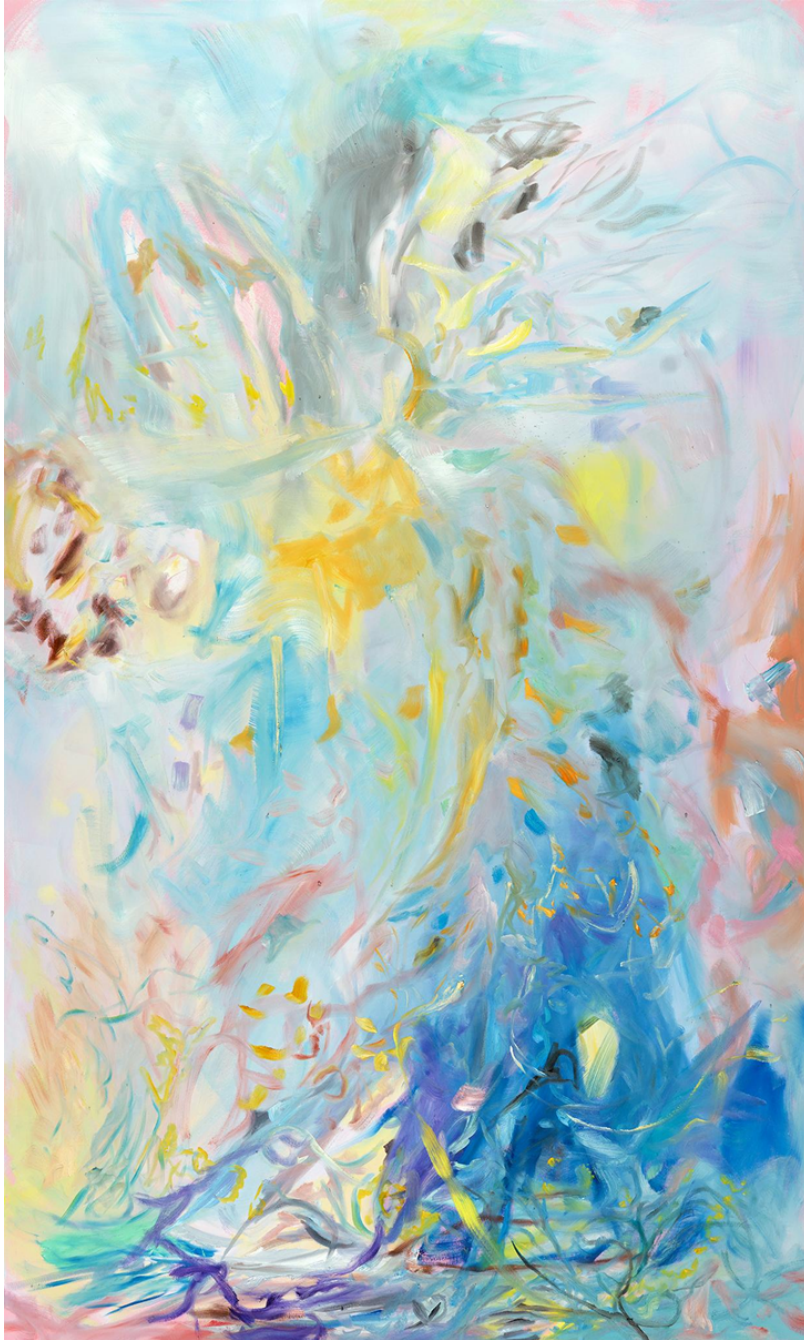
Welling, 2025, is the show's diva, a spectacular piece with an arresting arc of deep violet sweeping three quarters of the way across the canvas. The largest painting at almost ten feet, *Welling* is the kind of work we feel in the pit of the stomach as the space created by the violet arc sets off a touch of vertigo. Are we looking down into something like a pool or are we looking out into the void? Either way we feel as if we could be falling into something. A long yellow border, which hugs the arc at top right and then slides down to the painting's center, amplifies the violet's deep space. *Welling* is nervy in its scale and simplicity. Garrett pulls it off by bending the arc with just the right degree of upward acceleration, as well as adding some pale wisps of white in the violet expanse that keep it from overwhelming the whole.



Vocare, 2025, oil on canvas, 57" x 72"

Vocare, 2025, is *Welling*'s opposite. Where *Welling* is like a Romantic symphony, full of grandeur, *Vocare* is like a Baroque ensemble, with distinct parts fitting together in neat precision. Whereas in *Welling* we are looking out or over something, in *Vocare* we are looking through something, say a forest or a field. As with *Welling*, geometry plays a key role. There is a clear perpendicular, just left of center. The slight asymmetry moves our eye to the receding

space on the right, as if we had just turned a corner on a path and a vista had opened up—perhaps a pond, as suggested by the deep blue horizontal strokes at bottom right. Vocare’s insistent brushwork sets the whole surface thrumming to a subtle beat that pulses through the painting. Of all the works in *Psyche*, *Vocare*—the title is Latin for “to call”—feels closest to Charles Burchfield’s transcendental landscapes where everything in the land—trees, insects, clouds—vibrates in unison.



Persephone, 2024, oil on canvas, 94" x 57"

The most affecting of all Garrett's paintings in *Psyche* is *Persephone*, 2024, a tall painting, almost eight feet high. Where *Welling* sweeps from left to right, *Persephone* sweeps up from a violet/purple/blue passage on the lower right corner to the pale blue/ pearly white upper left corner, where a hint of pink underpainting peeks out. In an artist's talk, Garrett narrated her journey with *Persephone*, telling how she had to slow down so she could come into sync with what it was asking of her. The result of that conversation is a work that elicits a powerful sense of release, like a long exhalation, as our gaze soars upward. Coming to the upper third of the canvas we encounter a passage whose skein of lateral brush strokes resembles a pair of spreading wings. Where the wings meet, a burst of yellow, like a tiny sun, radiates warmth, maybe heralding the start of spring as in the Persephone myth when she leaves gloomy Hades to bring life back to the earth. Like all art worthy of the name, Garrett's paintings, heartfelt and considered, dare us to have hope, "the thing with feathers -," as Dickinson, put it, that "never stops – at all -"

Photos courtesy of the gallery.

Ashley Garrett, *Psyche*,
August 16 – October 18, 2025
September Gallery, Kinderhook