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Paintings after Proust: Contemporary Takes on Old Masters in Homage to Marcel Proust

ARTSY EDITORIAL

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It is said that Picasso once remarked, “Good artists borrow, great artists steal.” While this statement was especially convenient for Picasso himself, it speaks to the widespread, age-old tendency for artists to look to fellow artists for inspiration. This statement finds relevance in Claudia Baez’s debut solo exhibition at ART 3 gallery this month, “Paintings after Proust,” featuring a new series of paintings motivated not only by legendary French novelist Marcel Proust, but also numerous artistic forebears, and a book by contemporary painter Eric Karpeles.

While laboring over his seven-volume masterwork, *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*) (1913–27), Marcel Proust embedded in his text the names and works of more than 100 artists, ranging in nationality, style, and time period, from Bellini to Velázquez to Whistler. It was this fact that led Karpeles to compile the cited artworks in a book, which would become *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to 'In Search of Lost Time,'* (2008)—the second text which informed Baez’s new works. This cyclical discourse of art, literature, appropriation, and admiration take the fore this month as Baez unveils her paintings with the help of independent curator Anne Strauss.

With a passion for Proust and Western art history, Baez used Karpeles’s text to choose which artworks to recreate, and traced them back to Proust’s original, titling them after the lines from *In Search of Lost Time* where they were mentioned. Baez’s recreation of Velázquez’s *María Teresa* (1638–1683), *Infanta of Spain*—a bust-length portrait of the Spanish princess wearing an elaborate wig with butterfly-like ribbons, part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s permanent collection—is titled, “And as she played, of all Albertine’s multiple tresses I could see but a single heart-shaped loop of black



hair dinging to the side of her ear like the bow of a Velázquez Infanta.” In Baez’s version, the Princess is distilled to spare lines and brushstrokes, with just enough detail to evoke the original masterpiece.

Baez ultimately chose four works from each of Proust’s volumes, working in a range of styles from expressive gestural renderings, to simplistic delineations marked by bursts of color. Without becoming wrapped up in the details of each individual original, she developed a cohesive, dynamic series, marked by a diversity reflecting the range of painters she quotes. In two square paintings marked by quick, bold lines and white highlights, Baez pays tribute to Gustave Moreau; in another work layered with thin washes of color, swiftly applied in horizontals, creating a multicolored landscape, she nods to Vermeer. Mining inspiration from Proust, Karpeles, and numerous masterful artists, Baez ultimately has realized her own artistic vision, tempering the influence of her artistic and literary forebears with her own artistic vision and sensibilities.

—Casey Lesser

“Claudia Baez: Paintings after Proust,” is on view at ART 3, Brooklyn, Oct. 8th–Nov. 22nd, 2014.

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