

The background of the image is an abstract composition of horizontal, wavy bands in various shades of blue and teal. The colors transition from a deep, dark blue at the top to lighter, more vibrant teal and blue towards the bottom, creating a sense of depth and movement. The texture appears slightly grainy, suggesting a painted or fabric-like surface.

SUSAN VECSEY
DAY AND NIGHT



SUSAN VECSEY IN HER STUDIO

PHOTO: EMILY BROWN

SUSAN VECSEY DAY AND NIGHT

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SUSAN VECSEY (B. 1971)

An artist working in the Color Field tradition, Susan Vecsey merges art and nature in lyrically mesmerizing and elegant abstract paintings, rendered in a meticulous, labor-intensive method. Her fifth exhibition at Berry Campbell is titled *Day and Night*. Featuring more strongly hued works than in the past, Vecsey captures an essential mystery of light; the particular moments of brightening and fading are so minimally perceptible as to be archetypal images that stretch out time so that we become self-reflectively aware of ourselves in relation to the natural world.

Vecsey, born in Somerville, New Jersey, became familiar with art and artists at a young age, and one of her first art experiences was a field trip with her elementary school class in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. When the curator told the class that there were just a few women among the Impressionists, Vecsey was already thinking of becoming an artist. She worried that if women weren't allowed in the painting circle, maybe she should sign her works with an "S" instead of her full name to hide her gender. Her childhood anxiety conveys her early ambition but, of course, today she signs her full name on the back of her canvases.

After receiving her B.A. from Barnard College, Columbia University, Vecsey experimented for several years before enrolling at the New York Studio School, where she received her M.F.A. There she studied with the UK-born Graham Nickson (currently dean and atelier head of painting), whom she describes as "a remarkable painter and teacher." He used "examples from art history to encourage different ways of thinking about painting and problem solving," Vecsey remarks. One of his suggestions was turning a work upside down, and his two-week drawing marathons are legendary. Vecsey participated in more than a dozen of them, which could be a record. They instilled in her a method of working in a disciplined manner over long periods of time. Later, Vecsey was invited by Nickson to teach drawing at the school for a semester. She recalls the Studio School "as a special place with a wonderful tradition—it is in the original location of the Whitney Museum—a place where you're really working every day as if you were in your own art studio." Such a concentrated work environment fits Vecsey, who like many first-generation Americans has always worked hard—her parents emigrated from Hungary in the late 1960s. She has consistently sought intense school experiences, and a strong work ethic is an essential part of her painting practice. She loves spending entire days in her studio.

Vecsey began exhibiting her work in 2006. That year, she was in a group show at Sylvester & Co. and Amagansett Fine Arts. In 2007, she was featured in the *69th Annual Guild Hall Artist Members Exhibition*, East Hampton. Her first solo show was in 2008 at Ashawagh Hall, East Hampton, a place meaningful to her because of its history: built in 1847, and named

for the Native American word for "place where two roads come together," the hall was the venue for exhibitions of Pollock and de Kooning, who Vecsey considers her artistic forebears. In a review of a spring 2009 group show at Spanierman Gallery, East Hampton, Benjamin Genocchio took notice in the *New York Times* of Vecsey's "beautiful paintings of imaginary landscapes. . . created with oil paint that has been thinned and then lightly brushed, dripped, or poured onto the canvas."¹ From 2009 until 2013, Vecsey was represented by Spanierman Gallery (Ira Spanierman), where a solo show of her work was held in 2010. In 2014, Vecsey's work was featured in Guild Hall's *Selections from the Permanent Collection* curated by the former museum director/chief curator, Christina Strassfield. There Vecsey's work was shown alongside that of Eric Fischl, April Gornik, Mary Heilmann, and David Salle. Subsequently Vecsey has actively exhibited in group and solo shows. The latter include exhibitions at the John Jermain Memorial Library, Sag Harbor, New York, in 2017, the Greenville County Museum of Art, South Carolina (catalogue essay by Phyllis Tuchman), in 2017, and at Berry Campbell Gallery, New York (2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020), which represents her. A review of Vecsey's 2014 Berry Campbell show in *Artcritical* stated, "this is virtuoso painting."² In 2020, Vecsey participated in *Drive-by-Art (Public Art in this Moment of Social Distancing)* in the Hamptons, featured in the *New York Times*. Vecsey will be included in *Hamptons Artists* by Jaime Lopez and Coco Meyers, featuring fifty artists working in Long Island today.

Graham Nickson's advice, "not to be too precious about your work," resonated with Vecsey, whose process involves continuous working and reworking, so as to push her images constantly to the next level. Although committed to abstraction and a studio-based method, Vecsey starts with drawings from observation. She lives in both New York City and East Hampton, and from the latter, her method involves traveling out on Long Island, where she draws on-site in charcoal. In her studio, she develops her drawings into pastel sketches, introducing color ideas and doing color studies for the oils she will use in the paintings that will result in three or four hues "that will lock together and talk to each other." Her ideas about color can be traced to her discovery of Josef Albers' book on color theory, which she purchased from the MoMA bookstore when she was about fourteen on yet another school field trip. (The book first appeared in paperback in 1971.) Her response then was "Oh, this is something you can think about, how two colors act next to each other."

In her studio, surrounded by her studies, Vecsey builds stretcher bars that fit the size and scale of a given plein-air drawing. Instead of working on the floor with unstretched canvases in the manner of many other Color Field painters, she stretches her canvases before she starts painting, using a raw Belgian linen, whose heavy weave—wider and tougher than cotton—can support her many layers of paint. Vecsey loves the

beauty of the material and the subtlety of its light-brown color, which she has to factor in when working out color. This is because colors will react differently to the toned surface than to a white one, letting less light show through. The durability and strength of linen make it possible for Vecsey to explore nuances while the long-lasting material itself accords with her preoccupation with an elongated sense of time in her art. Her preparation includes testing colors on scraps of linen. Thus, she conceives a painting long before paint meets canvas, but it only comes to life in the painting process.

Like other Color Field artists, Vecsey paints with a staining technique rather than brushes, so the experience of a painting is free of the artist's interference. Her approach is risky yet careful. She liquefies her paints, which she places in buckets. She uses large cups for her pours, working wet on wet. The solvent-diluted pigment is difficult to control without a brush and Vecsey can only do one pour a day, letting it dry overnight, and repeating the process the next day, so that she is always working over an entire painting rather than creating it in sections. Because of the necessities of her exacting method, she renders several canvases at once, which are at different stages of completion. Her process is unforgiving because, like watercolor, it doesn't really allow for "mistakes." She comments: "I'm using the landscape as a vehicle for these compositions. But for me, the painting is really about paint on the surface, and for that reason I need to slowly build up the layers, maintaining the texture, quality, and beauty of the linen."

Vecsey's materials match her subject matter because the multilayered paint creates an effect similar to Long Island, where "everything has a sort of hazy, soft quality," as Vecsey notes. She records the lost, seemingly frayed, edges characteristic of the land in the Hamptons and the atmospheric translucency that permeates the air into her canvases, creating a palpable sense of depth that evokes an ambient mood of meditative calm in the viewer. At times her translation of landscape into paint has been associated with the work of Helen Frankenthaler, for whom Vecsey feels an affinity and admiration. However, her emphasis is on composition by contrast with Frankenthaler, whose method was more spontaneous.

Rejecting mimesis in favor of mental impressions of her sites, Vecsey's paintings evoke the landscapes of nineteenth-century American Tonalists, and similar to their works, her inwardly glowing canvases create liminal zones between art and nature. Yet they diverge from those of Tonalists, as well as from the tonal valences of Rothko, because they are not portals to an otherworldly spiritual zone, but instead represent archetypal landscape structures adjusted to human perceptual apparatus.

Vecsey has always worked in close tonal ranges but her recent paintings, built up with many layers of pigment, are more saturated and intense in hue. Blues are dominant in the show while some works are almost

monochromatic. They seem like afterimages, as if in response to the optical effect of the cobalt and ultramarine overload. Two 2023 nocturnes capture the surreal effect of a sky after sundown that, more intensely blue than during the day, suffuses the land. The paintings convey how this drawn-out light can blur one's vision but also allows distinctions to emerge when the eye adjusts, revealing shape and mass. In a blue vertical, the tripartite composition is the inverse of one's expectations, with dark navy in its upper register and two lighter hues in opposing triangles below. The image demands that we make sense of it, filling it in, as we become accustomed to the light, with our own referential capacities of distance and proximity [plate 1]. In *Untitled (Blue)*, 2023 [plate 2], a blue strip spans the lower register, and we feel the hugeness of the translucent sky, like in a Dutch seventeenth-century landscape, but then again we could just be looking closely at a cross-section of sky from a worm's eye view. The spatial complexities of Vecsey's paintings create optical illusions, as if we can in one moment feel overhead and in the next miniaturized. *Untitled (Yellow)*, 2022 [back cover], *Untitled (Orange Nocturne)*, 2023 [plate 5], *Untitled (Pale/Blue)*, 2023 [plate 4], and *Untitled (Gray)*, 2022 [plate 3], all feature low horizontal registers yet their different proportions and tonal relationships make us aware of how differently we locate ourselves in them. This is minimalism at its most compelling.

Seeing a show of Vecsey's paintings is ultimately an experience of the subtleties of light that often pass us by, making us aware of nuances we would otherwise miss, and the ways we map the earth as we make sense of our place within it, often through a sensory rather than a rational lens.

Vecsey's honors include being a visiting artist in 2012 at the American Academy in Rome and an invitation to present her work at Marika Herskovic's Annual Artist Seminar in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, also in 2012. Vecsey has collaborated with numerous architects and designers, including David Scott Interiors, New York; Mabley Handler Design, Water Mill, New York; and Daniel Kahan, Smith and Moore Architects, Palm Beach, Florida. In recent years, the distinguished design dealers, Lee Jofa and Brunschwig & Fils, have used several of her paintings in advertising campaigns. Her work has been featured in magazines such as *Architectural Digest*, *Hamptons Magazine*, *Veranda*, and *Luxe*. Her paintings are in public and private collections around the world.

—Lisa N. Peters, Ph.D.
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¹ Benjamin Genocchio, "Sun-Kissed Landscapes: Third Annual 'Light of Spring' Show at Spanierman Celebrates the Season, on Canvas," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2009, L18.

² *Artcritical: The Online Magazine of Art and Ideas*, June 21, 2014.

PLATE 1. **UNTITLED (BLUE VERTICAL)**, 2022, OIL ON LINEN, 80 X 48 IN.



PLATE 2. **UNTITLED (BLUE)**, 2023, OIL ON LINEN, 74 X 90 IN.



PLATE 3. **UNTITLED (GRAY)**, 2022, OIL ON LINEN, 52 X 58 IN.



PLATE 4. **UNTITLED (PALE/BLUE)**, 2023,
OIL ON LINEN, 44 X 82 IN.



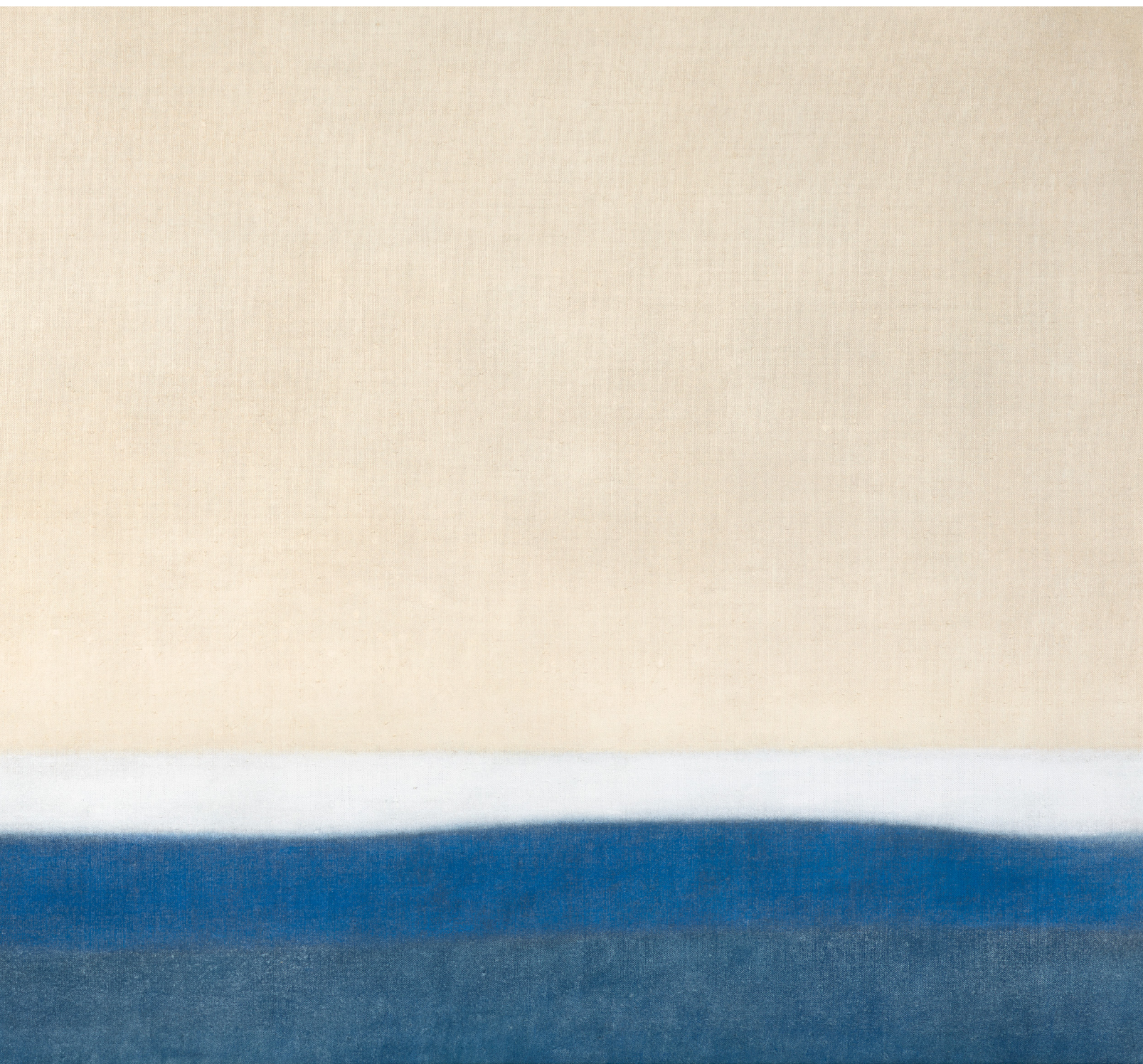


PLATE 5. **UNTITLED (ORANGE NOCTURNE)**, 2023, OIL ON PAPER, 32 X 40 IN.



PLATE 6. **UNTITLED (BLUE NOCTURNE)**, 2023, OIL ON LINEN, 48 X 76 IN.

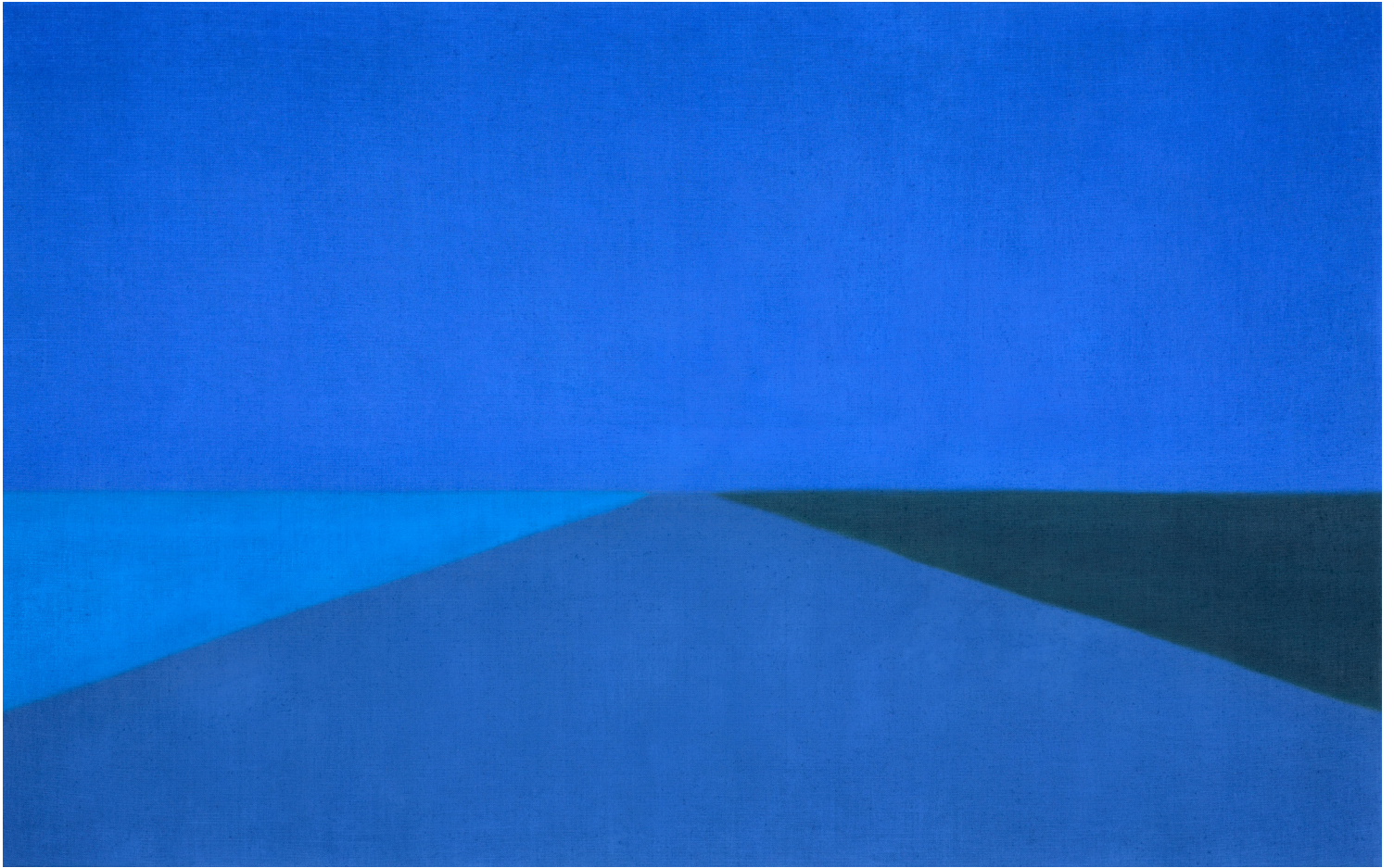




PLATE 7. **UNTITLED (DAY)**, 2023, OIL ON LINEN, 28 X 22 IN.



PLATE 8. **UNTITLED (NOCTURNE)**, 2023, OIL ON LINEN, 28 X 22 IN.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Christine Berry and Martha Campbell opened Berry Campbell Gallery in 2013. The gallery has a fine-tuned program representing artists of post-war American painting that have been overlooked or neglected, particularly women of Abstract Expressionism. Since its inception, the gallery has developed a strong emphasis in research to bring to light artists overlooked due to age, race, gender, or geography. This unique perspective has been increasingly recognized by curators, collectors, and the press.

Berry Campbell has been included and reviewed in publications such as *Architectural Digest*, *Art & Antiques*, *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Artnet News*, *ArtNews*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Huffington Post*, *Hyperallergic*, *East Hampton Star*, the *Financial Times*, *Galerie Magazine*, *Luxe Magazine*, *The New Criterion*, the *New York Times*, *Vogue* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

In September 2022, Berry Campbell moved to 524 West 26th Street, New York. The 9,000-square-foot gallery houses 4,500 square feet of exhibition space, including a skylit main gallery and four smaller galleries, as well as two private viewing areas, a full-sized library, executive offices and substantial on-site storage space. For further information please call at 212.924.2178, visit our website at www.berrycampbell.com, or email at info@berrycampbell.com.



MARTHA CAMPBELL, SUSAN VECSEY, AND CHRISTINE BERRY

PHOTO: GEORGE SIERZPUTOWSKI



UNTITLED (YELLOW), 2022, OIL ON LINEN, 42 X 62 IN.

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COVER: **UNTITLED (BLUE)** (DETAIL), 2023, OIL ON LINEN, 74 X 90 IN.