

# Art in America

January 2002

## Joanne Greenbaum at D'Amelio Terras

Joanne Greenbaum's art is one of maximum attention and maximum risk, disguised as an obsessive game. It is loaded with analogies, historical references and, most importantly, lessons of the hand. In these large, cartoonlike abstractions, there is an entire primer on the gambles and rewards of painting.

The seven works in this, her third solo exhibition at D'Amelio Terras, meet head-on the challenge of the large canvas. Each one presents an elaborate, imprecise construction, with a particular character, generated out of distinct color and formal relationships. "That's the pre-Columbian copper necklace," you might say, or "that's the one that looks like a kid's toy." Built on a white ground from flat simple elements—rectangle, circle, line, cube—the compositions are amazingly dynamic, shifting from cartoon outline into three-dimensional recessions, and back to what look like network diagrams. In most of the paintings, gesture has been banished, but every now and then there is a whorl, a Frank Stella pattern inside a square, a deep organic blob with a hole in it, or the swipe of a brush. Just right.

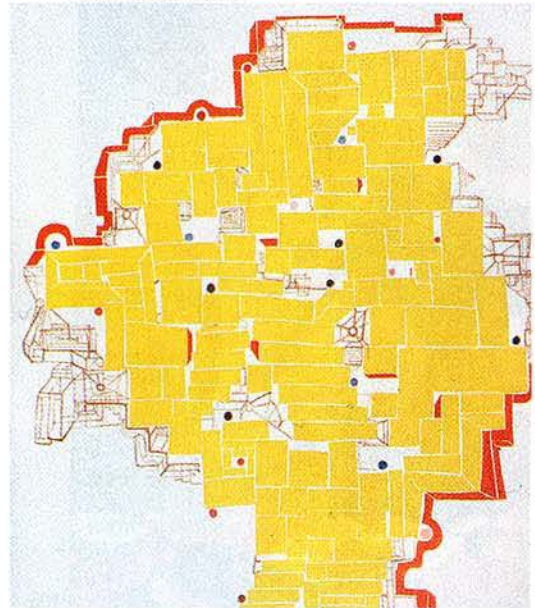
So where's the risk, the juice? Greenbaum has absorbed the rhythmic lessons of the great

inventors of nonfigurative form, from Klee and Mondrian to Brice Marden. She has understood the ambiguity of organic and inorganic shapes from straddlers of the line such as Elizabeth Murray and Lee Bontecou. Out of this knowledge, she has developed an idiom nourished by drawing. She has formulated an itinerary, so to speak, for each canvas, then stepped up and let it happen. Every move is right there. Nothing is effaced or altered. You can see her paint herself into corners and leap out, following the suggestions of the forms. Most of the images extend to the edge, and you wonder what's happening beyond the frame. She manages to have it both ways, generating existential energy and iconic structure. It's not always elegant, but it's absorbing to watch.

This emphasis on process puts Greenbaum at the opposite pole from, say, Peter Halley, for whom geometry is both a visual and a metaphoric straitjacket. Among so many contemporary painters, there is a need for ex post facto justification because the visual strategies themselves are infertile or lack imaginative engagement. With Greenbaum, it's just the opposite. Her affection for painting is enormous, and it shows. She doesn't say much, and her work doesn't encourage critics to say much. To paraphrase Thomas Pynchon, she keeps cool but she cares.

—Lyle Rexer

Joanne Greenbaum: *Untitled*, 2001,  
oil on canvas, 90 by 80 inches;  
at D'Amelio Terras.



# The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2001

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## ART IN REVIEW

### **Joanne Greenbaum**

*D'Amelio Terras  
525 West 22nd Street  
Chelsea  
Through April 28*

Joanne Greenbaum's raw, buoyant paintings look like the works of a graphically clever but attention-challenged teenager. Painted thinly and spontaneously in a few felt-tip or metallic colors on large white canvases, Ms. Greenbaum's compositions of blocks, spots, boxes and grids are like oversize doodles or schematic diagrams of unknown systems. They are best viewed from a distance.

Each picture sets up an animated interplay of different vocabularies: a rickety, boxy architecture plays off a circulating line of solid copper spots in one case; in another, spidery, improvised gridworks run around and peek through a wall of bright yellow blocks.

Such compositions might suggest musical counterpoint, dueling semiotics or dances between opposite personalities. A nervous impulsiveness makes a viewer wonder if the artist might be working out conflicting energies within her own psyche.

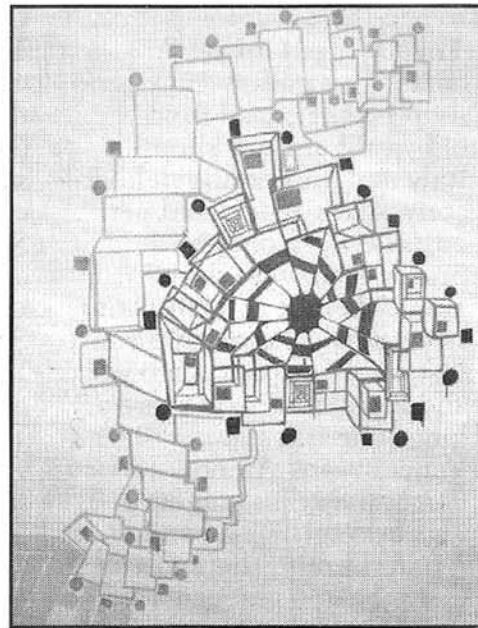
Negligently made as they are, Ms. Greenbaum's paintings are not likely to retain their freshness for long. But right now they have an appealing dissonant verve, and who says all art has to last forever?

KEN JOHNSON

## THE ART NEWSPAPER, No. 113, APRIL 2001

### Adrian Dannatt's guide to New York contemporary galleries

◆ All the tropes, tricks and limits of abstraction are constantly in play amongst the latest generation of its practitioners, as opposed to those before who were merely content to paint abstract paintings. Joanne Greenbaum is one of the most interesting of this current crop, now on show at **D'Amelio Terras**. Her canvases appear as drawings, models, sketches of possible gambits, which are also the actual things themselves. Her deceptively throw-away colour schemes and graphic skills combine to create deceptively casual series, all marked, literally, by a hesitant grace which is decorative yet cerebral. Sophisticated yet innocent: no wonder the Europeans love her, with recent attention including Phaidon's new *Fresh Cream* and a sell-out show at London's Greengrassi.



Joanne Greenbaum, "Untitled"  
2001. At D'Amelio Terras