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ROBERTA SMITH Art in Review

Joanne Greenbaum “Hollywood Squares”

Joanne Greenbaum’s new paintings are nicely abrasive, inharmonious in color and, generally speaking, a little nuts. They make the eyes spin. Despite the show’s title — “Hollywood Squares” — most of these untitled canvases are compositionally askew, often dominated by jigsawed, pinwheeling spirals that unravel as they turn in on themselves, as if one shade were battling another for supremacy. This is especially true in a painting dominated by a scrum of blue-green and black, with competing incursions of red and yellow at the edges. In another painting a pink hurricanelike vortex pushes into a black field, bearing down on an infrastructure of orange, green and black that oozes with blue scribbles.

The best works here emphasize dark tones, if not black, and the weight of the color works well against the thinness of the paint. There’s a grinding energy to the surfaces; they suggest a graffiti artist or a child with crayons who has been working in one place too long. What was supposed to be once-over-lightly becomes charged and impacted, pushing into the vicinity of painting without succumbing to the medium’s usual seductiveness.

Ms. Greenbaum has become less tolerant of the bare white canvas that tended to make her paintings resemble large colorful drawings. These new works are something else. **ROBERTA SMITH**

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Elliott Green: *Lemmonny Soap*, 2009, oil on canvas, 18 by 24 inches; at D'Amelio Terras.



the new work attests to a confluence of art and life or a fetishizing of personal style, there is a clear link between Hardy's private dressing room and the gallery. The pivotal word describing her new self-portraits is "self."

—David Duncan

**JOANNE GREENBAUM
AND ELLIOTT GREEN
D'AMELIO TERRAS**

Among the pleasures of tracking the changes that Joanne Greenbaum has put her painting through in the last decade or so is watching her try out ideas, bring them to fruition, exhaust them and move on. All the while, she retains her core painterly identity: a certain gawky ebullience that embraces irresolution, hesitation, repetitiveness; the awkward, offhand and off-kilter. Plus, she makes it look easy. In the eight new paintings (all 2009, 80 by 78 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas) shown in "Hollywood Squares," Greenbaum continues to deploy her spindly geometric motifs. But she relies less on the endless layering (each layer numbered in the painting, oy) that has lately subsumed her canvases, leaving it to Terry Winters, among others, to romance "process" to death.

Rather, each painting's space is invested in one or two eccentric shapes, such as the tumbling, convoluted blue and pink mass scraped into *Untitled (Hollywood Squares #5)*. Ziggurat steps appear below; above, wavy lines that would mean "stinky" in

the comics. A scrim of magenta sets that central shape off from a turbulent field of underpainting the features the artist's beloved fluorescent yellow. The painting's candy-color variants include butterscotch, molasses and Nutella.

A murky, licorice lagoon settles into the midsection of *Untitled (Hollywood Squares #6)*, where a lot of slithering painterly activity is dimly glimpsed. A great, cresting pink wave swallows up the graphomaniacal core of *Untitled (Hollywood Squares #4)*. An allegory of this painter's progress? Figure/ground ambiguity in the form of billowing, ragged patches of cadmium green and Bible black threatens to crowd out the noodly confetti in *Untitled (Hollywood Squares #8)*. Greenbaum continues to evolve, balancing risk and caution.

Elliott Green, who has been paired with Greenbaum, periodically overhauls his style, coming to abstraction via a cartoony figuration that posits the human form as elastic tubes and encumbering sacs complicated by heads, hands and feet. In the seven small, theatrical, Surrealist-tinged paintings in "Personified Abstraction," the artist dismisses his actors but retains their poses and gestures: body language, disembodied.

Many paintings align with the pastoral tradition of figures in the landscape. *Lemmonny Soap* (18 by 24 inches; all works oil on linen, 2008 or '09) depicts an encounter between two loopy, baggy characters on a greensward under a hazy purple sky. The larger thrusts an incongruously raw brushstroke in the



Joanne Greenbaum: *Untitled (Hollywood Squares #4)*, 2009, oil and acrylic on canvas, 80 by 78 inches; at D'Amelio Terras.

other's (implied) face as if in discovery or accusation, a play on "gestural" mark-making.

There is more bravura brushwork in *Roots Come Up For Air* (30 by 40 inches), in which a slick band of green suggests a grassy mound, buttery yellow bulbs nod in the breeze, and a pedestal supports a quizzical hybrid of animal, vegetable and industrial forms. The gaps between the bigger forms are populated with tiny annotations that border on the figurative, and even the distant background, with its sweeping curves in neutralized secondary hues, is sweetly anthropomorphic. Green's comic choreography of elasticity and resilience is a fine counterpoint to Francis Bacon's vision, recently surveyed in a traveling exhibition, of the human figure as beat-up meat.

—Stephen Maine

**MICHAEL JOAQUIN GREY
P.S.1**

Michael Joaquin Grey (b. 1961) has been known since the early '90s for making works that reference the principles governing the growth and transformation of things living and inanimate. As an ironic reminder of these concerns, a modified copy of Alfred Barr's legendary diagram of modern art's genealogy, titled *MoMA Kindergarten* (2005), hung outside Grey's recent P.S.1 solo show.

On entering the exhibition the visitor was met by the intense bass sound of heartbeats; though one didn't immediately see the video that was their

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

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JOANNE GREENBAUM

This exuberant show of big abstract paintings borrows its title from television—“Hollywood Squares”—and it’s as unabashedly entertaining as it is accomplished. The colorful canvases layer oil and acrylic, opaque brushwork and water-thin drips, hard edges and nervous lines, erasure and accumulation. In the process, they throw down the gauntlet to digital technology—it’s hard to conceive of an imaging program with more versatility than Greenbaum’s hand. What ensues is a game show of sorts, a quiz about painting, from Matisse to Mondrian to Morris Louis, in which the answer is always “all of the above.” Through Oct. 31. (D’Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

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Art | Listings

Studio visit *Joanne Greenbaum*



The artist leans back in her studio.

The artist talks about painting and the long haul.

By **T.J. Carlin**

Your career has been underground for a long time. Why was that?

After studying painting in undergrad school, I applied to a couple of grad schools and I didn't get in. I didn't get into good ones and I didn't get into easy ones. So I moved here and had my little apartment that I painted in and just worked. I had part-time jobs. Got by barely. I was really poor. And then for 15 years, I worked full time at this fine-art photo library and didn't quit until I got a Guggenheim fellowship in 2001. That plus a few sales from D'Amelio Terras was enough money to say, "Okay, if I don't do this now, I never will." They call it the "golden handcuffs" when you have a job that's paying your bills, and it was okay until it wasn't anymore. I finally said, "I'm making the break."

The paintings you have in your studio now are all going to be in your upcoming show at D'Amelio Terras; tell me about them.

I decided that I liked the idea of



making eight paintings that were all the same size, 80 inches tall by 78 inches wide, and though the show is called "Hollywood Squares," they're all off square. My idea was to overwhelm the gallery with a series of strong paintings that are a continuation of what I've been doing, except that I've moved it to another place. I'd been in Germany in the spring and had broken my ankle, and when I came back in May, I was laid up for weeks, and started making colored pencil drawings in preparation for the paintings. As soon as I could move around, I started making these, and they all came out in the space of two months.

They seem to hark back to earlier eras in modernism; is that intentional?

I'm not interested in summing up the history of painting or revitalizing modernism. I just don't care. I'm interested in how do you move abstract painting forward. Of course, I love Matisse, I think that's obvious. I don't feel like I'm looking to bring back a certain era, though I can certainly use the tools of some of those places. I remember in the late '80s going to this huge Morris Louis show at MoMA and being blown away by his skeins of colors. I've always liked Louis, but I'd never thought about him before, and I literally came home and pretty much changed my work because of that show. That's when I think I stopped using paint and started using transparencies of paint. Now, that didn't mean that I wanted to be a stain painter. I like the idea of staining, but I don't want to be a Morris Louis. I'm just kind of being in my own zone at this moment.

Greenbaum's work will be on view at D'Amelio Terras starting Sept 10.