

JOANNE GREENBAUM *1612*

by John Yau

D'AMELIO TERRAS | OCTOBER 15 - NOVEMBER 12, 2011

Joanne Greenbaum's exhibition consists entirely of wildly colored, cacophonous abstract paintings measuring 16 x 12 inches, which are installed salon-style, with some paintings paired and others lined up diagonally, with the bottom left corner of the upper painting nearly touching the top right of the one below. The logic of the installation never became didactic. Rather, the first painting to the left of the entrance is echoed by the first painting on the right, which turned me back into the exhibition.

In an interview with Marshall N. Price that is in the exhibition catalogue, the artist states: "I recently made a large body of small paintings (16 x 12 inches) and the act of making these was really movement-oriented, and very involved with the materials in a physical way. I would work on 20 at a time, lining them up and then going around and doing something on each of them that could involve just one thing."

Known for her vocabulary of schematic linear constructions evocative of fantastic structures, tight to loose linear coils, and flat, template-like shapes, Greenbaum has steadily moved from drawing in thin paint on white grounds to layering the surface with different structures and gestures. When she includes numbers, a note of impending chaos inflects the paintings. It is as if one is looking at a system both in a condition of disarray and decay, a combination of Bruno Taut and Robert Smithson's crystalline vision in a state of irreversible entropy.



Joanne Greenbaum, "Untitled," 2011. Oil, acrylic, mixed media on linen. 16 x 12". Courtesy the artist and D'Amelio Terras, New York.

Working within a smaller surface area, and in her own words, doing "just one thing" at a time, Greenbaum paints incrementally, adding a new layer upon whatever preceded it. She uses oil and acrylic, as well as magic marker, and doesn't scrape anything away. In this regard, the paintings are geological, with each layer forming a distinct strata. When the artist applies a linear, schematic structure over a solid form, her work evokes the way Mary Heilmann overlays different forms and structures from her early work. At the same time, the constraint on Greenbaum's movement has pushed her into a new domain. The paintings are more juiced than her earlier works, more openly and, to my mind, complexly emotional, where frenetic passages of

coiling lines are covered over by an obliterating smear of paint. Construction and destruction are as distinct and inseparable as the lovers in

Brancusi's "The Kiss." Greenbaum's paintings are a record of their coming into being, with each layer acting as a response to the preceding decision. In this regard, they share something with Frank O'Hara's lunch poems and his aesthetic of "I do this. I do that." The strongest ones are fresh and lively, full of unexpected moves and revelations.

If I take the poetry analogy further, and compare these paintings to O'Hara's lunch poems and Ted Berrigan's *The Sonnets*, which singlehandedly revitalized a largely dormant form, I get the sense that Greenbaum is determined to extricate the intimately scaled painting from the state of familiarity that had settled over it, and make it new, as her predecessors did, by showing no sign of settling into a style or mode of production. Thomas Nozkowski's quietly radical project, for one, has long set the standard for intimately scaled abstract painting, as well as made it something to try and master.

This is where the 1612 paintings come in. To Greenbaum's credit, she makes none of the moves we associate with Bill Jensen, Nozkowski, or Chris Martin. She's neither trying to be old masterish, like Jensen, nor work compositionally, like Nozkowski. Archetypal or symbolic forms don't seem to hold any attraction for her, as they do for Martin. These modes are not in her temperament, which she recognizes and stays true to.

In an age where many artists are trying to do the right thing or make the correct move, Greenbaum has long gone her own way, absorbing a wide range of influences (Heilmann, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Jean Fautrier, just to name three), while arriving at something that is all her own. Parody and pastiche are nowhere to be found. Instead, she remains indomitable about making something fresh arise out of the ruins. Not something nameable and thereby easily turned into a commodity, but something unnamable and resistant.