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Luminous Color

On Joan Gold's love affair with shade and tint

BY KATHERINE ALMY

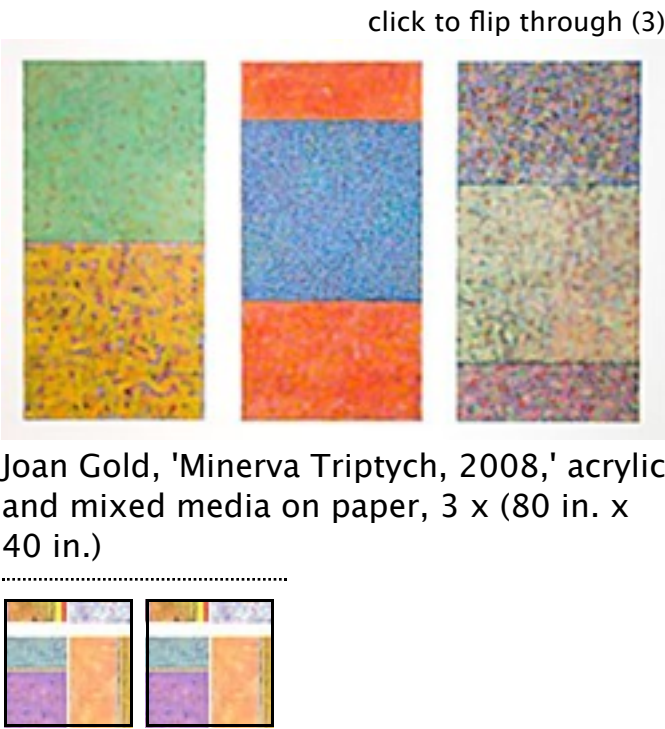
I'd recognize Joan Gold anywhere -- her paintings that is. I only met her for the first time last week to interview her for this article, but I have been looking at her paintings for more than 10 years now, and they are very distinctive. Mostly it's the colors. Some artists have a particular "palette," colors that they are drawn to and that they use again and again. This is the case for Joan.

"There are colors that are easy for me, and there are colors that are more difficult," she explains, "and I try to force myself to use the difficult ones and I always go back to the easy ones." Yellows, greens and blues are the ones that take center stage in most or all of her work. "What's really hard for me is red." This is not to say that red does not make an appearance in her work, but it does play a more minor role.

It's also the way that she uses color, building with it until she achieves her goal of "luminous color." Luminous is a word she used more than once while I was talking to her, so I knew it was a word that meant a lot. Color and the way light is reflected in and through color are the focus of her paintings.

There is an architecture to color and we are all familiar with the basics of it. If you know the three primary colors and what colors you get when you mix any two, then you've got the first step. But it continues on from there, as each color affects another, and there are thousands of hues that we see everyday. Have you ever looked at a forested hillside and tried to count the number of shades of green?

And if you've ever tried to recreate the color of human skin with "peach" from your coloring box and found it lacking, you know that there is much more complexity to that color than one crayon can ever match. The way different colors look when they are near each other is another part of the structure. Some colors clash, others sit together



Joan Gold, 'Minerva Triptych, 2008,' acrylic and mixed media on paper, 3 x (80 in. x 40 in.)

about the author

Katherine Almy

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Bio:
Katherine lives in the magical land of Humboldt County, California, with her husband Richard and their son, who just happens to be the most intelligent and beautiful child on the planet. She is a frequent contributor to the North Coast Journal and Artweek Magazine. She blogs and writes at <http://www.katherinealmy.com>... more

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quietly, some colors vibrate when they are placed next to each other.

The limitless choices and nuances of color are often a driving force for artists, but for Joan Gold, it is her primary concern. Her current show at the First Street Gallery in Eureka is called *Sanctuary* -- it is her attempt to introduce us to the warm and safe haven she creates for herself in her studio. The walls there are covered with rectangular panels, grouped in threes, fours or dozens, all filled with color.

In her studio, the panels are the building blocks she uses to build her colors. Paints can be layered to achieve colors, and those colors can be scanned, manipulated in her computer, printed out and used again in other ways. Parts of panels can be collaged onto others. There really is no end to the possibilities, and not enough time in one life to explore them all, although she is doing her best.

Computer technology has opened up a whole new array of opportunities, and she has diligently set herself to the task of mastering the various software programs and electronic devices to find out what they can add to her work. She has recently begun to incorporate lines in her work, drawing on the layers of color. This she does mindfully, careful not to distract the viewer from the color, but to enhance the experience of it.

To get the most out of Joan Gold's work, you have to allow yourself to enjoy it fully with no complications. Art is not obligated to carry weighty meaning, moral or story. Much of it does, and that's fine. View that artwork with your mind set to interpret symbols and understand story lines. But this art is not like that -- it is purely a visual experience. It is the glory and wonder of rich color with no attachment to human history (or as little attachment to it as possible).

Consider that the emphasis on “meaning” in art is a relatively new and typically American approach. It stems from our devotion to an end product. “What does this *do*?” is the question by which many Americans judge the value of anything, including art. If it doesn't have a specific purpose or fulfill a goal, than it is not as valuable. The idea that something could be valuable merely for its capacity to please, to soothe, to be enjoyed, rubs our work ethic the wrong way.

Work comes first; if there is time left over, we can play. And play is the privilege of those who worked hard to earn it. And work focused on the creation of beauty or enjoyment, is tantamount to play.

Joan puts in several hours a day, most days of the year, working toward the achievement of a certain quality of light and color, and developing ever new ways of producing it. She has an admirable work ethic, but it's all devoted to the attainment of beauty. In her words, “The painting is done when it satisfies me.” Now there's a nerve -- she's not even concerned with satisfying us, she's satisfying herself!

Joan Gold's work can be seen at the First Street Gallery, 422 First Street in Eureka, through Aug. 10. There will be an Arts Alive! reception there on Saturday, Aug. 2, from 6-9 p.m. You can also find out more about her at her website, www.joangold.com.

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