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SANCTUARY

*paintings by
Joan Gold*



Joan Gold, *Minerva Triptych*, 2008, Acrylic and mixed media on etching paper, 3 x (80 in. x 40 in.)

This essay was prepared by HSU students Ryan Cox, Chelsi Kirby and Jill Moore, edited by Jon McCallum.

Humboldt State University First Street Gallery is pleased to present, *Sanctuary: Paintings by Joan Gold*. This exhibition of recent paintings by the American artist Joan Gold is meant to convey a sense of Gold's actual studio space, which she considers her personal sanctuary. With this exhibition, Gold seeks to present her work in a format that captures the most satisfying steps of her creative process. By thoroughly covering the gallery walls with her intuitively arranged patchwork of color, Gold invites visitors to step inside the personal world she has created—a visual haven of brilliant hues infused with life and joy.



Each completed series of her compositions evolves from a culmination of multiple steps and manipulations. Experimenting with the media of paint as a means of unlocking the potential of color and expression, Gold creates abstract paintings that utilize traditional techniques and modern paint materials. Within the image space of her paintings, she deploys a form of geometric abstraction, while incorporating an engaging lexicon of emotive, gestural mark-making. This approach can alternately elicit excitement or peaceful contemplation on the part of the viewer. These emotional, yet ethereal states, are married with great force, as if an earthquake has deliberately

assembled shifting tectonic masses into a coherent geometrical union. In creating these pieces, Gold employs a rigorous aesthetic discipline, yet with such aplomb, that, in some works, the viewer is nearly unaware of the raw union of oppositional forces.

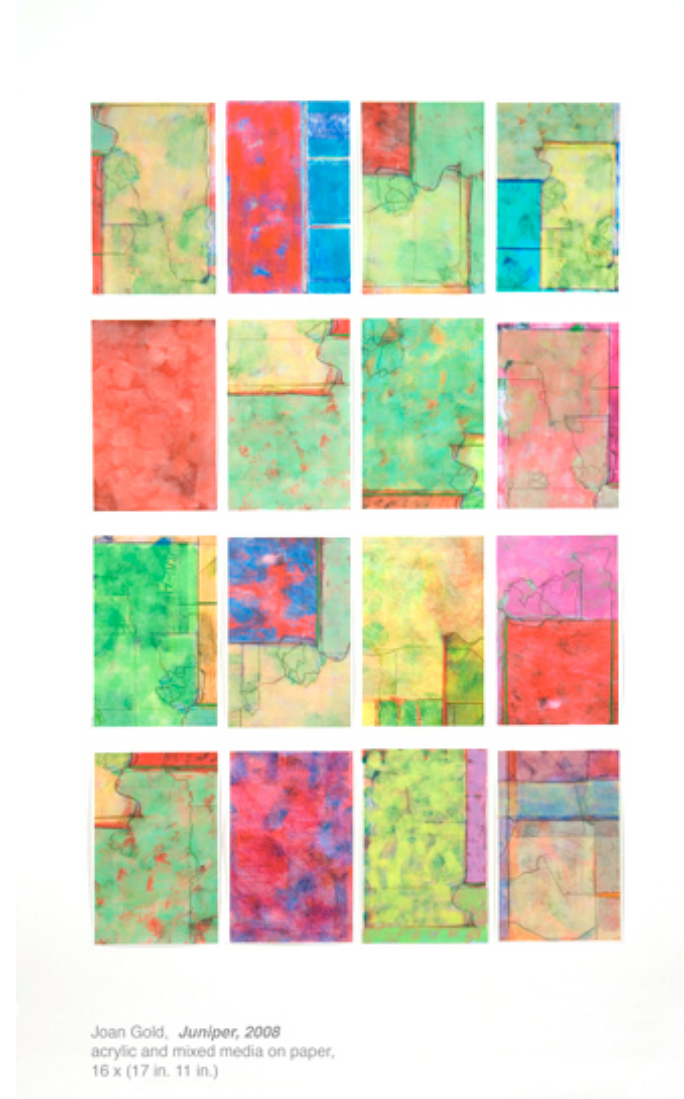
As a child, growing up in Brooklyn, New York, Gold began using color and design as a means of achieving the visual satisfaction that she has continued to seek throughout her life. Gold's mother adhered wallpaper samples to the walls of her basement playroom. "I remember being very content amongst those squares of color and pattern," she reminisces. Gold's fascination with color began with crayons and coloring books and was later influenced by her mother's dried floral arrangements.

Gold traces her need to create a safe place, a sanctuary, back to the 1940s as she became aware of the larger world, especially the violent impact that the Holocaust during Second World War had on humanity. As the terrifying meaning of the war grew in her consciousness, she experienced what could best be described as a profound loss of innocence. She considers that this pivotal development in her awareness had everything to do with the subsequent choices she has made for the rest of her life. And, quite paradoxically, it is what underlies the light and energy she puts into her painting. She determined that this lens of experience would focus her luminous, life-affirming direction in art.

Once she reached high school, she began taking art classes, where even at a young age she found herself drawn to an abstracted, reduced style of rendering. In an example, she recalls an exam in which she was asked to draw a tree and notes that while her peers worked diligently to recreate life-like representations, her tree was intentionally stylized with only one leaf. “I knew that imitating nature was not what I wanted to do,” she admits. “I liked things to be flat and design-like.”

After high school, Gold was accepted to The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City, a school where all students who pass the entrance exam are admitted with a full scholarship. Of The Cooper Union, Gold says, “I found my place in the world; there were other people like me.” There she was strongly encouraged by such professors as Ray Dowden and John Ferren to find and develop her strengths. Ferren played a paternal role for Gold in which he “provided the ground in which I could grow.”

After graduating from The Cooper Union, Gold continued her studies by participating in studio classes at the Brooklyn Museum where she gained an interest in the process of working with enamel on copper. This was followed by a fellowship to study painting in Venezuela where she enrolled in the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Caracas.





Joan Gold, *Rainforest*, 2008
Acrylic and mixed media on paper
16 x (17 in. x 11 in.)

In Caracas, inspired by the luminous effects that she could achieve in using enamel on copper, she continued her explorations by taking classes in both enamel and stained glass. Though too toxic for her to work with long-term, these specific materials acted as a bridge to her creative process and aesthetic today, showing her how a translucent media could heighten the effects of the pigments underneath. Living in Caracas also clearly had an impact on Gold as the vibrant light and color of the tropical locale show up in her work. This is certainly evidenced by her hot palette, but also by the fact that she stayed in Caracas for twenty-four years. “The color in Venezuela is extraordinary,” says Gold. “It’s always in bloom.”

Settling in Caracas, she married and raised her four children while working as an Associate Professor at the Universidad Metropolitana. Gold was awarded a medal for her service to Venezuela as an educator in 1974 by Raphael Caldera, the President of Venezuela. In 1979 Gold retired from the university, and re-settled with her four children in Humboldt County, California, where she has been living and working since. This move marked a turning point in her artistic endeavors, as it was then that she turned her focus to experimenting with acrylic paint and made a decidedly conscious effort to make her work more minimal. Emphasizing media as a means of unlocking the potential of color, Gold began to create abstract paintings, some, which are made with traditional painting techniques, while others incorporate digital imaging with paint. Joan Gold has exhibited her work throughout the nation, in Venezuela, and is in several important public and private collections.

The works in this exhibition firmly embody Gold's unique aesthetic approach, which, within the image space of her paintings, she deploys a form of geometric abstraction, while incorporating an engaging lexicon of emotive, gestural mark-making.

She begins by painting different combinations of color and pattern with acrylics on rectangles of paper, which she later assembles into a variety of arrangements by pinning them on to boards or to her studio walls. These works vary in size from 8 by 10 inches up to 6 by 20 feet. Here she uses paint instinctively, almost like layers of stained glass, stacking pane over pane of paint and other media. As the layers grow thicker some areas are left bare,

others are obscured, while still others combine to form complex bodies of color moving in and out of one another. Using the application of transparent layers as a means of achieving a radiant quality in her work, she “plays with paint,” letting her intuition dictate the formal choices she makes. Gold works on many units at a time, all rectangular in format. As she builds up the surface she also strategically separates and reassembles the individual units of work. Through this process of assemblage, she constructs united, yet starkly delineated regions of geometrically organized fields and groupings of color. Observing these works is almost like viewing vast farmlands from far above or examining cross sections of fluorescent striated earth. She terms her process a sort of stumbling towards balance, never knowing which addition or subtraction will achieve the right harmony. The product creates a peaceful union of storms, a healthy marriage of chaos.

A second group of works represented in *Sanctuary* starts with the same intuitive mark making, which, after passing through filters of technology, she then reworks by hand. First, Gold creates works on paper with layers of translucent, yet rich, phthalos, turquoises, chartreuses and alizarins overlapping like pieces of wax paper melting into each other at the edges. These works are digitally photographed or scanned into her computer. There she crops, enlarges details, and augments the original chroma to heightened, more ethereal, states. She then prints the new images onto archival paper and expands upon them even further, applying subtle layers of media: oil pastels, chalk pastels, graphite, colored pencils, collage, and gouache. The final assemblage is an accretion of forms vaguely reminiscent of architectural layouts, or sometimes they appear more like anatomical or botanical structures such as a flower or cell.



Joan Gold, *Community*, 2008
Acrylic and mixed media on paper
16 x (11 in. x 8.5 in.)

A unique aspect of Gold’s overall process involves the use of the studio space

itself where she covers the walls from floor to ceiling with her pieces. Gold explains this, saying, “The best moment is when there are a great many pieces pinned to the walls just before being dismantled and reborn into their final forms. My workspace becomes the world as I want it, a safe place full of color and light.” The sanctuary of her studio allows Gold to manipulate and reorganize her work on the walls as she progresses, and this often informs new work. Surrounded by these modular, interchangeable *pinnings*, grouped into bodies she calls trios and quartets, she sometimes plays for years until she finds their appropriate arrangement. The next stage in the process is stacking these groupings on top of one another and affixing them to museum board or canvas, forming panels, which then blanket her studio walls.

In this exhibition, *Sanctuary*, Gold represents this artistic process as it unfolds in her own workspace. By extending her studio walls into First Street Gallery, Gold seeks to present her work in a format which best epitomizes the most satisfying steps in her process of creation. In covering the gallery walls with her intuitively arranged patchwork of color, Gold invites visitors to step inside the world as she creates it for herself: a visual haven of brilliant hues infused with life and joy.

Gold understands the consequences of living in this world, and embraces its gifts. She makes work that emanates from the light end of life’s grey scale, having experienced the dark. She paints options. She paints windows and doors. Gold creates her paintings to act as a great counterweight, offsetting the problems we face, and providing a space to rejoice. Her work is deliberate, yet not dogmatic, captivating, yet it delivers a freedom. Absorbing her work is like being transfixed by a visual manifestation of the voluminous and spiritual luminosity that many of us intuitively yearn for, but seldom glimpse in our quotidian existence. Gold makes her world in her studio. She invites her viewer to share it.