

Joan
Snyder
&
Pat
Steir

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Boston, Massachusetts

**Joan
Snyder
&
Pat
Steir**

October 1 to November 12, 1974

Institute of Contemporary Art
955 Boylston Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Director and Trustees of the Institute of Contemporary Art I would like to thank Joan Snyder and Pat Steir. Their cooperation and generosity made this exhibition possible. My thanks also to Fourcade, Droll Inc. of New York, to Marcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend Gallery of Boston, and to the Janet Fleisher Gallery of Philadelphia for their assistance with loans of paintings and drawings, and the preparation of photographs for the catalogue. I am also indebted to all the friends who loaned works for this exhibition. I am grateful to Kenneth Baker for writing the essay to this catalogue, to Joan Powell for designing it, to John Taylor Williams for his advice, to Jeanne Wasserman, Stephen Paine and Phyllis Rosen of the Exhibitions Committee for their continuous support. Above all it is my pleasure to thank Isabelle Storey for the time and energy she devoted to the preparation of this show. I am most grateful to the staff of the ICA for their assistance.

Gabriella Jeppson
Director of Exhibition

Lenders To The Exhibition

Janet Fleisher Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York

Graham Gund, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Harcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts

Dr. and Mrs. Alvin A. Krakow, Boston, Massachusetts

Mrs. A. Bliss McCrum, Jr., New Canaan, Connecticut

Rosa M. Miller, Boston, Massachusetts

Joan Snyder, New York

Anonymous

Joan Snyder

Many people think of Abstract Expressionism when they first see Joan Snyder's paintings. Her energetic exposure of the qualities of paint and canvas is reminiscent of certain works of De Kooning and Hofmann. However, her best work runs counter to the theory of Abstract Expressionism which says that the painter can translate his private experience by means of paint alone, without reference to anything objective but the process of painting. This theory assumes that the artist has special knowledge or intuition of a symbolism of feeling inherent in the colors, textures, and gestures available to him. One way to understand Abstract Expressionism is as a search for such a symbolism or for something objective in paintings that could communicate as readily as a pictorial image.

Snyder discovers in her work what the Abstract Expressionists were looking for, a way of evoking real experiences, or sensations, at least, without resort to images or symbolism of any kind. Consider a canvas like "Summer Painting." It is packed with discrete strokes, smears and stains of pigment. Jarring combinations of colors emphasize the separateness of each painted element from all the others; no coherent design unifies the picture, and there is no suggestion of an order in which it should be read. A casual look suggests that any stroke might have been the first, and that any point of entry for the eye is as good as any other. What makes the painting coherent is a constant emphasis in it upon touch. The first information we get from the canvas is that it has been touched again and again. As a record of process, this information is trivial. All paintings are touched with paint, even spray paintings like Jules Olitski's. But in Snyder's work each stroke, by its size, color, texture, and density, evokes a possible tactile experience in terms accessible to language. (Kenneth Noland, who must know as much about color as anyone, remarked once that he thinks of color in tactile terms. He pointed out that the adjectives we use to describe colors usually describe sensations of touch as well. Here are a few examples: warm, cool, dull, solid, deep, watery, soft.)

Every application of paint in "Summer Painting" has a characteristic intimation of space, and a certain tone and intensity carried by color. Snyder's way of painting finds in the very appearance of paint itself the ingredients of a possible tactile experience. Certain strokes suggest sensations of aggressive grasping, others suggest idle fingerings, and still others evoke sensations of touch less focussed and articulated than our hands usually provide. Each stroke, further, characterizes the picture surface in a specific way. Here it appears solid and resistant, there it seems veil-like and porous, at another point it may seem solid but transparent.

Snyder's work restores the connection between touch and sight that abstract art usually plays down. For the aim of traditional figuration in painting was translation of solidity into visual terms. We might see the culmination of this tradition in Impressionism. In the pointillist pictures of Monet, Pissarro, and Seurat, tiny touches of color stand for scintillas of visual sensation. The data of touch and sight become interchangeable. After Impressionism, painting seems to lose its grip on appearances.

Snyder reinvests painting with the power to convey the solidity of things seen. If her paintings appear disorderly, it is because she deliberately resists the easy coherence of a pictorial image. Images are cheap in a culture pervaded by photographic and electronic media; they no longer make a sufficiently compelling affirmation of the unity of the senses. And there is nothing in tactile experience that corresponds to the visual summation an image makes. Just as there's no given or stable order in experiences of touch, there's no discoverable formula for reading Snyder's paintings. We are adrift in them as we are in the physical world and in our own bodies. Their point is to show us the basis for trusting our own experience.

Kenneth Baker
August, 1974

Joan Snyder

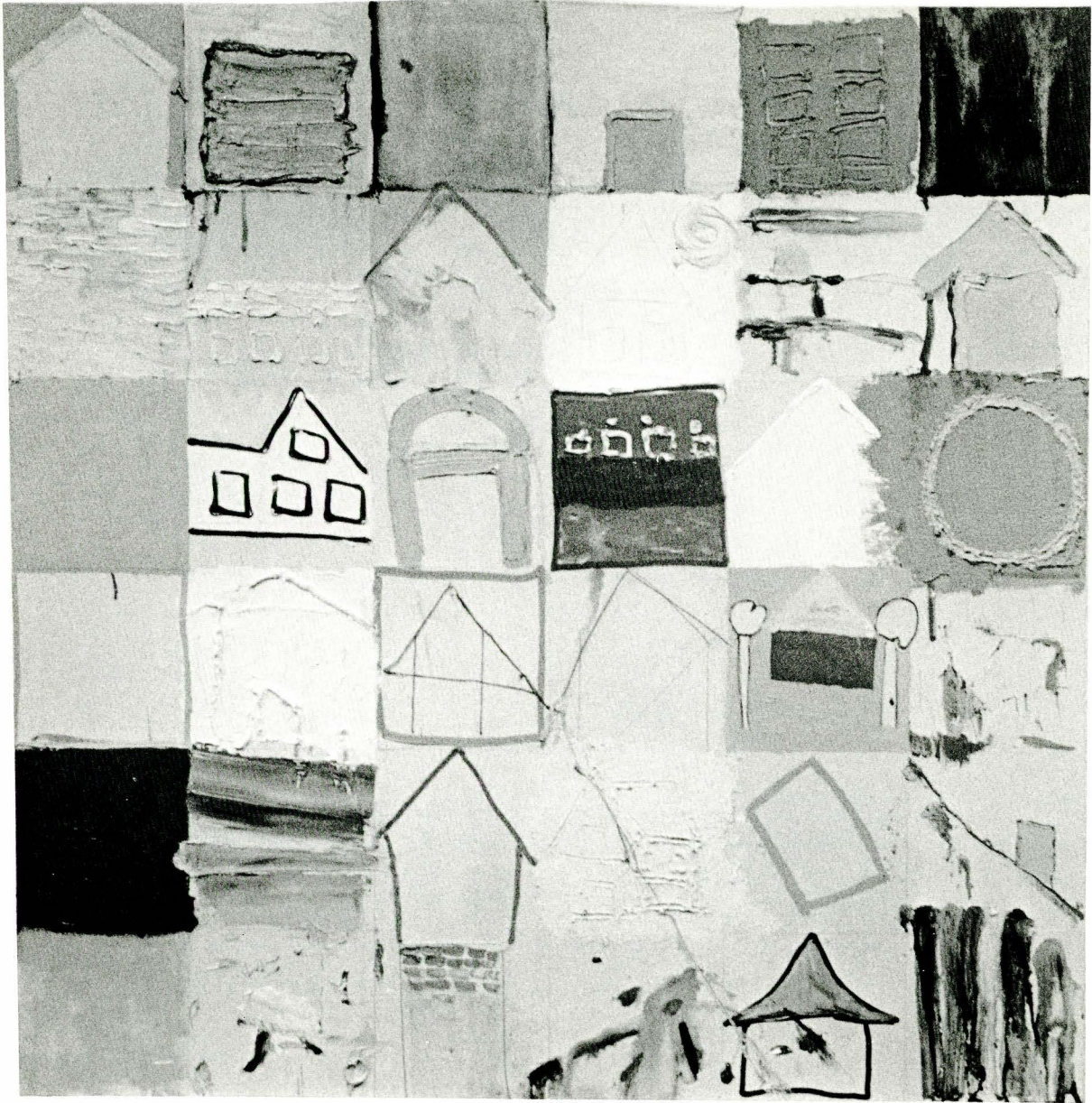
Houses

1972

Oil and acrylic on canvas

4' x 4'

Lent by the artist



Joan Snyder
Summer Painting
1970

Oil and acrylic on canvas
5' x 5'

Lent by the artist
Photograph by John Ganis



Joan Snyder
Layer Take
1972

Acrylic on canvas
5'9" x 11'6"

Lent by Graham Gund, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Photograph by Barney Burstein, Boston



Joan Snyder

- 1940 Born, New Brunswick, New Jersey
1962 BA, Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey
1966 MFA, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey

Individual Exhibitions

- 1973 Paley & Lowe, New York
1972 Parker Street 470 Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts
Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey
1971 Paley & Lowe, New York
Michael Walls Gallery, San Francisco, California
1970 Paley & Lowe, New York, *Three Paintings*
1967 Little Gallery, New Brunswick, New Jersey
1966 Rutgers University (Thesis Exhibition), New Brunswick,
New Jersey

Selected Bibliography

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April Kingsley, "Women Choose Women", *Artforum*, March
1973, p. 73.
Douglas Davis, "Art Without Limits", *Newsweek*, December 24,
1973, pp. 68-74.
John Elderfield, "The Whitney Annual", *Art In America*, May-
June 1972, p. 27.
Kenneth Baker, *Christian Science Monitor*, April 20, 1972, p. 8.
Robert Hughes, "Myths of Sensibility", *Time*, March 20, 1972,
pp. 72-73.
John Elderfield, "Grids", *Artforum*, May 1972, p. 53.
"Portrait of Young Artists", *Newsweek*, February 7, 1972, p. 79
Carter Ratcliff, *Art International*, January 1972, p. 68.
Dave Hickey, *Art in America*, January-February 1972, p. 35.
Marcia Tucker, "The Anatomy of a Stroke: The Recent Paintings
of Joan Snyder", *Artforum*, May 1971, p. 42.
Tony Robin, "A Protean Sensibility", *Arts Magazine*, May 1971,
p. 29.
Alfred Frankenstein, "Powerful, Roughewn Paintings", *San
Francisco Chronicle*, August 28, 1971.
John Elderfield, *Artforum*, November 1971, p. 87.

Group Exhibitions

- 1974 *Joan Snyder and Pat Steir*, Institute of Contemporary
Art, Boston, Massachusetts
Michael Walls Gallery, New York
An Exhibition of Current Painting, Pratt Institute,
Brooklyn, New York
Women's Work-American Art '74, Philadelphia Civic
Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1973 *New York Avant-Garde*, Saidye Bronfman Center,
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Options 73/74, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati,
Ohio
Image of Movement, Stamford Museum, Stamford,
Connecticut
American Drawings 1963-1973, Whitney Museum of
American Art, New York
Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York
Women Choose Women, New York Cultural Center,
New York
1972 *Ten Artists (Who Also Happen To Be Women)*, The
Kenan Center, Lockport, New York and the Michael C.
Rockefeller Arts Center, Fredonia, New York
Paintings on Paper, Larry Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield,
Connecticut
Seven New York Painters, Berkeley Art Museum,
Berkeley, California
Grids, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
Whitney Annual, Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York
12 Statements: Beyond the '60's, Detroit Institute of Art,
Detroit, Michigan
Three Artists, Fine Arts Center, University of Rhode
Island, Kingston, R.I.
Gedok American Women Artists Show, Kunsthhaus,
Hamburg, West Germany
1971 Glauber-Poons Gallery, Amsterdam, Holland
Into the '70's, Mansfield Fine Arts Museum,
Mansfield, Ohio
Paley & Lowe, New York
Bykert Gallery, New York
1970 The New Gallery, Cleveland, Ohio
A Clean Well Lighted Place, Austin, Texas

Pat Steir

The central image in Pat Steir's new paintings is the rose. She isolates her roses in stark flat fields of black or white so we will see them as symbolic, not just descriptive, images. The rose is overloaded with symbolic associations, and it is the emblem of her preoccupation with literary meaning. She chose the image not just because it is so easily recognized as a symbol, but because it suggests more meanings than she could possibly intend for it. She wants us to recognize how readily we assume that intention is the only valid determinant of meaning in the making of a painting, or in human action generally. She is attacking the moral and aesthetic consequences of this assumption.

Literary meanings aside, Steir's rose is a symbol of the painting that contains it. It suggests something that picture space has in common with the real space in which paintings are done and seen. A common condition obtains in the two kinds of space. It might be expressed by saying that any action taken in either space is liable to mean more than anyone could intend by it. Steir's work of the past four years has stressed this parallel between picture space and real space in many ways. Her latest work makes explicit the implication that follows from this parallel, namely, that intention is just one among many things that determine meaning. If we think that intention alone determines meaning, we probably overestimate our ability to make our actions mean to other people what we want them to mean. And to insist that what we do means only what we intend it to is often to deny that other people can see; and that means denying their reality. In other words, if we hold to the view that things mean only what we intend them to mean, then we hold to the idea of a boundary between "inner" self and "outer" world. We will fail generally to see external realities as the best expression of "internal" ones; and we will refuse to see ourselves implicated in each other's lives. (This refusal to see is characteristic of what psychoanalysis calls repression.)

Steir demonstrates that our concept of meaning is important to the way we look at paintings and at the world. Her rose image may be seen as representing certain ways we might conceive of

a picture's meaning. For instance we might think of meaning as a hidden efflorescence at the heart of the work. Or we might even assimilate meaning to fragrance, an invisible but sensible essence with which roses are practically synonymous.

Of course everything I've said so far is qualified or inflected by the roses' being crossed out. The crossing out suggests an act of reflection whereby we change our minds about what something means. (Steir may also be making a joking allusion to the Rose and Cross emblematic of 19th century Symbolist painting. Other obvious art historical associations of the rose image include Duchamp's "Rose Selavy" and Magritte's late picture, "The Tomb of the Wrestlers.") The painted X's parody our self-consciousness about illusionism. They repeat our awareness that an image is not present to us in the same way an object, like the painting itself, is. They also suggest the elevation of a mistake to the subject of a painting; and they even seem to anticipate the fabled bourgeois impulse to deface vanguard art. (They remind me, too, of the passage in Martin Heidegger's "The Question of Being," where, straining at the limits of language, he resorts to the typographical ruse of printing the word "Being" crossed out: "~~Being~~") Paradoxically, the crossings out recall the popular psychoanalytic slogan to the effect that there's no such thing as a mistake.

What Steir's work proposes is a different kind of consciousness than we are likely to bring to it. For her paintings set up contradictions and paradoxes only to dissolve them in the process of provocation we undergo when we attend to the work. If the clues, jokes, symbols that compose the work don't seem to lead us anywhere it is because we have a bad idea of "where" we are and hope to be transported, passively.

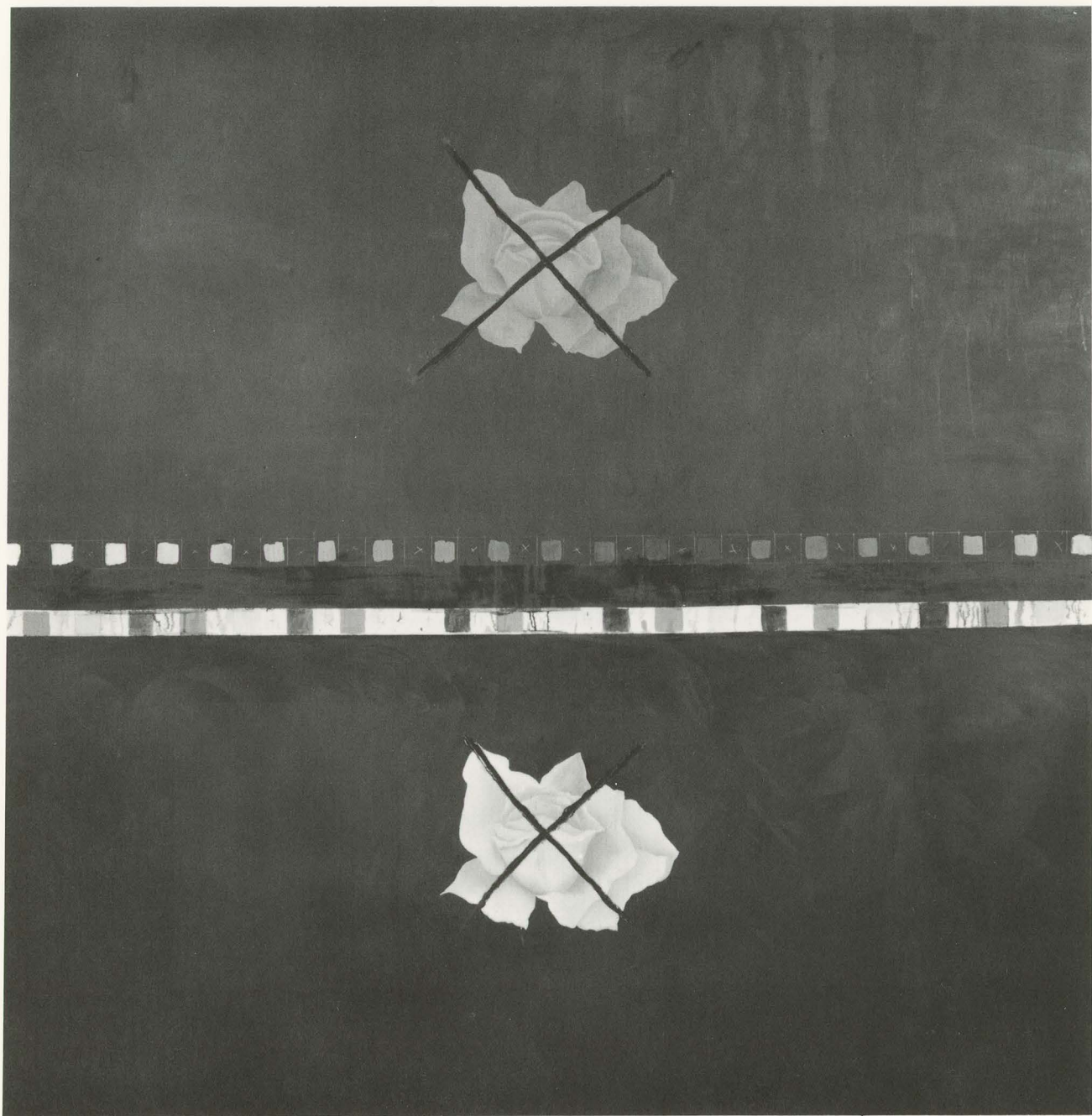
Some remarks of Norman O. Brown's belong here. "Literal meanings are packaged commodities for passive consumers." "Enigmatic form is living form; like life, an iridescence; an invitation to the dance; a temptation, or irritation. No satisfying solutions, nothing to rest in; nothing to weigh us down."¹

Kenneth Baker
August, 1974

1. Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Vintage, 1966), pp. 246-247.

Pat Steir
Word Unheard
1974
Oil on canvas
7' x 7'

Courtesy of Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York

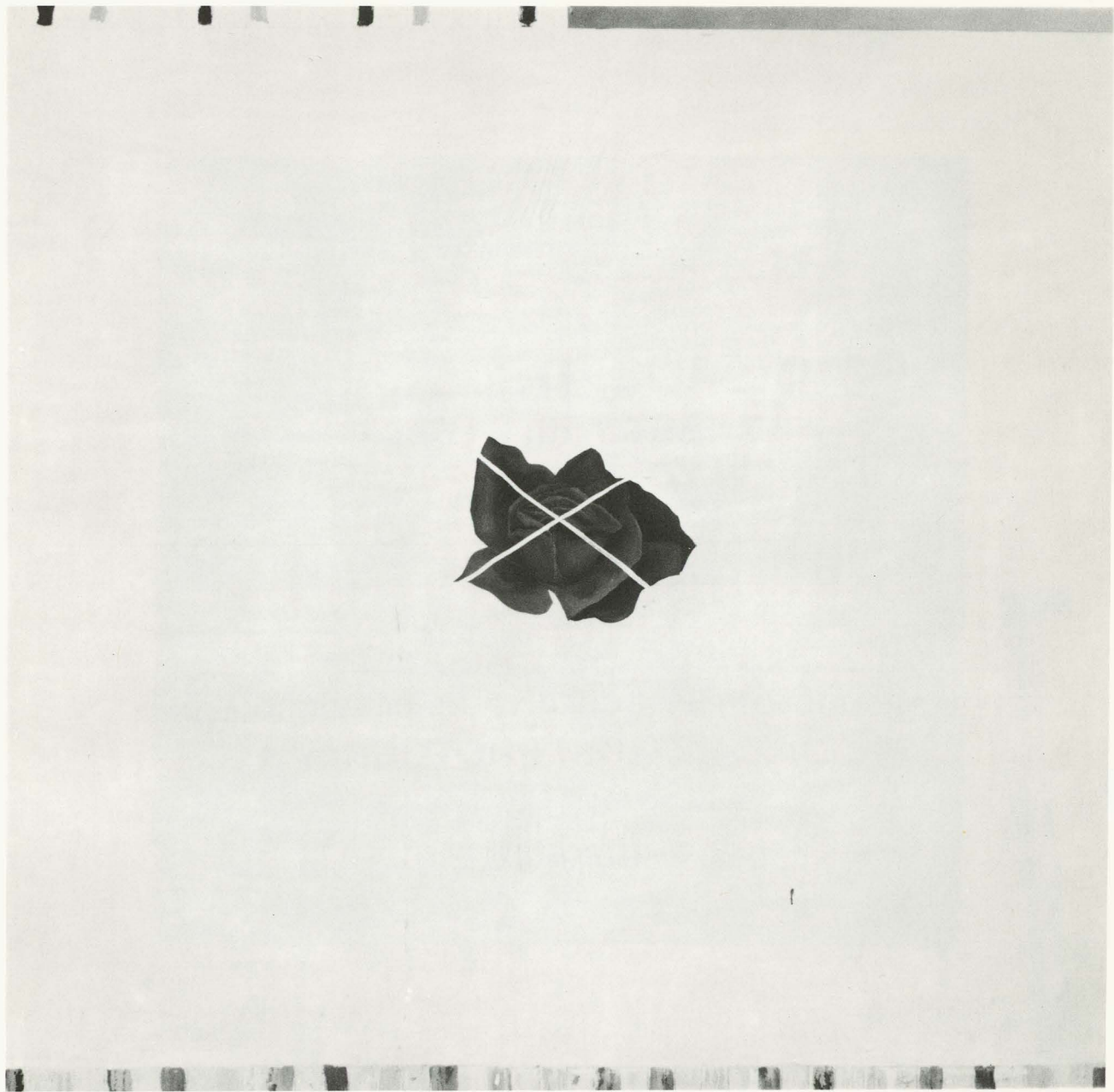




Pat Steir
Word Unspoken
1974

Oil on canvas
7' x 7'

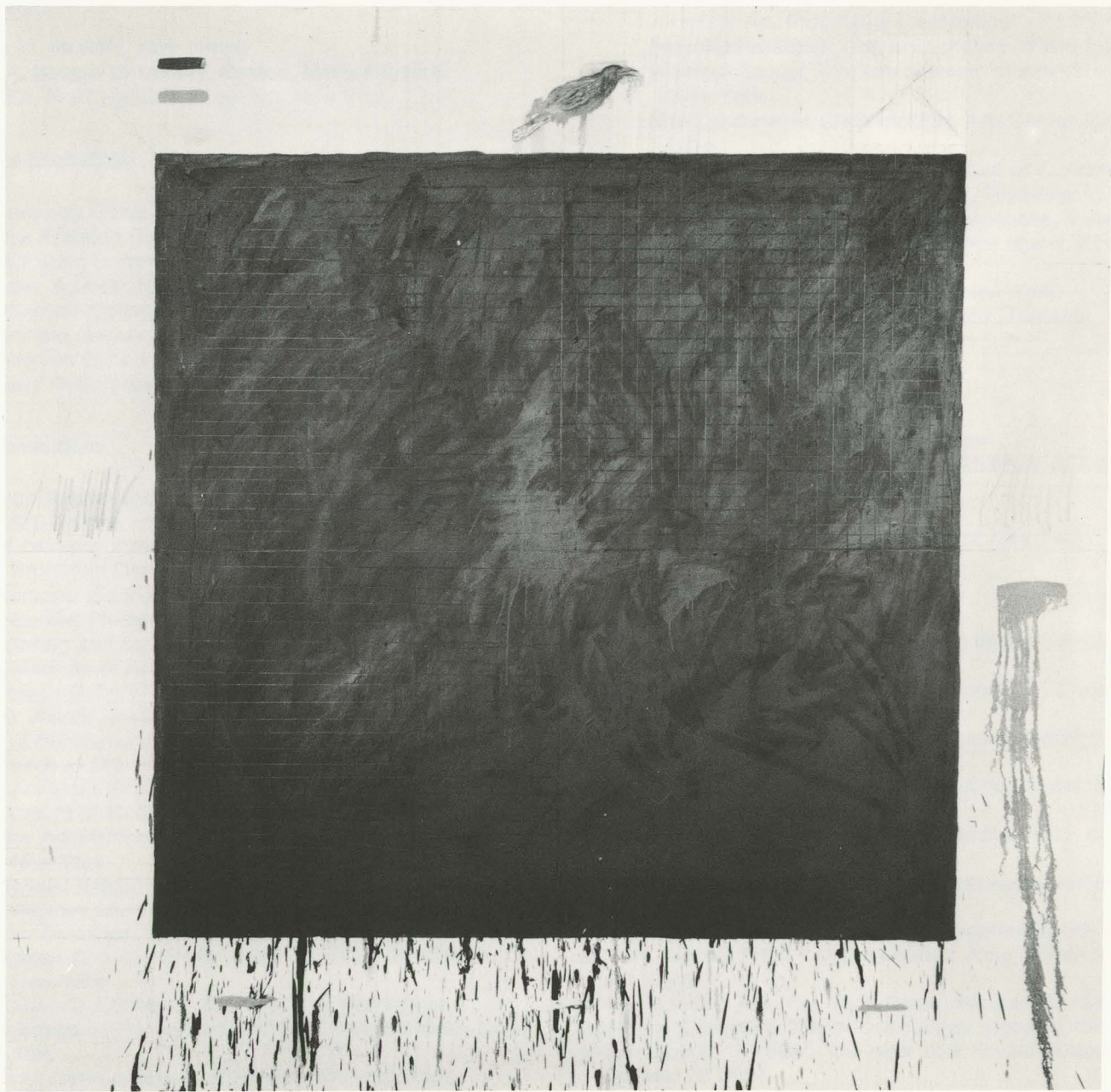
Courtesy of Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York



Pat Steir
Circadia
1973

Oil and pencil on canvas
7' x 7'

Courtesy of Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York



Pat Steir

- 1938 Born, Newark, New Jersey
1960 BA, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts
1962 BFA, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York

Individual Exhibitions

- 1973 Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Max Protetch Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana
1972 Paley & Lowe, New York
Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey
1971 Graham Gallery, New York
1969 Bienville Gallery, New Orleans
1964 Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York

Group Exhibitions

- 1974 *Joan Snyder and Pat Steir*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts
28 Painters of the New York Avant-Garde '74, Saidye Bronfman Center, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Woman's Work-American Art '74, Philadelphia Civic Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Painting and Sculpture Today 1974, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana
1973 Cusack Gallery, Houston, Texas
Six Visions, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
American Drawings 1963-1973, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Museum of Modern Art, New York
New Acquisitions, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Biennial Exhibition: Contemporary American Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Four Drawings, Bard College, Poughkeepsie, New York
Women Choose Women, New York Cultural Center, New York
Franconia College, Franconia, New Hampshire
1972 *Paintings on Paper*, Bard College, Poughkeepsie, New York
Landscapes, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- Paintings on Paper*, Larry Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
Drawing Exhibition, Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Whitney Annual, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
New Landscapes, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio
The Topography of Nature, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana
Three Painters, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, R.I.
1973 *Three Paintings*, Paley & Lowe, New York
Glauber-Poons Gallery, Amsterdam, Holland
Graham Gallery, New York
1970 French & Co., New York
1969-
1970 Graham Gallery, New York
1966 Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York
1964 Annual Exhibition, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Finch College, New York
Drawings, Museum of Modern Art, New York

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Robert Hughes, "Myths of Sensibility", *Time*, March 20, 1972, pp. 72-73.
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Laurence Campbell, "Review", *Art News*, October 1964.
Grace Glueck, "Review", *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 27, 1964.

Catalogue of the Exhibition

Joan Snyder: Paintings

Summer Painting

1970
Oil and acrylic on canvas
5' x 5'
Lent by the artist

Layer Take

1972
Acrylic on canvas
5'9" x 11'6"
Lent by Graham Gund, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Toon's Loss

1973
Oil and acrylic on canvas
2' x 2'
Lent by Mrs. A. Bliss McCrum, Jr., New Canaan, Connecticut

Mistery

1973
Oil and acrylic on canvas
4' x 8'
Courtesy of Janet Fleisher Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Houses

1972
Oil and acrylic on canvas
4' x 4'
Lent by the artist

Squares

1972
Oil and acrylic on canvas
4' x 4'
Lent by the artist

Symphony II

1974
Oil and acrylic on canvas
6' x 9'
Lent by the artist

Drawings

Drawing

1974
Pencil and crayon on paper
22" x 30"
Lent by the artist

Drawing

1973
Pencil and crayon on paper
22" x 30"
Lent by the artist

Drawing

1973
Pencil and crayon on paper
22" x 30"
Lent by the artist

Pat Steir: Paintings

Circadia

1973
Oil and pencil on canvas
7' x 7'
Courtesy of Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York

Word Unspoken

1974
Oil on canvas
7' x 7'
Courtesy of Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York

Word Unheard

1974

Oil on canvas

7' x 7'

Courtesy of Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York

Deviations and Variations

1974

Oil on canvas

7' x 7'

Lent anonymously

Night Chant Series II Epiphyte for G.B.

1974

Oil on canvas

7' x 7'

Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Alvin A. Krakow, Boston

Rose Poem for J.B.

1974

Pencil and crayon on paper

19" x 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Courtesy of Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York

Drawings

Light of My Heart

1974

Pencil on paper

15" x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Courtesy of Harcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend Gallery, Boston

To My Brother

1971

Pencil on paper

15" x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Courtesy of Harcus Krakow Rosen Sonnabend Gallery, Boston

Drawing

1974

Pencil on paper

15" x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Lent by Rosa M. Miller, Boston

Untitled (Drawing in four panels)

1973

Pencil on paper

20" x 26" (#'s 1 & 2)

19" x 26" (#'s 3 & 4)

Courtesy of Fourcade, Droll Inc., New York

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