

Joan Snyder

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**August 10 - September 10, 1976**

**Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art  
in the ABC Entertainment Center  
2040 Avenue of the Stars  
Century City, California 90067**

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At first these paintings look fiercely ugly. Snyder applies paint in a riot of different colors, textures and brushstrokes. She is not afraid to sacrifice finesse for messy, gaudy vitality. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any lyrical abstractionist who dares such a cacophony of contrasting means and mediums. These recent canvases (1973-75) use everything. There are patches of writing, childlike drawings of houses, and repeated hearts, orifices and circles with centers, images determinedly "female" in connotation. And blood-red drips, globs of gold, gold speckles, bursts of brushwork and rectilinear planes of color. And there are collage elements, too: swaths of surgical gauze, a black fur heart split down the middle, a satin heart beruffled with cheap lace, decked with a fake corsage and slathered with some caramel-colored syrup. As if this concocted mockery of sweetness and sentiment were not enough, Snyder also builds up shapes with paper mache, cuts into these mounds or into the canvas to create gashes that resemble female genitalia or wounds; she then only partially sews these gashes shut again.

What are we to make of this astonishing plenitude? One hint comes from a knowledge of her earlier, more abstract paintings. In them, colored strokes were the equivalents of sensations, while the dispersal of those strokes over a penciled grid seemed a cumulative record of thoughts, emotions and events over time. Now her painting is more stridently autobiographical; on one canvas, Snyder has written, "The painting hauntingly precedes the life - and follows it." Unabashedly, even brutally, these paintings speak of rage, anxiety, love, sex, flesh, pain and sexual politics. They confront the issue of whether there is a female sensibility in art by baring feelings about being a woman with a vehemence and a pictorial clout that makes the viewer witness Snyder's experience at an uncomfortably close vantage point. The paintings do not celebrate female sensibility; rather, the subject is the pain of self-awareness and the projection of the artist's own ambivalence about being female. This is manifest in words, images and, most emphatically, in the handling of color and form. Because of this, and because Snyder never explains or exploits her feelings, self-exploration never becomes cloying self-exposure, and her paintings' urgency is accessible to both sexes, not just to women. "Can I make symphonies out of this subject?" Snyder writes on one canvas. The answer, I think, is yes.

But what raw, dissonant symphonies! Snyder orchestrates the battlefield of her feelings using a penciled grid, as before, to lend an underlying structural coherence. Four of the seven exhibited works are tripartite. Though their parts are differently articulated, they are united by subtle formal and thematic links - a rhyming of rectangular swatches of purplish velvet, for example, or the repetition of a circular motif. Three of the tripartite works are composed so that there is a definite progression from left to right. At the left of each, a section with a white ground is marked mainly by writing, the centers are charged with intense pictorial drama, and then the right sections seem to resolve some of that drama by their more orderly composition of rectangular planes of color. The effect is to give a sense of time, or psychic growth, of crisis followed by resolution.

We cannot grasp all the disparate events of form and feeling in Snyder's paintings at once. The clash and bite of disjunctive fragments vibrate in our memories. To eyes accustomed to spare, immaculate abstraction, Snyder's will to flaunt flamboyance smacks of disorder. Everything in her work seems impure, provisional, deteriorated, soiled, changing. She is not telling us about fixed ideals or absolutes (either emotional or pictorial). She is telling us about life. For all their fearful intimacy, Snyder's paintings are dignified and even majestic. They will continue to unsettle our notions about the quality of female experience as well as the pieties of abstract art.

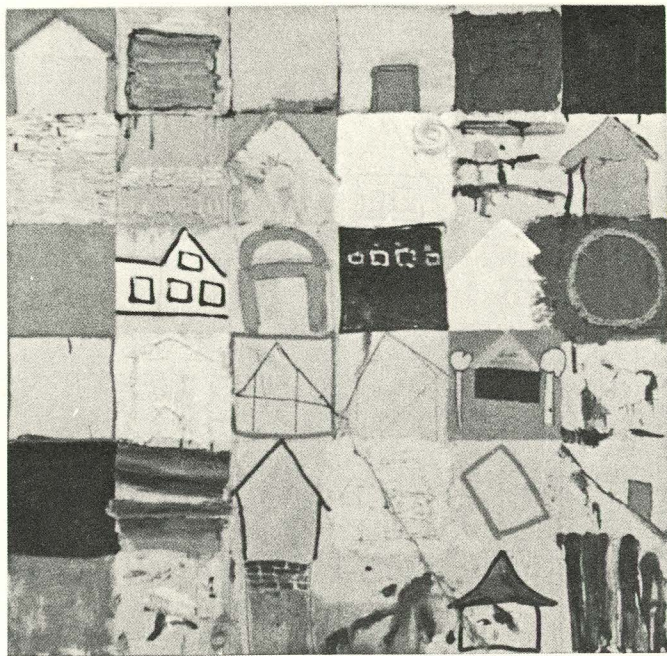
--Hayden Herrera



Marcia and Me, 1971, acrylic and oil on canvas, 4'X 8', lent by  
Mr. Barry Lowen



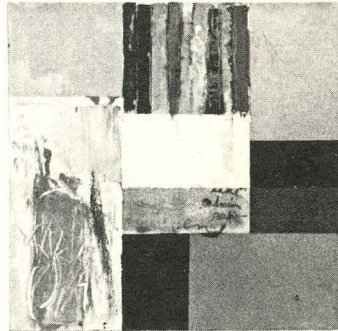
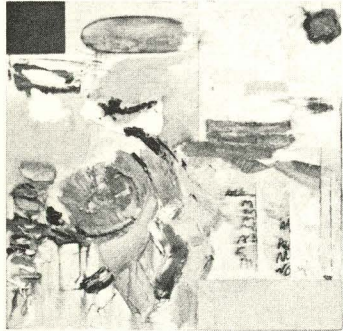
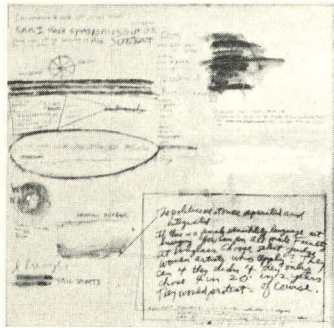
The Storm, 1974. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 6' X 12'.  
Collection of Mr. Barry Lowen, Los Angeles.



Houses, 1972, oil and acrylic on canvas, 3'X 3', lent by Gene Corman

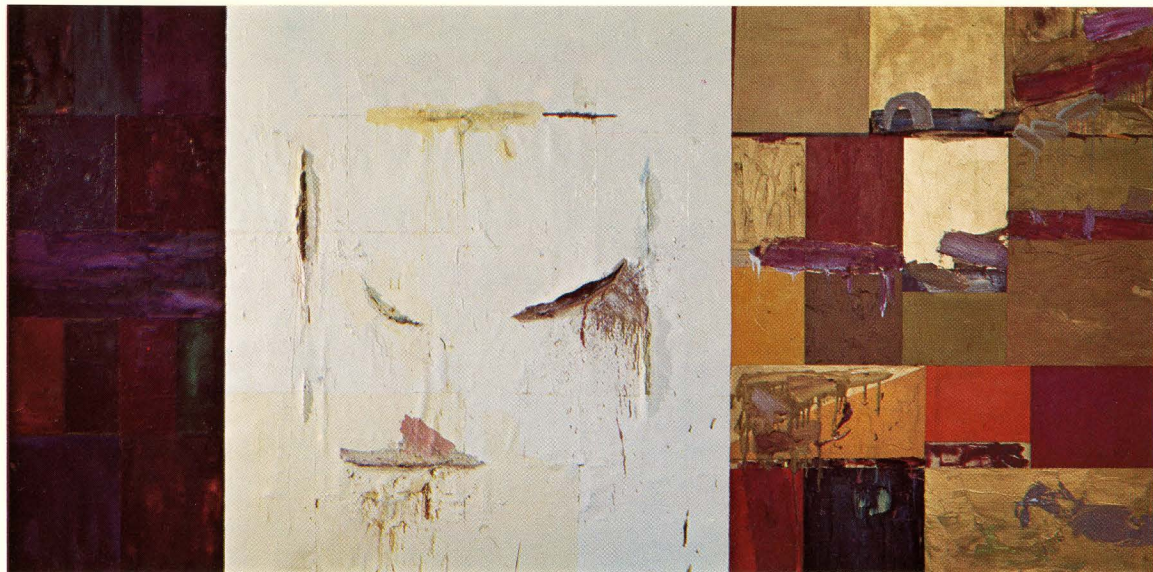


Vanishing Theatre, 1974. Oil, acrylic, chicken wire, paper mache, fabric and thread on canvas. 5' X 10'. Courtesy of the Carl Solway Gallery, New York.

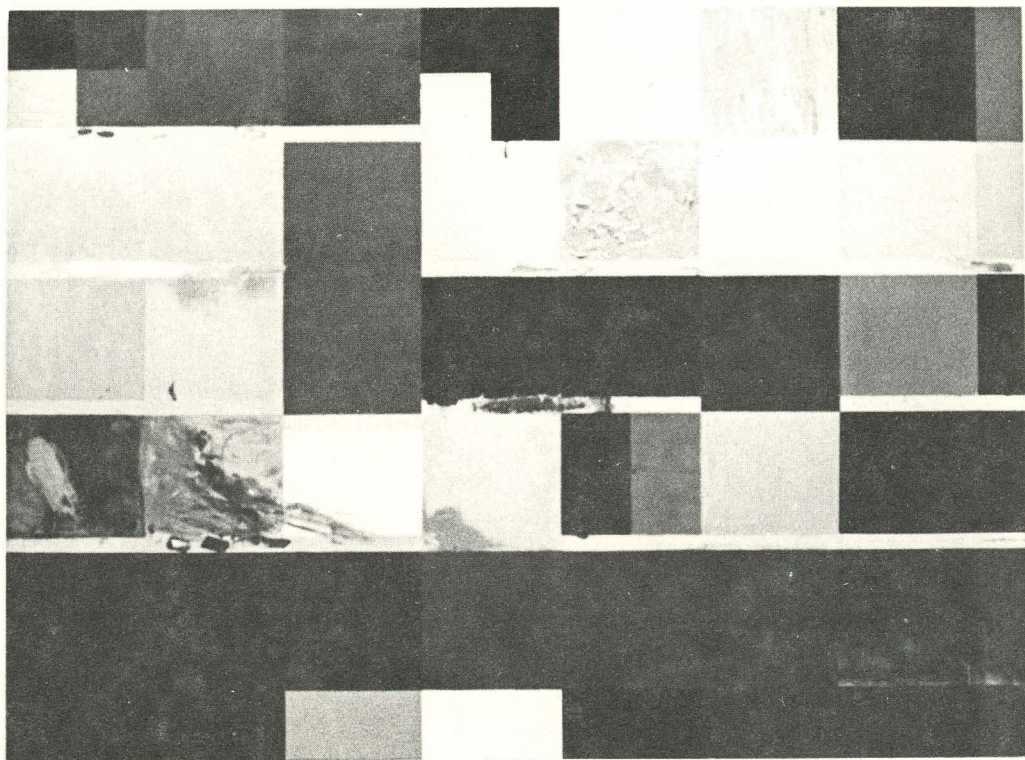


Small Symphony for Women, 1974 (three panels), oil, acrylic, pencil, paper and ink on canvas, 2'X 2'each, lent by Suellen Snyder





Symphony III, 1975. Oil, acrylic, paper mache and thread on canvas. 5' X 10'. Loaned by the artist.



Symphony 11, 1974, oil and acrylic on canvas, 6'X 8', lent by the artist

## BIOGRAPHY

Born New Jersey, 1940

1962 B.A., Douglas College, New Brunswick, New Jersey  
1966 M.F.A., Rutgers University, New Jersey

### One-Woman Exhibitions

1976 Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey  
Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon  
Reed College, Portland, Oregon  
Carl Solway, New York  
1973 Paley & Lowe, New York  
1972 Parker 470 Gallery, Boston, Mass.  
Douglass College, New Brunswick, New Jersey  
1971 Paley & Lowe, New York  
Michael Walls Gallery, San Francisco, California  
1970 Paley & Lowe, New York  
1967 Little Gallery, New Brunswick, New Jersey  
1966 Rutgers University (Thesis Exhibition), New Brunswick,  
New Jersey

### Group Exhibitions

1976 "23 American Women Artists", Mary McKay Koogler Art  
Institute, San Antonio, Texas  
1975 Corcoran Bicentennial, Washington, D.C.  
1974 Michael Walls Gallery, New York  
"An Exhibition of Current Painting", Pratt Institute,  
Brooklyn, N.Y.  
"Women's Work - American Art '74", Philadelphia Civic  
Center, Philadelphia, Pa.  
1973 "New York Avant-Garde", Saidye Bronfman Center, Montreal  
"Options 73/70", Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati,  
Ohio  
"Image of Movement", Stamford Museum, Stamford, Conn.  
"American Drawings 1963-1973", Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York  
"Women Choose Women", New York Cultural Center  
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, Conn.

"Seven New York Painters", Berkeley Art Museum,  
Berkeley, California  
"Grids", Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Pa.  
"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  
"Gedok American Women Artist Show", Kunsthaus,  
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  
Dayton's 12, Minneapolis, Minn.

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"A Protean Sensibility", Arts Magazine, May 1971, Tony Robin,  
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"Powerful, Roughhewn Paintings", San Francisco Chronicle,  
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