

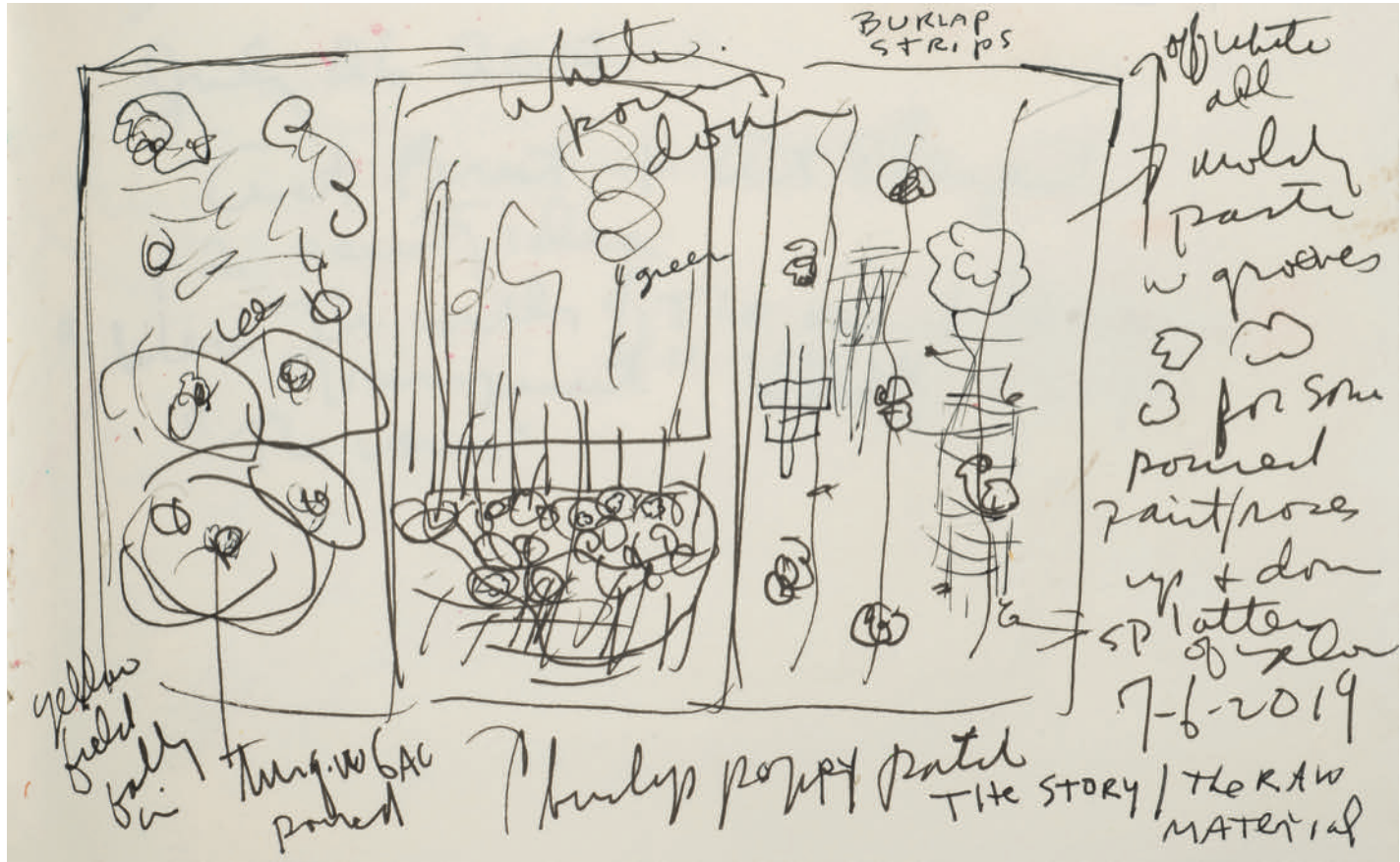
The Summer Becomes a Room



Paintings by Joan Snyder

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Introduction

Wallace Whitney

The Summer Becomes a Room, Joan Snyder's first show at Canada, is an exciting occasion but hardly an accident. Joan's work aligns with a lot of what the gallery has championed over the years, including an investment in abstraction and faith in the handmade. I worked for Joan as a studio assistant in the early 2000s and the experience left me with a sense of gratitude for the example she set. The time I spent in her studio was an education in painting.

I came to understand that materials are at the heart of Joan's practice. The tubes of paint, some cheap and some fancy, were piled on shelves and tables. Selected and bought over time, each spoke to her personal relationship with color. There were dried flowers in buckets and herbs in Mason jars. An overflowing table of plastic fruit, particularly grapes, added a lush note. There was a large assortment of glass beads and bags of flock. Heaps of fabrics, ranging from silk to burlap, were ready to be collaged onto the paintings. A palette knife was always available, with a silvery clean blade on the working end, and a handle molded through use to fit Joan's hand perfectly. The floor was crusted with drips of paint, sticks and stray strings that fell during the painting process. Everything was understandable and quotidian. Everything seemed to be awaiting transformation via Joan's particular alchemy.

The time Joan spends working and looking is the key to bringing her loose yet solid paintings to life. The painting process begins with an idea from a text or a piece of music. The idea grows through sketching and writing, and Joan zeroes in on what she is after and works at the best ways to convey her initial impulse. The formal structures fluctuate between modernist grids, raw figuration, and nature. Grids can become pumpkin fields, which yield to lines of writing from journals—and these lines may generate an isolated stroke of color that becomes, once again, part of a grid. The constant rotation of Joan's visual vocabulary keeps her paintings in orbit. The constituent parts interact with her entire body of work in an ongoing dialogue. Each part serves her expanding cosmology.

Joan carefully considers things like grounds and supports, a diptych or a single panel, gessoed canvas or raw linen. Each decision adds to the finished piece. Every layer is as accessible and visible as the next. Her choices are never just for the sake of moving stuff around. Material is always linked to and animated by the emotional terrain of Joan's life. The process of turning something hidden, like an intense feeling, into something visible, is the act of extending beyond abstraction or metaphor into reality. This can look easy in Joan's hands, but her focus and consistency over time are remarkable.

This essay suggests that Joan's show at Canada is a homecoming of sorts, so I'll conclude with a homey story, one that has stayed with me over the years. Toward the end of my tenure with Joan, she was on her way out of the studio for the day. She asked me to do few final things: wash the brushes, put paintings away. Then she turned to a table laden with glass beads and rhinestones. She touched the table and asked me to tidy it and organize the "jewels." She touched the stones, apparently lost in thought, repeating the word "jewels" several times quietly to herself. In that moment I realized that for Joan, the glass beads weren't glass beads, but actual jewels, with all their value and importance. I felt it too. The magic of Joan's world is her ability to see things how she needs to see them, and work with them in a way that makes them completely real. Her paintings convey this poetic transformation absolutely. The base raw material, so simple and available, becomes imbued with the light, ardor, and purity of spiritual things, through the tactile and purposeful application of her soul. Joan gave me the privilege of watching the work come into being. Most remarkably, the same generosity is offered in these paintings to anyone willing to look and see.

What a curious thing it is to try and sort out the world and one's place in it. Just this morning, as I was breaking down cardboard boxes, so they could better fit in the large city-issued blue recycling bin, I found myself thinking, "Consciousness, at the level of evolution, humans got too little too fast." It struck me as a very 21st-century thought, prompted by my ethical dilemma. I had ordered things to be sent to the house. I was lining the pockets of the owner of Amazon, now the richest man in the world. I was disgusted with myself for giving in to the convenience. And I also had the mild sense of smug self-satisfaction and control that comes with the menial tasks of home ownership (another ridiculous dream). I could cross "garbage" and "recycling" off my to-do list.

I have to stop using the housework as a means to procrastinate. I flip open the laptop and look, once more, at the images of Joan Snyder's new paintings. They share a compositional and affective logic. Landscape in format, their long rectangular forms evoke a horizon line, though none appears in any of the works. They create a field that implies we are in the landscape rather than apart from it. Several are multi-paneled, which, combined with their intense compositional horizontality, gives the impression that they are to be read sequentially from left to right, as if a text. As the feel of landscape slides into the logic of text, I remind myself these are not texts. These are paintings, images, pictures. Both abstract and representational. Both pretty and aggressive. Both layered and flat. Both composed and improvisational. Both observational and invented. An instance of a human consciousness, trying to make sense of itself in the world.

The logic of these pictures is both/and, an endless sentence composed of run-on fragments.

I read a conversation in which Snyder told her interviewer that after her mother passed away, she went into her studio every morning, for a full year, and listened to Mozart's *Great Mass*, and wept. Only then was she able to begin working for the day. I played the first version of *Great Mass* I found on iTunes, and while its majesty swelled to fill the entire contour of my living room, I thought about how when a friend of mine died, all I could listen to in the mornings was Aretha Franklin's live gospel album *Amazing Grace*.

Snyder's new works are littered with flowers—images of roses, globs of paint gathered into rosettes, schematic calligraphic marks that indicate "petals," pumpkins with greenish centers, paint held together with straw. As Mozart's swelling mass dipped into a lilting aria sung by mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter, I wondered about how in almost every culture, throughout almost every historical period, music and flowers attend grief. And about how they also accompany love. Both/and: both music and flowers for both love and grief.

I feel like I should write something about all the different types of marks Snyder makes, something obligatory about how the paintings are like a dictionary of painterly marks in the wake of Abstract Expressionism. I feel like I should do this because it will demonstrate that her work is in dialogue with Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg. And yet I feel suddenly resentful and skeptical about the need to legitimate these pictures by offering a lineage. This morning, as Mozart rises and falls in the other room, I just want to write about the daily practice of going to the studio.

Snyder goes to her studio every day. In that space she makes marks, thinks about making marks, looks at pictures—both hers and others'—likely listens to music, cries, laughs, falls into a meditative state, gets hungry, looks at her work with pleasure or regret or compassion or struggle. She keeps notebooks filled with drawings. She thinks about how those drawings might leave the horizontal page of the book and find a new life on a vertical canvas to be hung upright on the wall. She is, in no small measure, marking time, passing time, killing time, filling time, exploiting time, producing time—the time of the picture. The time it took to make it, the time it will take to dry, the time it will take to look at it, and all the time that it will exist in the future that has not yet been accounted for.

The word *diary* has as its Latin root the concept of a "daily allowance." Meant to be private, diaries are a daily written record of the day's events. They were kept as early as the 2nd century and exist in almost every culture that possesses written language.

They are a form of keeping time, of remaining present, of acting as both observer and recorder. They can be solipsistic, truthful, bombastic, tender, filled with rage, complicated, nuanced, obvious, riddled with self-denial, self-abnegation, self-doubt, self-pleasure, unadulterated joy. They make a habit of noting the fleeting qualities of the weather, the changing of the seasons, recording—without knowing that they do so—the rise of global temperatures, the effects of our overextended carbon footprint. They contain the passage of friends, lovers, and family. They are rife with the blank spaces of grief and love that language cannot touch. They may be redacted, filled with words crossed out due to mistakes in penmanship, spelling, and internal assessment. They are a space of self-expression and self-censorship; self-aggrandizement and the enactment of the ego's check on itself. They offer descriptions of passing visual sensations, and frequently attach those sensations to enormous abstractions such as *nature* or *love*. They can be messy—emotionally, linguistically. They are a space for ambivalence—neither this nor that. They can be propositional—what if I went at it this way? They are by nature as repetitive as the seasons they document, the events they memorialize, the days they either open or close. They are simultaneously banal and cataclysmic, announcing the twinned poles of infinity—birth and death.

I suppose we tend to see the diary as the opposite of art: private compared to art's publicness, concerned with the daily rather than with art's quest for the timeless. Diaries mark out the specific rather than the universal. Snyder's work holds such an either/or scenario in abeyance. Her diaristic paintings, it seems to me, are an ongoing daily practice of the possible. Everything that can be said, felt, registered, observed, communicated: all that our magnificent consciousness has made possible for us, including, by implication, her glorious messy surfaces, her barrage of colors, her movement between words written on the picture plane and her emphatic strokes of color that block our entrance into that picture plane. These indicate all that cannot be said, translated, or understood about this planet we inhabit and what our role on it might be. *Field Marks* indeed.



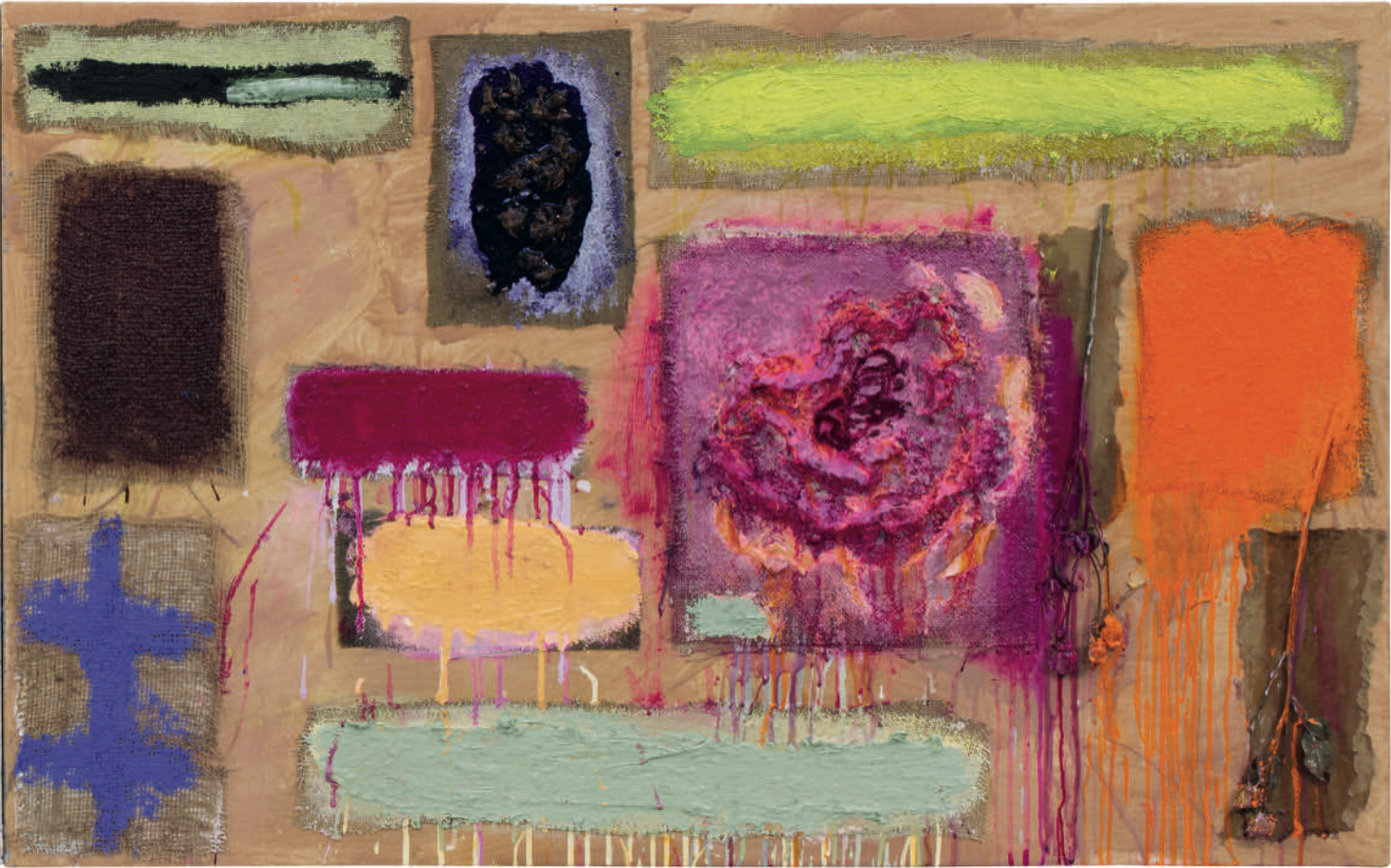
















In Woodstock, 2019

Oil, acrylic, burlap, cloth, mud, herbs on linen. 32 x 64 inches (81.3 x 162.6 cm)



Joan Snyder: A Conglomerate of Love

Sean Scully

The real Artist pursues a vision, and accepts the consequence, because it is true.
Lesly Naucs

You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.

Friedrich Nietzsche

I was 26 in 1972 and managed to scrounge my way over to Boston on a Harvard Scholarship for a year. Wide-eyed, I was up for America and its exuberance. I brought with me, coming from a more reserved culture, at least before Damien Hirst, my tightly woven paintings. But I was up for it for sure: the freedom, the extremes (some of which I don't like now: like guns) and pretty soon I saw some images of paintings that I loved. They were by an older lady: she was 31.

They and she fascinated me. I naturally thought of the disconnected scribblings in paint of Cy Twombly, who's a wonderful artist. But Joan's marks were not European, not grey, not refined, not pushed through the scrim of culture in order to get out into the world. Joan's were brash, Joan's were neon, Joan's were American.

I was using all the same stuff as her: spray guns, sprayed lines, with their photographic edges and paint put down first time, making drips. She liked the grid, but I seemed to like it a lot more. I seemed to be stuck in it. She seemed to wander in and out of incarceration at will. Everything I used was in the service of a net. Everything she used hung in and on an invented air, just being itself. Nothing in these mark paintings seemed to be working for anything else. The blurring marks, these tough lines, were there for themselves. They approached the possibility of a society that made a structure, but they never quite submitted. It seemed existential to me, as if they represented themselves in the independence of being there. Just being there. Simultaneously.

Leonard Cohen sings in one of his great songs: "crucifix uncrossed," resulting in two bars. So there it was, in these glamorous and highly original paintings, characters of forceful color made by hand, bumping into each other occasionally but resisting closure and asserting individualism. So there I was up in Harvard, near New York, at 26: looking at a free grid.

Joan gathered around her a significant fan base; what I didn't know was that like the marks in the mark paintings, she wasn't going to serve it. Because she had a bigger love in mind. She stepped in and out of abstraction because abstraction wants to remove itself from the temporal world and make a separate reality. But she looked at the world and its material. She exited and dissipated in equal measure. In a climate dominated by American Minimalism and conceptualism, an artist whose devotion to the profound truth of Nature that overwhelmed issues of strategy would become an outsider.

She made Beanfield paintings that I saw on Madison Ave. They seemed to be the field itself upended, remade on a rectangle. Her identification with the root of growth, its vitality, and its mess and materiality, was rendered new. These paintings were extraordinarily physical, as if the artist was consumed by panic and anxiety. To preserve, to show, to hold and to make a painting: once again the real thing. That air invented for the mark paintings had disappeared. Now the marks, the matter, the materiality was piled up into a beanfield, in an art gallery. Then Van Gogh comes to mind. Where everything in the painting, is a thing. He felt the threat of the 20th century just up the road and all the harm it was going to do to his pastoral world. And the panic caused by this is so powerful that every mediating space has to be pressed out of his art and thrown overboard.

Joan was willing to be unpopular for a higher purpose. And the higher purpose was to close the space between her art and the majesty of nature. She paints flowers in gray pink, dark pink, bright pink, pale red, blood red, back again to dark pink, and then to red. This is an artist whose identification with the subject is so earnest that there is no space for in and out looking. This is passion and immersion. An identification with the thing loved. As in Jackson Pollock, who was on and in the paintings, she is on the

painting and in the subject, or with the subject, in such a way that reconsideration and correction are not helpful, in fact they pollute the immediacy of the embrace.

Joan paints an homage to her fallen friend Mary Hambleton, who I also knew. Mary was a beautiful woman. The degree of lament and grief that Joan is willing to exhibit, with colors that are light and delicate, flirts with the edge of taste in our lexicon of high-minded Art. But she doesn't care. She cares more for the subject, and that deep sincerity, based on friendship and loss, will overpower taste.

She has been described as "confessional," but she doesn't confess. There aren't mistakes, only desires, only what inspires. She liked the grid. But she didn't want to live in it. She has the key to the cell door, so she opens it and dances outside. She might come back for a break, but that's all.

Yellow was Blue (2013) is a painting where space is allowed to return. The items on the paintings, such as blobs, words and a figure, bang into each other, molest each other, but they're also free, to some extent, to serve themselves. She even goes so far as to tell us that blue is blue. It's a more intellectual painting than many of her densely worked and overlaid paintings, that insist on the primacy of Mother Nature.

As we stand now, in an existential crisis caused by our lack of reverence for where we live, namely Nature, the world has changed since the 70's when I first saw her work. Now the extraordinary identification with nature, that she has manifested in passionate and physically radiant rectangles over the decades: makes her look like the Oracle. The one who knows things first.

America, the land of the signature. The United States of Litigation. Conquered first by settlers and then the settlers were conquered by lawyers, who've taken all the soul out of the law, and filled that hole with details. This is the land of the signature style. The biggest Art Market in the world, it loves Art, and loves Art to walk the line. The artist that steps off the line, as Joan Snyder does, just whenever she wants, steps onto the land where there are no art collectors.

Her child, the one who lives within, has an omnipresent guiding hand: and the Mother, without, rarely says "No, I shouldn't paint that." Her access to the subjects of her world is not clouded by strategy, ideas about profit, and she serves her impulses and her loves of the subject with a clear bright light and a tactile attachment.

The fall of Modernism has allowed and provoked many artists to step in and out of signature styles. This has allowed painting to make an unlikely and prolific return to prominence. Joan has been doing this all along. Now it is time, since she approaches 80, for us to honor her.

Joan made a painting titled *Nature Remains* (2018). Rilke wrote the poem "Nature Survives." If Nature remains, so do we.

*Who says that all must vanish?
Who knows, perhaps the flight
of the bird you wound remains,
and perhaps flowers survive
caresses in us, in their ground.*

*It isn't the gesture that lasts,
but it dresses you again in gold
armor—from breast to knees—
and the battle was so pure
an Angel wears it after you.*

Rainer Maria Rilke











List of Works

Nature Remains, 2018
Oil, acrylic, burlap, silk, paper, ink, raffia, herbs,
rosehips on linen
50 × 72 inches (127 × 182.9 cm)

The Summer Becomes a Room, 2018
Oil, acrylic, herbs, rosebuds, burlap, cloth on canvas
42 × 62 inches (106.7 × 157.5 cm)

Ode to Summer, 2019
Oil, acrylic, paper mache, burlap, poppy pods, dried
flowers on canvas
60 × 120 inches (152.4 × 304.8 cm)

Inner Green, 2019
Oil, acrylic, paper mache, burlap, dried flowers on linen
50 × 72 inches (127 × 182.9 cm)

Anatomy of a Summer Painting, 2019
Oil, acrylic, paper mache, burlap, paper on linen
32 × 128 inches (81.3 × 325.1 cm)

Paint A Pond, 2019
Oil, acrylic, burlap, paper on canvas
32 × 64 inches (81.3 × 162.6 cm)

Field Marks, 2019
Oil, acrylic, burlap, paper, rose stems on canvas
30 × 96 inches (76.2 × 243.8 cm)

Black Lake, 2019
Oil, acrylic, burlap, paper mache, leaves, herbs
on canvas
24 × 96 inches (61 × 243.8 cm)

In Woodstock, 2019
Oil, acrylic, burlap, cloth, mud, herbs on linen
32 × 64 inches (81.3 × 162.6 cm)

Even a Melon Field, 2020
Oil, acrylic, burlap, silk, cloth flowers, herbs on linen
54 × 108 inches (137.2 × 274.3 cm)

Love, Mom, 2017
Oil, acrylic, cloth, paper, colored pencil, pastel,
beads, glitter on canvas
52 × 72 inches (132.1 × 182.9 cm)

Lipshtick, 2017
Oil, acrylic, ink, cloth, pencil, pastel, rosehips, paper
on canvas
55 × 50 inches (139.7 × 127 cm)


Storyboard, 2017
Oil, acrylic, cloth, ink, paper, glitter, beads on canvas
50 × 70 inches (127 × 177.8 cm)

Always, 2017
Oil, acrylic, ink, pencil, paper, glitter on canvas
55 × 50 inches (139.7 × 127 cm)

SHE, 2017
Oil, acrylic, watercolor, paper, cloth, colored pencil,
pastel on canvas
60 × 42 inches (152.4 × 106.7 cm)

3-21-17
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 Derreck + Andrea.

Lit design of crystal
 rainbows for angels
 awareness brand of time
 loss



yes 1-30-2020 seen fetch (noies) 20re idea
 lower notes w. poured
 red. 4-13-17
 yes 1-27-2020

Helen Molesworth is a curator and writer. She has organized monographic exhibitions of Moyra Davey, Noah Davis, Louise Lawler, Steve Locke, Anna Maria Maiolino, Josiah McElheny, Kerry James Marshall, Catherine Opie, Amy Sillman, and Luc Tuymans. She is the author of numerous catalogue essays and her writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *Documents*, and *October*. She hosted a podcast series called "Recording Artists" with The Getty, Los Angeles.

Sean Scully was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1945 and today lives and works between New York, Bavaria and London. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at The Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.; the Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, Germany; The National Gallery, London; the Albertina Museum, Vienna; the Villa Panza & Panza Collection, Varese, Italy; and at San Giorgio Maggiore Church in Venice, Italy, for the 58th Venice Biennale. In 2020, Scully opened the major fifty-year career retrospective: *Sean Scully: The Shape of Ideas* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art also hosted by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas. Other solo exhibitions in 2020-21 include: Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary; Benaki Museum, Athens, Greece; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

Wallace Whitney is a painter based in the Bronx. His work has been the subject of many solo exhibitions, most recently *Braided Sky* at Ceysson & Bénétière, New York and *Patience' Gift* at Soloway, Brooklyn. As an educator, Whitney has taught at the University of Tennessee and the Tyler School of Art and Architecture in Philadelphia, and his writing on contemporary art appears in numerous catalogue essays and in the online magazine *Artcritical*. Whitney has curated exhibitions in the United States and abroad, notably *Unfurled: Supports/Surfaces 1966-1976* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2019), and *Feed the Meter, Vol. I and II* at Ceysson & Bénétière in Wandhaff, Luxembourg (2015, 2018). Whitney is a co-founder of the artist-run gallery Canada.

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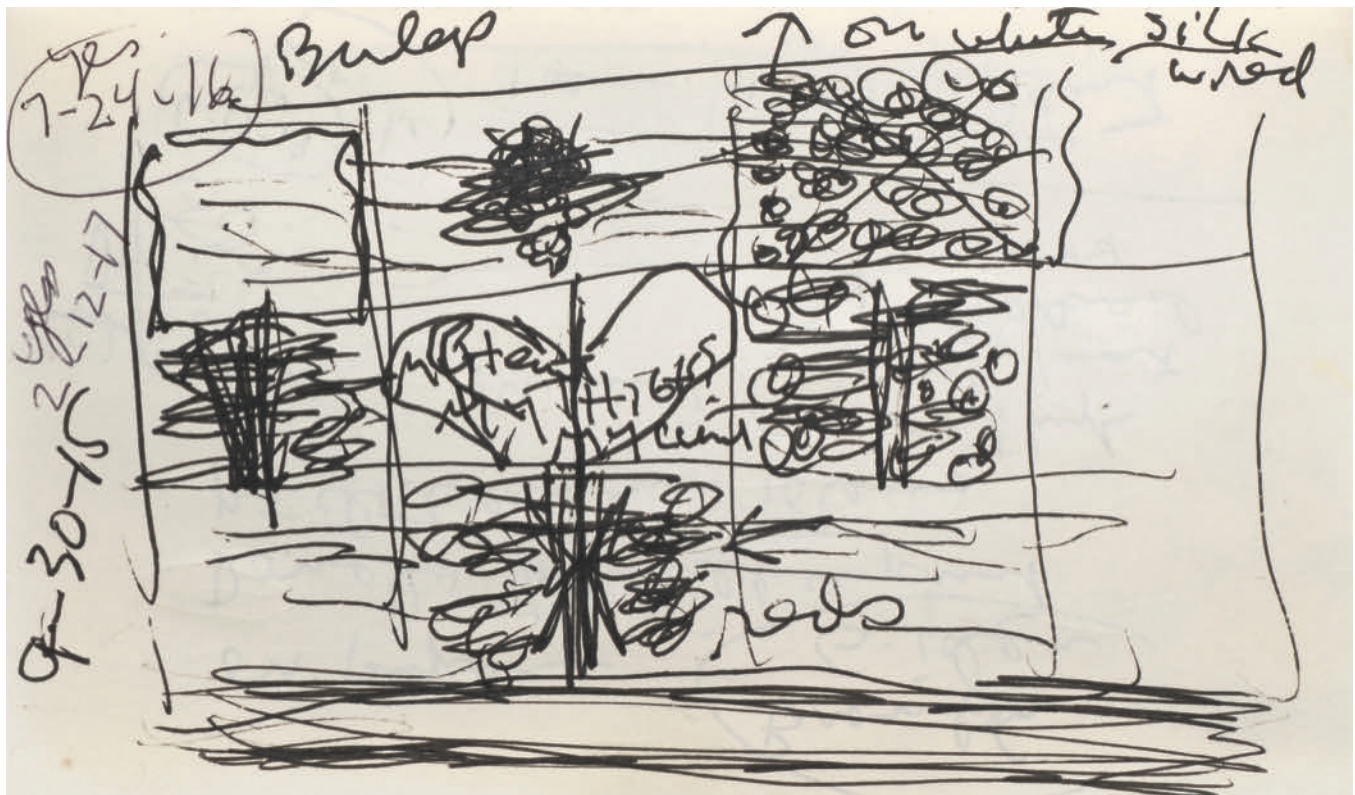
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Page 4: *Sketch for Ode to Summer*, 2019, ink on paper, 8 1/8 x 5 1/8 inches.
 Page 44: *Sketch for Liturgy of Crystal*, 2017, ink on paper, 3 3/8 x 5 1/2 inches.
 Page 46: *Sketch for On White Silk*, 2016, ink on paper, 3 3/4 x 6 1/2 inches.
 Page 48: *Sketch for SHE*, 2017, ink on paper, 3 3/8 x 5 1/2 inches.

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Joan Snyder

