

franklin parrasch gallery

Joan Snyder

To Become A Painting



Joan Snyder in her studio, Woodstock, NY. Photo: Maggie Cammer

“The modern tradition can continue to bring us glad tidings by taking us on extraordinary journeys to familiar places, but only on its own eccentric terms. The deal is you have to go without a map, and you can only get there on foot.”

- Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High & Low*¹

Franklin Parrasch Gallery presents Joan Snyder, *To Become a Painting*, an exhibition comprising six large scale paintings created by the artist in her Woodstock, NY studio during the Covid-19 pandemic. The paintings reflect the artist’s engagement with the land, referencing the generative and vital state of earth and water and acknowledging impulses that access nature as a guide for connecting with the most fundamental human emotions.

The shared space of high and low is Snyder’s signature domain. She weaves varied layers and densities of acrylic and oil paints in poetic concert with applied materials, from the commercially-produced—such as burlap, silk, cheesecloth, plastic grapes, and beads—to elements from nature like plant stems, seed pods, twigs, rose hips, dried grass, and straw. Snyder’s vivid early and provocative encounters with distinctly post-War materials began as a child with dime store toys her father distributed on his sales route. A range of brightly-colored rubber and plastic toys (hula hoops, whirlygigs, balloons, bubbles, and the like) packed the garage of the family’s home, possibly initiating an association between color, texture, and personal emotion.

For Snyder, painting is, much like the process of planting and sowing, in itself an act of generative growth: begin with a ground - then add, layer, combine, build - and culminate in the fruition of the image. In a recent essay, *Ecce Femina: Joan Snyder*, Rhonda Lieberman wrote, “As Proust conjured a riverbank of words, Snyder’s paintings are not depictions, but their own reality. The materiality of the paint and references to flatness (appended doodads, the drippy hand-prints) assert themselves through Snyder’s earthy motifs to weird and powerful effect.”² The gardener’s process of nourishing these elements—giving them means to thrive by irrigating, pruning, separating, etc.—is analogous to Snyder’s process of painting. In these newest works, Snyder is steeped in the inquiry and quest to find out what happens when her images develop from that process.

Regenerative forces in the natural world, those that supply nutrition and propagate life, sustain the psychic entities that Snyder’s paintings often depict. A range of emotions—love, sorrow, fear, and hope—are all subjects in Snyder’s images. The ebb and flow of emotional shifts becomes the symphony she orchestrates. These shifts themselves are invisible and inexplicable in the physical world. Their currents are pulled by the tides of spiritual and subliminal forces and are realized in pictures Snyder deftly crafts using the stuff of an artist in search of her planet’s pulse.

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1. Varnedoe, Kirk and Adam Gopnik. *High and Low: Modern Art & Popular Culture*. Museum of Modern Art, 1990, pp. 412.

2. Lieberman, Rhonda. “Ecce Femina: Joan Snyder.” *Rosebuds & Rivers: Joan Snyder*, ed. Rowena Chiu, Blain|Southern, 2019, pp. 10.



Joan Snyder is one of the foremost abstract painters working today. Beginning in the early 1970s, she pioneered the narrative potential of abstraction through her sensuous mixed media works. Known collectively as the “stroke” paintings, these breakout canvases from the 1970s merged the delicacy of pencil drawing with the overlay of thick brushwork. The lush, staccato strokes rain down in a bevy of colors, and are set against an often-visible grid.

During the 1980s, her expressionist paintings continued to evolve into full-blown maximalist compositions, with scrawls of poetic text. They were frequently accompanied by additions of glitter, thread, paper mâché, and other dimensional flourishes. She began collaging natural materials such as straw, twigs, and seeds to further embellish her heavily textured surfaces. Her paintings are emotive, dramatic, and raw: their gravitas comes in the form of song cycles and symphonies that resonate as celebrations of the seasons of life—its highs and lows in love, loss, and despair, with nature as a primary and enduring metaphor into the 21st century. Her current works continue to explore female subjectivity, and the enflamed passions of living in an uncertain world. Feminist, poetic, and unapologetic, Snyder’s works offer tour de force moments of radicality.

- Jenni Sorkin
April 2022

Symphony of Pain and Joy, 2022
oil, acrylic, paper mâché, paper, pencil, ink on linen
54 x 66 in (137.1 x 167.6 cm)



Duet in Three Parts, 2021
oil, acrylic, ink, paper mâché, burlap, paper,
twigs, leaves on linen in two parts
overall: 60 x 64 in (152.4 x 162.5 cm)



Ode to Monet, 2021

oil, acrylic, paper mâché, burlap, dried flowers, flower stems,
paper, wooden hoop on canvas in two parts
overall: 32 x 96 in (81.2 x 243.8 cm)



Pondsong, 2022
oil, acrylic, paper mâché, burlap,
twigs on linen in two parts
overall: 32 x 64 in (81.2 x 162.5 cm)

Mud Blues, 2021
oil, acrylic, paper mâché, burlap, dirt,
herbs, straw, dried grass, glass
beads on canvas in two parts
overall: 36 x 72 in (91.4 x 182.8 cm)





Cameo, 2022
acrylic on linen
10 x 8 in (25.4 x 20.3 cm)

Winter 2021, 2021
oil, acrylic, paper mache, twigs,
leaves on linen in two parts
overall: 24 x 96 in (60.9 x 243.8 cm)



Joan Snyder, *To Become A Painting*

May 12 - June 24, 2022

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19 East 66 Street, New York, NY