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Carol Brown Goldberg: A Personal Journey

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When and how did you develop your mixed media abstract style?

It was 2001, we were moving out of our house and into a condominium. I was moving away from all the early dreams like getting married, having a home, and sending children off into the world. I was ready to begin a new chapter. My inspirations were still rooted in my teachers: Gene Davis, Tom Green, Leon Berkowitz. With a focus on color, circles became the vehicle for creating light in color. When I did my first painting of circles, around 2004, I stood back and I saw an aura of light coming out of the center. It was exciting! The process started as simple circles on canvas; then, I realized that this canvas is a mirror of humanity, so it's about layers, and I started dripping. Before I put the circles, I wanted to create random patterns on the canvas. I was inspired by visiting the Freer and Sackler galleries and looking at Islamic Art and near Eastern art, which was highly decorative, highly mannered, caught in different perspective and had an elegance to it.

Talking about decorative elements, why did you choose to add materials like pulverized glass or glitter to your painting?

In the early Nineties I was doing pnp paper. When the paper is wet, it's very satisfying, but when it dries, it becomes very matte and has no sheen to it. A person in the studio showed me some materials left from a workshop. I started working with some of those elements and it was very satisfying. I said to myself, "you are a female, you can't use glitter, it's embarrassing." However, Nancy Graves uses it, Warhol used diamond dust, and Severini used glass, so what's wrong with me using it? I realized it was countercultural, and I didn't think about it until 9/11 happened, when I saw that glass from the World Trade Center being crushed, the sunlight hitting it, the wind grabbing some flickers of color glass, swirling them in the air and on the streets down in New York. A couple of months later we went to the ocean and I saw the flickering light on the edge of the waves. I remember grabbing friends and saying, "Would you call that beauty? Do you think that's a beautiful image, light on the waves?" It also seems to me that the first image that an infant sees is the light in the cornea of the eye of the mother, or the father, or the caregiver; a tiny flicker of light is a pre-verbal connection.

In the Seventies artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro reintroduced the biographical component, which was quite groundbreaking. By seeing *The Color of Time* (2012), I realize that the biographical component has been playing a large role in your work as well. Were you embracing feminism at that time? Or rather

you were not, but you realize now that you were on a parallel path?

I knew about Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, who had been in my studio in the early Eighties. There was a lot to learn from them, but they were much more involved in the feminist culture than I was. I got married in the early Sixties and had my three sons right away. I watched the culture through a TV set; I didn't march, but my heart was with the marchers. There was this culture happening parallel to my inner life, where I sat in my kid's beds and read them stories while people were marching for civil rights. We all have ambiguities and opposites that pull us in different directions, and contradiction is part of who we are. These were parallel lives, an external world and an internal life: learning about the death of Kennedy, while at the same time giving optimism and life to my sons.

Do the titles of your work reference personal narratives?

In both painting and sculpture, I attach personal associations through the titles. I did sculpture maquettes with a glue gun, and the forms began to look anthropomorphic to me, like real people. I realized that these maquettes are everyone I have ever known, these are folks who I have loved, learned from, laughed with, lived with...the name keeps them alive within me. I started giving them a public title, like RA (relational aesthetics) or NT (nanotechnology) and also a private name after people I know.

Let's talk about the exhibition *One-on-One* that you recently had at the Phillips Collection.

I was so honored when Klaus Ottman, chief curator at The Phillips Collection, approached me about his project *One-on-One*. The project places a living artist in visual dialogue with a work from The Phillips Collection. Ottman came to my studio and chose the painting *Maggie on My Mind* as well as 2 works on paper. He paired my work with Matisse's *Interior with Egyptian Curtain*. I always understood the relationship I had to Matisse. I thought Matisse was my secret, but Klaus saw it. I was ecstatic that he made this connection. To me, Matisse's *Interior with Egyptian Curtain* encompasses the world of the sublime, the ecstatic; an almost supernatural world of color, composition, and pattern. It is not just a world of pleasure, but one that allows tension and harmony to exist simultaneously. This ambiguity of forces, perhaps a reflection of our internal world, is an inspiration for endless gardens.

www.carolbrowngoldberg.com

CAROL BROWN GOLDBERG

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Interview by LEDA CEMPELLIN
Associate Professor of Art History at South Dakota State University



"Secret To'em" 2014, Painted Bronze installation at Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ, 100 inches