

"In A New Space," Brenda Goodman Turns Towards the Light



Brenda Goodman, Shine on Me, 2017, oil on paper, 6 x 8 inches, courtesy of DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary, Brooklyn NY

By DEBORAH KRIEGER, AUG. 2017

Looking back over Brenda Goodman's body of work, you're struck by the protean nature of her technique as well as the underlying, overwhelming sense of anxiety and trepidation. Over the course of her fifty-plus years as an artist, her works investigate Munch, Miro, Goya, and Chagall, with aspects of Symbolism and Surrealism incorporated for good measure. In her self-portraits from the mid-1990s and early 2000s, for example, which reflect Goodman's contemporaneous struggles with her body and with food, the effect is one of utter horror and hopelessness. Transmuted into a monstrous, misshapen ghostly form with spindly hands and a gaping maw, Goodman's own body resembles images of the Titan *Saturn* devouring his own children. Another collection of works from around the same time, on the other hand, has an almost spiritual bent to it, with glowing golden blocky forms against black backgrounds that evoke of a mysterious temple or edifice in the underworld.



Brenda Goodman, Self-Portrait 13, 1994, oil on wood, 48 x 40 inches, courtesy of the artist



Brenda Goodman, After September 11 (3), 2001, oil on paper 15 x 20 inches, courtesy of the artist

Goodman's approach is grounded in the traditional formal education she received at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit in the 1960s, yet is wholly characterized by her intuition and impulsive nature. As she puts it, she "[puts] the color on and take it off until it *feels* right." Yet despite the glimmer of recognition some of her older works might inspire, Goodman is clear: "I don't channel, but I do think my work often taps into universal themes and images. And even though my initial impulses are personal, the resulting paintings are never so personal that they don't speak to larger, universal issues in life."

Brenda Goodman's body of work, until recently, could best be summed up with John Yau's astute commentary from 2015: "visceral visions of troubling beauty." Her combination of figurative and abstract elements, Goodman says, "seems to best allow me to address personal and emotional content, while also satisfying my love of form and texture."



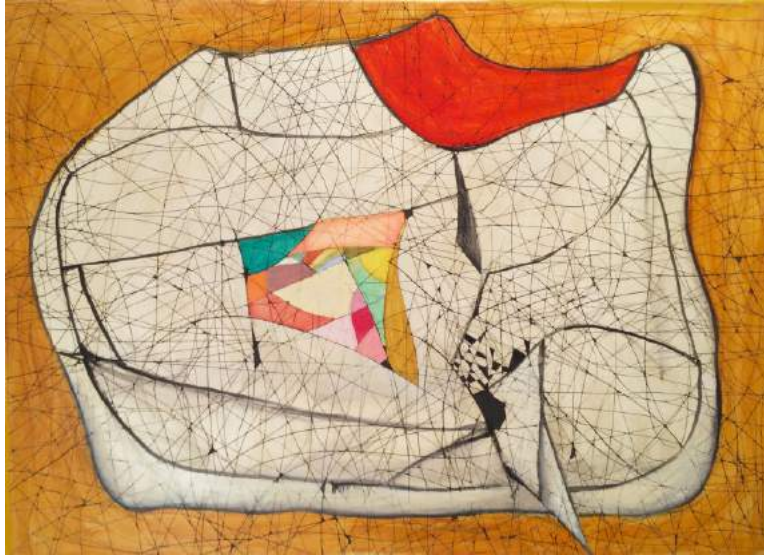
Brenda Goodman, Tomorrow's Promise, 2017, oil on wood, 32 x 50 inches, courtesy of DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary

It is the overall haunting quality of the bulk of her oeuvre that makes the recent collection of paintings that comprise Goodman's upcoming show at DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary, *In a New Space*, particularly striking. It's clear that these new works reflect a clear change not only in the formal qualities that have come to define Goodman's decades-long career, but also in the emotional effects these works evoke. The murky and eerie element has been substituted for a clearer, brighter aesthetic, which is quite telling; Goodman's body of work, which she refers to as a "visual diary," as she calls it, has "always come from [her] emotions." Keith Schweitzer, one of the eponymous owners of DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary, remarks on Goodman: "Brenda Goodman is a real badass, regarded as a painter's painter [...] She's painting about painting, the sheer joy and love of it. She's really hit a certain stride. These are breakthrough works for her, and I am absolutely delighted and honored to be working with her."



Brenda Goodman, Hidden Memories, 2017, oil on wood, 32 x 28 inches, courtesy of DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary

The visual language and vocabulary Goodman has used—and continues to use—to reflect her frame of mind is always evolving, forever guided by her “intuitive” approach. And often the meaning—that ineffable thing—is something that isn’t necessarily there from the start, but arises more organically as the painting is completed or even as viewers take it in for the first time. As she says, “sometimes meanings come to me during the process of painting [...] sometimes the painting just is what it is, and I learn something about its meaning from other people’s eyes and responses. But always my work comes from my heart, and viewers find the emotion it communicates for themselves.” When you consider Goodman’s paintings from *In a New Space*, then, the narrative of Goodman’s constantly shifting emotional states that has emerged over the decades via her work seems to have, at last, come upon a genuinely happy and satisfied chapter.



Brenda Goodman, Lickety Split, 2017, oil on wood, 35 x 50 inches, courtesy of DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary



Brenda Goodman, Siblings, 2017, oil on wood, 50 x 72 inches, courtesy of DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary

The paintings in *In a New Space*, while a definite departure from previous works, aren't entirely from out of left field stylistically: while the colors are purer, the boundaries more clearly delineated, the overall compositions tighter and more centralized, the forms themselves harken back to older parts of Goodman's oeuvre. The craggy shapes of her 2009-2010 *Troubled Waters* series and the bold black outlines of her work from just two years prior come to mind, as do the mixture of geometric and rounded edges from her abstractions of 2007-2009. This aspect of continuity isn't intentional, but certainly isn't an accident. As Goodman says, "I know that certain shapes and forms reoccur in different incarnations throughout the whole span of my work. You can look at a painting I did

when I was a student and see a shape that pops up in other works made many years later. Certain shapes and forms seem to resonate with different people.”



Brenda Goodman, Holding a Dream, 2016, oil on wood, 59 x 45 inches, courtesy of DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary

The most striking difference between Goodman’s newest works and nearly all of her previous work is the approach to color—she’s adopted a few new colors into her palette, including bubblegum pink (found in the work *Siblings*, from 2017) and sea foam green (*Lickety Split*, also from 2017). The technique Goodman describes in creating this new body of work seems to reflect the vigor and energy with which she approaches her painting practice today. She’s always used oil paints, and largely painted on wood or drawn on thick paper; her love of texture dates back to her days as a student, and is perhaps the one eternal constant among the myriad iterations of Goodman’s technique. Goodman remarks on her painting process: “different surfaces convey different emotions, so I have spent a lifetime gathering many different tools and techniques in order to express different feelings. Often, in my thick paintings, I will add pumice and ash to the paint to build up a deeper surface. Other times, I will use fine rabbit hair brushes for

glazing thin layers over each other. I often use several techniques, resulting in several surfaces, in one painting.” She recently realized that she could make scratches in the wooden body itself, as she does in her works on paper, she “got some very sharp tools at the hardware store and started digging into the wood, then filled the lines with black so they were more visible. These gauges became my starting point,” and so the works for *In a New Space* began to take shape.



Brenda Goodman, Something to Say (in-progress), 2017, oil on wood, 32 x 33 inches, courtesy of the artist



Brenda Goodman, Something to Say (com), 2017, oil on wood, 32 x 33 inches, courtesy of the artist

Quite literally, Brenda Goodman is digging into her medium in new and exciting ways, just as she is digging into her life's work with renewed relish and joy. Add in a brand new studio space—one that's bigger and more open than her previous work spaces—and it's clear that Goodman has found some kind of inner peace to reflect in her painting practice. As she says, "the new paintings changed partly because of the new techniques I was using, but also because of the space around me." And never discount the wisdom of the years: "some changes may be because I'm now 74. I feel this work has a clarity that I haven't quite experienced in this way before. I continue to challenge myself, take new risks, and always paint from my heart." **WM**

(Brenda Goodman: In a New Space is on display at DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary from September 8 to October 1, 2017.)



Brenda Goodman, Watching and Waiting, 2017, oil on wood, 32 x 40 inches, courtesy of DAVID&SCHWEITZER Contemporary

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