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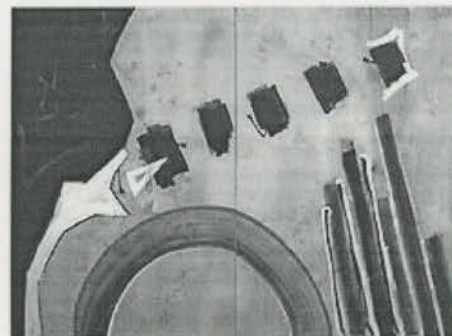
ART

Judith Godwin: Paintings

By *Blake de Pastino*

Paintings

Judith Godwin
 At Towson University's Holtzman Art Gallery through March 22



"On Target," 1986

Judith Godwin's career has the customs stickers of the past 50 years of art plastered all over it. After an earthy Southern upbringing, she studied in New York in the early 1950s under Hans Hofmann, one of the last, best acolytes of Henri Matisse. His diction lessons in color and form prepared her for Abstract Expressionism, which was just then settling in as the lingua franca of American art. Soon, her alignment with the movement became solid, if not doctrinaire. Brush in hand, she used aggressive strokes, demanding hues, large-scale canvases. Outside the studio, she hung out with the nursemaid of Abstract Expressionism, art dealer Betty Parsons, and bought Franz Kline's old brownstone in Greenwich Village.

But as events progressed, so did Godwin. When the shock of Ab Ex had worn off by the early '70s, she began experimenting with environmental art, in keeping with the times. By the mid-'80s, she was around to herald "The Return of Abstraction" in a Manhattan group show. And as you can see in the exhibit of her most recent work, hanging now at Towson University's Holtzman Gallery, through it all she never left the strident, post-war spirit of those early days far behind.

Though Godwin was and remains very much a product of her time, her work is not set to the clock. These latest pieces--all made since 1986--reflect her increasingly unique dialect of the expressionist approach. Pieces like "Memories" and "The Ring" are dominated by neat, almost architectural semicircles in addition to Ab Ex's trademark swaths of paint. Her brushstrokes are uncommonly wide and muscular. And she pulls on ugly colors that are supposedly inspired by nature but actually recall just the opposite--fake-grape purple, sea-foam green, disco-era gold, Barbie pink. But by far her most effective stamp on the style is the sheer restraint she calls on, even when surrounded by her own raucousness. While some of her better-known contemporaries gained fame by conquering every square inch of canvas, Godwin uses the silences of expressionism to make some of her most eloquent statements.

"On Target" (pictured here), which she painted in 1986, is probably the best measure of this. Two frames join together as an eight-foot-wide diptych, united across the bottom with a thin red arc, flanked

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by a brash angling of black on one side and striving lines of black, white, and gray on the other. But all that remains in between is the outline of a draftsman's drawing triangle, five wrist-flicks of black paint, and enough decades of experience to let the rest of the blank canvas finish the job.

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