

COLOR AND MOVEMENT THE ART OF JUDITH GODWIN

Judith Godwin has given her life as an artist to the study of the rhythms of the body and the wonders of nature. Continuing a long-term commitment to abstraction, her recent paintings combine spontaneity with a more developed command of interior space, and a greater willingness to experiment. While her early abstractions featured tightly interlocking elements, Godwin's new canvases explore an expansiveness in scale and a full range of spatial complexities. Godwin has stated:

PAINTING IS A NON-VERBAL MEDIUM TO WHICH I HAVE DEVOTED MOST OF A LIFETIME. AS A CHILD I DREW AND PAINTED AND WAS EXPOSED TO A GREAT DEAL OF ARCHITECTURE AND TO GARDENING. THROUGHOUT MY SCHOOL AND COLLEGE YEARS, ART CLASSES WERE OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE. MY ADVANCED STUDY WITH HANS HOFMANN IN NEW YORK AND PROVINCETOWN ENABLED ME TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD THEIR ADMIRATION AND ENTHUSIASM FOR THE VITALITY AND EXPANDING CONSCIOUSNESS OF MODERN ART.

In previous assessments of her art, Judith Godwin has been historicized by her study with Hans Hofmann, and categorized as a second-generation Abstract Expressionist who exhibited her gestural abstractions of the 1950s with Betty Parsons. For Godwin this identification of her entire career exclusively with an art historical style of fifty years ago hardly seems justified. For the artist is currently producing some of the boldest and most remarkable canvases of her career. Although she is indeed a member of the New York School who had close associations with Franz Kline, Kenzo Okada and other painters active in the 1950s, she has continued

to evolve her abstractions, increasing the scale, the intensity, and the risk-taking to dramatic new visual achievements.

HOW MY PAINTINGS WILL APPEAR TO OTHERS IS NOT A CONCERN WHILE I AM WORKING. NEITHER DO I INTELLECTUALIZE ABOUT A WORK. I PREFER TO LEAVE A CANVAS UNFINISHED FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD RATHER THAN MAKE INSTANT REVISIONS, WHICH COULD REMOVE THOSE ELUSIVE CENTERS OF DIRECTNESS AND SPONTANEITY FOR WHICH I HAVE STRIVEN. I WOULD HOPE THAT VIEWERS OF MY WORK, BEING INNATELY SENSITIVE TO COLOR AND MOVEMENT, WOULD RESPOND TO SOME OF THE EXCITEMENT, SUBTLETY, DISCOVERY AND IDEALISM I HAVE EXPERIENCED IN THE BEST OF MY WORK.

Since the late 1970s, Judith Godwin has had regular solo exhibitions of her work in New York galleries and elsewhere. Not only have her single canvases been combined into large-scale diptychs, but the compositions have grown in their internal expansiveness as well. Of the monumental paintings included in the current exhibition at Rutgers University, Godwin's canvases are bold in visual effects and experimental in the use of materials. Paper tapes collaged onto the surface can be found in *Blue Arrow*; in other works both paper and pieces of netting have been attached. A full range of surface effects has been explored, from splattered pigment to thickly encrusted impasto.

Aspects of Nature are evoked in her various manifestations: from craggy rock formations and mountain peaks, as in *Seabird*, to dramatic storms and shifting tides. Occasionally man-made elements

appear; for example the sailboats seemingly tossing on the waves in *Green Pennants*. But Godwin's oil paintings are not literal representations at all, and the same canvas that suggests the forces of the natural world may also embody a dancer in motion. Color and slashing brushstrokes often combine to evoke the rhythms of the dance. One is easily reminded that Martha Graham was an important formative influence on Godwin. When she came to New York City in 1953, Godwin became a frequent visitor to Graham's Eastside studio, though she declined the choreographer's invitation to participate in classes there. Recalling Graham's frequent use of swirling motions, Godwin incorporates spiraling or circular forms into her compositions. Memories of the extraordinary choreographic effects of Martha Graham are given enduring form in the photographs of the dancer taken by Barbara Morgan and others. These images are studied by Godwin, and become a repository of gestures for her canvases. *The Ring*, a giant diptych is a prime example of Godwin's achievement in this respect. A range of associations—from a moonlit landscape to the jagged thrusts and twirls of a figure moving through space—are suggested here. The double canvas, measuring nine feet across, encompasses the spatial range of the viewer in its breadth. *The Ring* confronts its audience and engages the spectator in its powerful rhythms.

I USUALLY STRETCH AND PRIME MY OWN CANVAS. THIS IS, TO ME, PART OF MY CRAFT. I MOST OFTEN BEGIN TO PAINT BY ENVISIONING FORM AND SPACE IN NATURE AND THEN INTERPRET MY IDEAS AND FEELINGS INTO PLANES OF COLOR ON THE CANVAS. WHEN I RECOGNIZE AN EMERGING FORM, I RESPOND INTUITIVELY BY EVOLVING COMPLEMENTARY SUB-FORMS IN COLORS AND APPLI-

CATIONS WHICH FEEL SUPPORTIVE AND FOSTER DEVELOPMENT. IN STUDYING COLOR AND ITS BEHAVIOR, I HAVE LEARNED TO TRUST MY INTUITION. I HAVE A STRONG BELIEF IN MY WORK AND PURSUE IT CONSTANTLY.

Godwin's technical expertise is remarkable, and reminds us that thirty years ago, this artist apprenticed herself to a carpenter and plasterer, and a stonemason. There is strength, energy, ambition, and daring in these monumental canvases, stretched and nailed by the artist, and richly covered with varying levels of impasto, dry brushed pigment, and collaged elements. After fifty years of painting and drawing, Godwin is willing to take risks, while she has also mastered the patience necessary to achieve her desired effects. Hers is a virtuoso performance of controlled spontaneity. Although the final appearance of her composition retains the brilliance of bold gesturalism, Judith Godwin has understood the advantage of waiting, sometimes for days on end, so that passages of thick oil paint will dry before painting bold gestural strokes over them. The use of collage, handled with precision, can produce dramatic changes that rival the punctuation of dry-brushed areas.

That Godwin has continued to explore the world around her, that the vigor and intensity of her panels remains fresh, inviting, and authentic are sources of inspiration for the creative life of us all. Here is a woman who has dedicated her life to the exploration of inner forces, and has given full manifestation to the poetry she finds in her daily experiences.

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