

# HYPERALLERGIC

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## Does It Have To Mean Something To Be Great?

Joanne Greenbaum's cacophonous symphony of individual marks, shapes, and colors coheres without obscuring the individuality of each element.

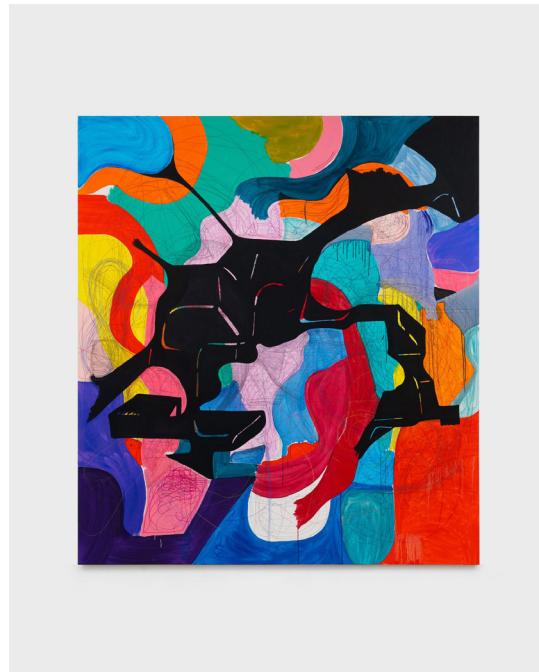
By John Yau



Joanne Greenbaum, "Untitled" (2023), oil and marker on canvas (all images courtesy the artist and Nino Mier Gallery, photos Elisabeth Bernstein)

Joanne Greenbaum may be the only artist who came of age in the 1980s to extend the visual innovations of Jackson Pollock, Helen Frankenthaler, and Asian ink painting into fresh, unexpected territory in which marks can convey stillness and accelerating movement. She achieved this by reintroducing the hand and drawing into painting at a time when it was dominated by a stylized aesthetic, while utilizing different media and processes in each work: Using oil paint, acrylic, flashe, oil stick, ink, ballpoint pen, colored pencil, markers, and other diverse, seemingly incommensurable materials, she stains the canvas, creates flat and feathery shapes, and defines open-ended, linear constructions. The result is a cacophonous symphony of individual marks, shapes, and colors that somehow coheres without obscuring the individuality of each element. Her tour de force compositions feel discovered in the process of their becoming.

The 13 paintings, three ballpoint pen drawings, and five ceramic sculptures in her current exhibition, *Amnesia*, at Nino Mier Gallery (all untitled and dated between 2010 and 2025) reveal even more sides of her multi-pronged approach to art. For example, she's used a metallic glaze for one ceramic work, and silver leaf and an oil-based Sharpie for another. It is as if different people made them, but all are somehow Joanne Greenbaum.



Joanne Greenbaum, "Untitled" (2014), oil, acrylic, flashe and graphite on canvas

In a conversation with artist Amy Sillman, Greenbaum said of her creative process:

*I don't really scrape away. I just keep adding until the painting feels like it doesn't need anything more. But there has to be lots of air in there, otherwise it's claustrophobic.*

In a 2014 painting, colored lines coalesce into various configurations, which peek through flat, curving, monochromatic, and puzzle-like shapes rendered in a variety of oranges, blues, reds, pinks, and violets. Placed atop this layered composition is a large, slotted black form that seems to alternate between two and three dimensionality. While the different strata feel connected, it is unclear how, as she's followed no discernible formula. As powerful as this combination of elements is, Greenbaum doesn't turn it into a recipe for success — there is no other painting like this in *Amnesia*.



Joanne Greenbaum, "Untitled" (2016), ballpoint pen, marker, and flashe on canvas



Joanne Greenbaum, "Untitled" (2016), oil-based Sharpie on white stoneware

For a 2016 work, Greenbaum draws irregular concentric circles in ballpoint pen that culminate in an opaque spot near the center. The composition is reminiscent of water emptying down a drain, yet the bubble gum pink ground severs any connection we might make to a real-life scene while elevating the imagery into something that can only happen in paint. Greenbaum is disinterested in resemblance; however, her ability to evoke associations, even as she underscores that we are looking at paint and marks on a canvas, is one of the interesting paradoxes of her art. The dimensional blue and pink shape in a 2013 work looks like nothing we know, while a 2025 painting might bring to mind an aerial view of a futuristic city.

That Greenbaum can traverse a perceptual territory that moves from object to place to action without ever crossing the line into representation is just one of the many pleasures of her art. There is an infectious fun to it that has nothing to do with style or statement. That deep-seated satisfaction of making something wild out of the banal — which is rare in art and poetry — can also be found in Joe Brainard's experimental memoir, *I Remember* (1970), and the poetry of Frank O'Hara, who wrote "Grace to be born and live as variously as possible."

Joanne Greenbaum: *Amnesia* continues at Nino Mier Gallery (62 Crosby Street, Soho, Manhattan) through February 14. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.



Joanne Greenbaum, "Untitled" (2013), oil, ink, acrylic, oil stick, and colored pencil on canvas