

talking **PICTURES**

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Guest Reviewer: Cecilia Whittaker-Doe, "Travels through a Life": Joan Snyder's Paintings at Canada



"Burlap Bars" (2022) oil, acrylic, rosebuds, twigs, burlap on linen, 54 x 66

The first thought that resonates upon looking at Snyder's work is how intentional and thoughtful the color is. And how clear and separate each color is, even colors painted on top of other colors; they mix together more in my perception than on the linen.

In “Burlap Bars” the garden is the constant. It does not speak to me of changing seasons—it is more about the continuous presence of a garden (in nature or metaphorical) through the span of one’s life. In some paintings the thick richly applied areas of paint are flowers without being “drawn” The use of plants and mud in the paintings go beyond their materiality, they preserve. To preserve a memory; to preserve oneself. Is memory a way to preserve oneself?

Death and life; this may be connected to seasons, but it is not obvious connections that the paintings seek. There are line drawings in paint of female nudes – whether overt or suggested. As with the drawn flowers near the thick richly applied areas of paint, the plainly described and the suggested sit together, different ways of seeing and of painting.

Perhaps the life is in the paint; death resides in the physical plant attached to the canvas. Certainly, the celebration of color in its vibrancy, nuanced fleshy color and hovering presence on the surface is metaphor for life. But it could be the opposite; the paint and rose buds intermingle, changing places depending on your own perception/view. There is no line that exists between the “real” and the “abstract”. Everything co-exists.

This painting could suggest the everyday (I did not know the title when these thoughts occurred to me). There is a garden on the left. Something about the two ends gives me a sense of stability and of organizing in different ways, while the center takes me traveling. Perhaps the center panel contains hints of letters received and sent. There is a topographical feeling to this panel, like traveling across some terrain. Time has passed and the painting describes different ways of seeing how this time was spent.

This is a painting that has an obvious ass painted at the bottom. It toys with the idea of a figure bending over. It is all we get to see of the person, yet it presents someone tending the garden. Then again, it could not be an ass, but rather an area of plants in a mapped-out garden. It seems to me that the figures and the gardens in these paintings are one. Beginning, end, past, present, future all intermingles. The figures are female. We are immersed in this painter and her view of life, while being able to translate into our own thoughts, whomever we may be.

I don’t think paintings have to be “figured out”. What I’m writing is how my mind wanders while taking in how Snyder feels her way through each painting. I could go back to any one of them again and again because they offer so much.