

# HYPERALLERGIC

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## The Passions of Joan Snyder

Snyder's painting suggests a constant, self-examining practice, one that remains absolutely faithful to the veteran who wields it.

"My work has been absolutely faithful to me," reads an emphatic text in a 1997 print by Joan Snyder. It might be a banner, as well, for *ComeClose*, her exhibition of 13 recent mixed-medium

paintings reiterating motifs and materials she has explored for over half a century. Nearly every Snyder riff is sampled: thick, churned-up impasto, roughly shaped burlap, collaged seedpods, dried rosebuds and twigs. Among the motifs are colored strokes, fallen cherries, grapes, pods, roses, fields, and shapes suggesting bodies, ponds, moons. Nature, mortality, sexual passion — themes that have recurred throughout her career — are present, but it is her sure-handedness that dazzles above all.



Joan Snyder, "Sub Rosa II" (2023), oil, acrylic, paper, ink, colored pencil on canvas in two parts, diptych 54 x 64 inches (all photos by Adam Reich, courtesy CANADA)

and-yellow ribbon of paint squeezed from the tube, and beyond that, a subtle stained penumbra that creates a magical glow. The pond, reflecting perhaps a few distorted moons, suggests a nighttime view. Is the scattering of images surrounding it the "dream"? The horizontal dashes and strokes that first brought Snyder fame in the 1970s are here decisively rendered in crusts of color. To the right are a fluorescent-pink rose — ever her favored flower — and three vignettes that could almost be miniature Snyder paintings hanging on a wall. Drizzles of paint lend vertical ballast to an overall horizontal read and, above the pond, a long strand of bright yellow paint twists back on itself like the flourish in a signature.

Some paintings feel almost like samplers: "Grounding," for example, with its three registers of inset rectangles containing mini fields of flowers, strokes, and fallen fruit. Or the less serene "Only in April," with its blotchier versions of Snyder motifs, scumbled and bleary, as if dissolving on the walls of her studio. At the top is a somber wreath, reminding us that April, in Snyder's paintings, has signified a time of crisis and mourning. Here the choppy bits seem to have sunk to the bottom of the painting, darkening the mood. Throughout the show, the frequent use of pink continues the artist's insistence on a defiant femininity, as in the curvaceous pond at the center of "Magenta & Bronze." Look closely within the ambient pink of "Sub Rosa II" and you will find a scrawled naked woman, as on a bathroom wall. For Snyder, painting and sexuality are closely linked.

Everywhere we are made aware of a passion for nature that is deeply personal. Twigs and straw are never marshaled to the grandiose, as in Anselm Kiefer. "The heart is a fistful of earth" Snyder wrote in a painting many years ago. Her materials are trapped in the boat-like fissures floating through soul catchers, along with primeval handprints and the word "Soul." Paint-covered earth, dried flowers, and twigs congeal at the bottom of "Red Velvet Vertical," while above rise layers of deliberately painted bands ranging from deep red through rainbow hues to black, toward a kind of second horizon with yet more colored bands above. The painting suggests a constant, self-examining practice, one that, 20 years after her printed declaration, remains "absolutely faithful" to the veteran who wields it.