

Painting With Paper: Joan R. Brownstein At The Cooley Gallery



Artist Joan R. Brownstein

OLD LYME, CONN. — As a dealer in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century American folk painting, much of it portraiture, Joan R. Brownstein is known for her scholarly precision and acute eye for quality. What some may not know is that Brownstein derives much of her insight from practical experience. She supported herself as a painter for years before she began buying and selling the work of others in 1980.

A chance conversation with Jeffrey W. Cooley at New York's Winter Antiques Show led to

"Painting with Paper," an exhibition of Brownstein's latest work at the Cooley Gallery. The show arrays more than 50 small, identically framed geometric abstractions, forceful in their lively, almost musical, variety. Brownstein deftly deploys shape, color and line in ways that suggest movement and depth, exploring a terrain both physical and emotional. The Cooley Gallery will continue representing Brownstein following the show's close on May 22.

"These images combine everything you want to find in a good picture. They are intriguing, stimulating, pleasurable and interesting," says Cooley.

Brownstein acknowledges a debt to American landscape painting and writes that through abstraction she came to understand and appreciate American folk art.

"Years ago, I fell in love with the great Nineteenth Century landscapes of the American West, with their dominance of color. As a collector and dealer, I soon realized that I'd never be able to afford them, but that I could buy primitive portraiture, big and small, and early photography, which I'm starting to show again," she says.

Cooley and others see paral-



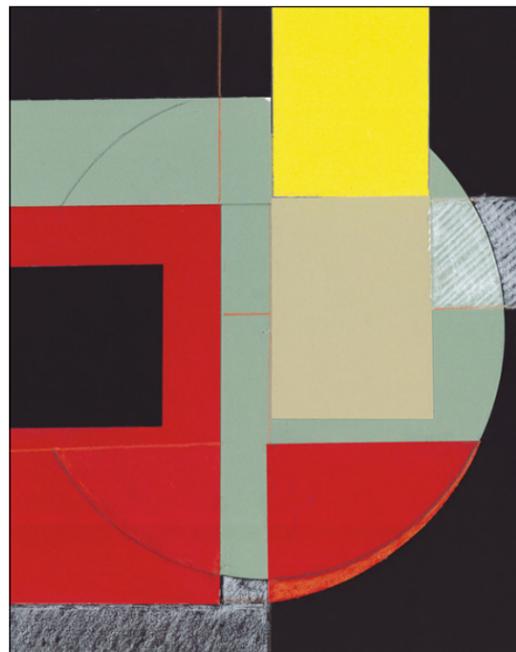
"Threads 1," cut paper, colored pencil, graphite; 6 by 4½ inches.



"Circles 20," cut paper, colored pencil, graphite; 7½ by 6 inches.



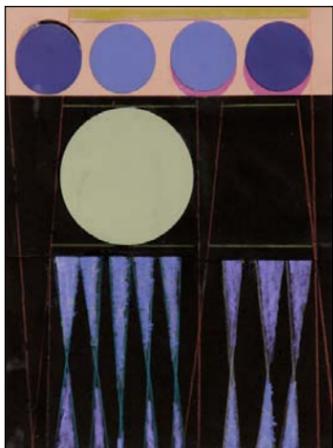
Review by
Antiques and The Arts Weekly
Laura Beach, Managing Editor



"Not Mondrian 1," cut paper, colored pencil, graphite; 6 by 5 inches.



"Shadows 4," cut paper, colored pencil, graphite; 7 by 4½ inches.



"X's and Squares 12," cut paper, colored pencil, graphite; 6 by 4½ inches.

els between Brownstein's current work and that of the folk artists she represents, observing in both flatness, linearity and bold use of color. But

Brownstein is hardly untutored. Her sophisticated compositions perhaps have more in common with Japanese prints — subtle, delicate expressions governed by aesthetic rigor and uniformity of scale.

Like leaves of a book, these potent pieces may be read as a memoir, an artist's earnest, assiduous reckoning with life. Brownstein uses Color-aid, a light-fast paper, to make her cut-paper paintings, enhancing the roughly 6½-by-4½-inch compositions with colored pencil and graphite. Her choice of scale, materials and technique stems in part from a recently diagnosed medical condition. Tremors make it difficult for her to hold a paint brush.

Brownstein is making art with fervor these days, often working in her studio for ten hours at a stretch. "Painting with Paper" has about it a palpable intensity. It is meditative, even mystical. Organized around a series of themes, the show moves from "Circles," a kinetic sequence of rotating

orbs; to the aqueous "Harmony" compositions, in which some see the influence of the Bay Area artist Richard Diebenkorn; to the tactile, gestural "Threads" and "Shadows" pieces. The aptly named "Constellation" series has elements of the luminous and nocturnal.

Earlier in her career, Brownstein fashioned large-scale paintings in acrylic. She has returned to the medium, creating a series of poured paintings she calls "Stopped Flows." As she explains, "I have migrated back to a kind of imagery that is very familiar to me. It is more fluid and lyrical."

Of her ongoing role as a dealer, she says, "I am serious about making great collections for the people with whom I want to work. If a piece is wonderful, I buy it, but I'm not adding stock. I have quite a large inventory as it is."

The Cooley Gallery is at 25 Lyme Street. For information, 860-434-8807 or www.cooley-gallery.com. For more on Joan Brownstein, www.joanbrownsteinpaintings.com.



"Painting with Paper" at the Cooley Gallery in Old Lyme, Conn.