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Forbes

Joanne Greenbaum On The Future Of Painting With Glass

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Joanne Greenbaum JSP ART PHOTOGRAPHY

[Joanne Greenbaum](#) is a New York artist who has been painting abstract compositions for over 30 years. Her work, which ranges from playful to chaotic, cartoonish and sometimes architectural compositions, which are always a conundrum to decode. Recently, the artist has turned to making works on glass for her latest solo exhibition at Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York City, *I'm Doing My Face In Magic Marker*.

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For her latest work, Greenbaum has created a series of ‘glass paintings,’ flat, wall-works made entirely of glass. It signals a shift – glass is becoming a central medium in contemporary art, not as sculpture, but as wall works. As Greenbaum explains: “I was interested in making glass paintings, and I’ve used cutouts to work with the beauty of glass, not against it.”

Women have been working with glass for ages, but it was so often considered craft. Now, glass is considered high art. The artist spoke from her Tribeca studio about glass, painting and the art of controlled chaos.



Joanne Greenbaum, Untitled, 2019. kiln-formed glass JSP ART PHOTOGRAPHY

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How did you start working with glass, and how did it lead to glass paintings?

Joanne Greenbaum: I had heard of an artist residency to work with glass and I applied, as I was intrigued about the process and wanted to see what I could do in glass. When I got there, I had to learn the basics such as how to cut glass and program the kiln. Shortly after, I arrived at Bullseye Projects, I realized that I wanted to work with the colored glass in a very basic way, I didn't want to destroy the glass, burn or even transform it, I wanted to work with it in a way that would highlight its beauty and transparency. I was so taken with all the color varieties and forms of glass that they had and wanted to work with it in a way that would feel natural to me. So I created glass paintings.



Joanne Greenbaum, Untitled, 2018 COURTESY RACHEL UFFNER

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How has glass changed in terms of ceramics and contemporary art? Being accepted as serious?

I think the idea of crafts used in contemporary art is fairly old at this point. Many many artists use traditional crafts like ceramics, glass and weaving in their work. I don't think these things are looked down upon anymore as lesser. I think the opposite has happened in the art world; its almost expected for artists to use these materials in some circles. That said, I don't think that I am following any trends or hitching on a bandwagon. I find that my instinct on what I want to do with materials is usually correct and that making these glass pieces were an extension of what I already do, albeit more simply.



Joanne Greenbaum JSP ART PHOTOGRAPHY

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You've taken a 'flat' approach to glass, why?

I learned pretty quickly that casting or hot work (glass blowing) wasn't really available to me, and I also saw that I didn't want to do that. I wanted to work more immediately and quickly and fused glass allows for that process. I already make three dimensional sculpture in ceramic. So I started to make two dimensional paintings and went with that. I wanted to use what was available there in terms of the huge range of colored glass and glass bits and powders. I liked the limitations of using cut glass to make these panels that in a way mimicked some of the themes in my paintings. I felt it was very conducive to what I wanted graphically and also the simplicity of the process suited me. I loved working with the colors and cutting shapes to create glass paintings. I also liked the speed of the process, that I was able to make a piece or a few in a day, put them right in the kiln and come back the next day to see how it came out.

Where did the title of this exhibition, *I'm Doing My Face In Magic Marker*, come from?

When I start to think about a show, the gallery asks what would be the title. Since I don't usually title my individual paintings, I have to come up with a title. I constantly make lists of things I think would make good titles, such as lyrics or titles of a song, something I saw online, or just a group of words that I think sounds good and relevant to the work. So I had heard this line somewhere I think on television or heard a song with the lyric "I'm painting my face with magic marker." I use markers a lot in my painting, so I wrote it down on the list. When I had to give the title to the gallery I sent in a few titles of which this was one of them, and I kept thinking of it and realizing it was a good title and not the usual thing like "new paintings." I found out later on, however that it is a lyric from a song by the group [Christine and the Queens](#), which I didn't know about.

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Joanne Greenbaum, Untitled, 2018 COURTESY OF RACHEL UFFNER

What fueled this new series of paintings on view?

Nothing in particular fuels a body of work. I am always making paintings and a group of paintings in a similar time period that talk to each other. So about six months ago, when I knew I had a date for this show, I started to gather works that I had made that could start to form a coherent group. I also like to throw a note of discord into the mix. At a certain point in the preparing for a show, one gets a sense of what the show will look like and how different is it from the last group, I always want to make work that is a departure from the last. When I work, I try not to have any expectations, or even a specific direction in mind. If it feels familiar, I usually stop and try to go another way to create a new thing.

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Joanne Greenbaum, Untitled, 2019 JSP ART PHOTOGRAPHY

Is there such a thing as controlled chaos?

Yes, of course. I think that is how I work, I create some sort of chaos and then try to rein it in, but also I like to see how far I can go with chaos, before it starts not to make sense. Knowing when to stop is very important.

Is the art world changing to be more inclusive in terms of gender parity?

Not really, and I am always asked this question. I don't like answering it because I sound like a broken record. It is changing but very slowly and at the top levels of the art world, it is not changing near fast enough. The thing about all of this is that women are constantly being erased. This fact of erasure and invisibility impels me to continue fighting for myself and my female friends. By the way, male artists are never asked this question.

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