

Art in America

Joan Snyder

at Franklin Parrasch Gallery
by Julian Kreimer



Joan Snyder: *Requiem Redux*, 2014, oil, acrylic, papier-mache, pastel, fabric, mud, straw, graphite, and glitter on canvas, 60 by 72 inches; at Franklin Parrasch Gallery.

Joan Snyder's canvases—alternatively gentle and tragic, pastoral and grimy—elicit thoughts of Susan Sontag's half-century-old call for an "erotics of art." The works' emotional openness compels us to experience them directly through our feelings, rather than intellectually through abstract ideas. Snyder's exuberant use of materials also points to another meaning of the word "feeling"---an act of touching something with one's hand.

Snyder's exhibition at Franklin Parrasch consisted of eight recent paintings. In *Requiem Redux* (2014), materials including papier-maché, patterned fabrics, mud, straw and glitter share the canvas with oil and acrylic. The sense of touch—of materials handled—is intertwined with an expression of grief, communicated as much by the word “Requiem,” whose letters are scrawled here and there in

the piece, as by the light-absorbing square of black velvet positioned in the upper-right corner. The figure of a rose appears three times on the left side of the painting, in chunky white, muted pink and washed-out earthy brown. Each inspection of the work seems to reveal an additional layer, such as the bright strokes of quinacridone red and cobalt violet smothered under smears of pink and yellow.

The rose appeared throughout the works on view. The exhibition title, “Sub Rosa,” alluded both to this age-old symbol of passion and mortality and to the complex layering evident in all the paintings. In *Winter Rose* (2013), black-red roses with the suppurating texture of scabs dominate the upper and lower registers of the composition. At the center of the canvas are thick smears of pale green and lavender overpainted with pale yellow. Such cool tones evoke the cold skin of a cadaver.

It takes guts to find new life in a symbol as sentimental and overused as the rose, but Snyder's formidable power as an artist has always been in her ability to present familiar things (words, simple landscapes, brushstrokes themselves) with a roar of emotional intensity, channeled through her visceral grappling with materials. Looking at her work, one can feel the physical glee of making it: the extension of wrist, shoulder and elbow in the act of brushing, gluing and glittering. In *Symphony VII* (2014), faint lines in red, pink and black grid out a loose set of eight squares, two high and four across. A thickly crusted rose sits on each of the squares of the top row: a whitish rose on a pink square, a red rose on a red square, a purple one on purple, and a yellow one on the raw linen. The bottom row is filled with long streaks of thick white paint as well as silk strips, berries, twigs and sunflowers encased in a syrupy dark-orange gel.

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In interviews, Snyder has related the loose grids that structure her paintings not to 1960s Minimalist but to the lined yellow paper that children often use for drawing and to the tongue-and-groove wainscoting that an old studio of hers had. Her emphasis on finding inspiration in seemingly mundane items echoes the way her paintings harbor an emotion immediacy that reveals itself directly to the viewer.