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Review: From Joan Snyder, a Profusion of Flowers at Franklin Parrasch

By ROBERTA SMITH JUNE 11, 2015



Joan Snyder's "Symphony VII" includes berries and dried sunflowers among its materials.

Franklin Parrasch Gallery

Joan Snyder, who had her first solo show in New York in 1970, has always been extremely present in her paintings and, like them or not, this intensity is in itself an achievement. The best of her latest efforts, produced over the last two years, confront us with heavy textures, strong colors, bursting roseate motifs and sometimes fraught bits of language, which all coalesce into a visceral self-expression that uses nearly every means at a painter's disposal, and then some. For Ms. Snyder, painting functions as a kind of scrapbook, diary, garden journal and bulletin board.

In "Sub Rosa," as this show is titled, Ms. Snyder is digging beneath or perhaps going further into the rose, one of her longtime motifs. As before, her surfaces include mud, rosebuds, straw, papier-mâché (used as extra-thick paint), twigs and fabric, which she uses to create an exaggerated physicality that is relieflike and luxuriant.

Once or twice here — especially with "Random Beauty" — the work can feel too loose and unfinished, but the best pieces have a new no-nonsense tautness, almost a precision. This is especially true of "Winter Rose" and "Symphony VII," which contrast large blooms with luscious expanses of thick horizontal brush strokes. But it also applies to "Amor Matris," whose smaller white, pink and yellow blossoms bleed softly down the surface along with the phrase "if not, know that I have loved you very much." Ms. Snyder's work is performative, feminist and painterly in equally robust parts. After 45 years, she is still making paintings that you have to contend with.