



## Four Exhibits

*Commonalities among exhibiting artists at Carl Solway Gallery*

**MATT MORRIS** // FEB 4, 2009

It seems possible that the four concurrent exhibitions now presented at Carl Solway Gallery are meant to link abstract artists from the past to two contemporary artists who grapple with abstraction, color, humanity and nature. The full force of an abstract painter exploring the emotive potential of color and mark is exhibited in *Joan Snyder: Selected Paintings 1999-2007*, while earlier examples of this are on display in the selection of drawings by Hans Hofmann, although they are not his most beguiling or innovative. And deconstructions of the human figure in *Fred Tomaselli: Selected Editions 1991-2005* receive a thoughtful precedent in *Joan Miró: Masterpiece Lithographs from 1948*.

Joan Snyder is one of a generation of painters who revived the most expressive parts of Abstract Expressionism to the shock and awe of a world after Minimalism. Since the late 1960s, the New Jersey-born Snyder's paintings have made their way through any number of New York galleries and have been shown in a solo exhibition at the Jewish Museum (2005) and the huge *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution* that traveled North America last year. In 2007 she was made a MacArthur Fellow.

Her paintings are positioned in the discourse of Postmodernism and the circular argument of "post-post" we are treading presently. Her vocabulary of strokes, blossoms and chunky blocks is the tamest element of the paintings. Plant matter, paper pulp and who-knows-what have been collaged onto most of the surfaces. "Flow," for example is initially colored with the blue-green shades of a babbling brook. But seeds glitter and a swath of cheesecloth have been embedded into paint that sometimes gets transparent and gelatinous enough to resemble splatters of vomit.

Snyder exaggerates every potential element of abstract painting, toying with decoration, assemblage and ugly beauty. A stunning diptych, "Primary Fields" courts a lazy grid on a white ground with a fiery canvas of rosy and bloody reds. On the left, little rectangles of dripping paint are arranged on bars like musical compositions or penmanship exercises. The right canvas is like a Monet set aflame with juicy spots that look like gaping wounds. It is a Baroque and metaphysical painting. "Sigh" is a funny assemblage, a grid of festive, flashy colors with a copious splash of red glitter that is displayed in Solway's upstairs room.

I'm not excited by Fred Tomaselli's works the way much of the art world is. Originally from Santa Monica, Calif., Tomaselli has been exhibiting widely since attending California Institute of the Arts in the early 1980s. He now works in Brooklyn, with shows in 2009 lined up at White Cube in London and the Aspen Art Museum.

Are his many modes of working meticulous? Sure, but they're also coy in their combination of recreational and pharmaceutical drug references and neo-mystical arrays of human body parts. At Solway, we are treated to two samples of his typical collage-and-resin panels from the artist's collection as access points to his various print-media explorations. Of all the work, "Phrase Book (web)" is a beautiful curiosity — a limited-edition book with sleeve onto which a tiny crowd of images blasts out from a center axis point. It is like a painting with a book slid

into its side, which has to be one of the more cunning combinations of text and image I have seen.

Hofmann and Miró are represented by lesser works that nonetheless typify their contributions to art history. The galley of the downstairs space is lined with Miró's lithographs, full of wide-eyed little goofs that topple around stars, moons and curly scribbling. Where Tomaselli might comment on hallucination, Miró's work is informed by surrealist dreams with open-ended narratives. Among all the Hofmann drawings, "Untitled," circa 1949, contains some of the same vivacious color and violently animated composition that we find in Snyder's paintings. A hot pink bulb is jammed up against a plank of blue, almost totally surrounded by a field of black ink.

I wish there were more show-stoppers to see, but the four artists provide ample visuals for consideration. At the best points, interesting links can be drawn between them.

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**SOLWAY GALLERY's current exhibitions continue through April 18.**

**<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13017996/four-exhibits-review>**