

BROAD RANGE

THE RICH CAREER OF PAINTER STEWART GOLDMAN "THEN AND NOW"

By Jud Yalkut

Several years in the planning with the Springfield Museum of Art has resulted in a major retrospective of the work of influential Cincinnati painter Stewart Goldman. Beginning his career as a teacher of painting in 1968 and designer of the gallery at the Art Academy of Cincinnati in 1971, Goldman became Chair of the Fine Arts Program in 1983 until his retirement in 2001.

With the establishment of his studio in Covington, Kentucky, Goldman began work on a powerful series of conceptually daring paintings based on the Holocaust. Thus began several cycles of creative vision which propelled his work from incisive social commentary to pure painting in color form and back again.

The broad range of Goldman's work is represented in Springfield's "Then and Now," filling all the special exhibition galleries at the Museum through April 12. Only excluding two series of early period works, paintings based on Ovid and watercolors and drawings from the Umbrian landscape in Italy during 1985, the exhibition includes "Paintings Referencing the Holocaust," "Variations on Rubens," and "Prints from Tales of Slavery and Deliverance" from "Then," and his mural-size "Tape Wall Drawings" and the elegant coloristic flows of his "Squares" in "Now."

"After the intense involvement in the Holocaust paintings, I wanted to do something which was not so emotionally engaging," remarked Goldman, relating his experience to his grandmother leaving Kiev in the early part of the 20th century. "All these things are a reflection

of what I'm thinking about," he added, "autobiographical, viewing and thinking about the world."

The Rubens variations series, triggered by the painting "Homage to Venus" which he began studying at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 1986, resulted in a total of 24 variations, four of which are included in the current exhibition. Stimulated by the fact of his wife being an art historian centering on the 17th century, Goldman began reintroducing the figure in smaller works and decided to work in series, resulting in extraordinary visions in which the surging figural elements became more than gestural and interact with color changes through matrices of square elements.

"I became interested in pushing away landscape and becoming more abstract," he noted, "using complements of color in my own contrary way, not wanting gesture to determine the painting." In "Red Sea" (2003-04), white areas emerge where color was and with deep complementary green swimming within the expanse of varied reds.

The pale lightning jags of "Shazzam" (2003) contrast sharply with the deeply crimson-flecked dark greens of "Al's Gal" (2002-03), and the pink, orange, red gradations in "Lava"



above: Stewart Goldman, "Shazzam" (2003), oil on linen

right: Stewart Goldman and his "Variation on Rubens #7" (1988), oil on linen and ragboard



(2007) become a warm bath for the eyes. Other "square" works are more minimalist, such as the floating blue flecked cloud above the red expanse and subtle curves of "Greenland" (2007), the white fingers within the green variations of ground in "Fog" (2005), and the pale cresting curves on the top of a deep blue-green in "Trey" (2005).

Additional "square" pieces have more linear elements within them, like the abstract forest feel of trunks and curves in "Mellow Yellow" (2001) and the blue-purple wisps of floating currents in the updraft movements of "Yellowscape" (2002-03). The subtle flows and movements in these abstract squares become almost cinematic when Goldman composes mounted matrices of paintings as in the 16 one-foot panels of "Herclitus Mind" (2001), and the slowly evolving gestural forms of the 36 paneled "Elysian" (2001-04) on its large pink background.

The tape pieces, initiated in his 2000 installation "Reminder" at the Warsaw Project in Cincinnati, utilized colored electrical tape and chalk drawings on walls.

Goldman initially began to delineate architectural elements with tape, forms relating to the Holocaust, like a tower (one such form seen in outline on colored squares in an oil on linen from 1989), a gas chamber, and a bridge. The latter form, executed in 2006 with red tape, is wall-sized here in blue tape in "Lodz Bridge," based on geometric structure in wood that the Germans used to connect the ghettos in the town of Gletz that they had divided.

Beginning with a show Goldman had at the Weston Gallery in Cincinnati two years ago, and reviewed in these pages, he referenced maps of cities "which in my view were put into decay by the way the country was run, like Baghdad, Washington D.C., and New Orleans." Outlining the main forms and routes in chalk, he wanted the tape elements to gradually disintegrate with the chalk marks being ghostlike memories of what the cities were, "a metaphor of what it was and now is, disappearing and passing."

The map pieces became quite large in response to the expansive wall spaces available at the Museum, and in the present manifestation of "Baghdad" (2006) the red tape became symbolic of dried blood against the confluence of deep blue rivers. "Washington D.C." is red, white and blue dominated by a large broken white rectangle, and "New Orleans" has two shades of blue with white trails where the dark blue has been intentionally allowed to curl and droop down, like the diminishing superstructures of the afflicted cities.

The Springfield Museum of Art is located at 107 Cliff Park Road. Admission is \$5 for non-members and free to members and children under 18. Museum hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and Thursday until 9 p.m., and 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday (admission is free). For more information, call (937) 325-4673 or visit www.springfieldartmuseum.com.

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