Stewart Goldman: Presence Through Absence (Review)

BY MATT MORRIS · MARCH 4TH, 2009 · ART

Solid curating and progressive notions have gone into the Cincinnati Art Museum's new solo exhibition, *Stewart Goldman: Presence Through Absence*, in its Vance-Waddell Gallery now through May 10.

Born and trained as an artist in Philadelphia, Goldman has been a resident of Cincinnati since 1968. For most of the time in Cincinnati, he was a professor at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, and it's not difficult to trace his influence through several generations of artists who attended the college during his tutelage. My own time at the Art Academy did not overlap Goldman's tenure (he had already retired to focus on studio practice), but I nonetheless recognize a rapport between the principles that drive these works and those that formed the foundations of my own aesthetic beliefs.

The exhibition traces an evolution from representational painting, of recognizable rooms, into the increasingly less certain terrain of abstract painting. But the radical shifts within this one painter's oeuvre don't suggest artistic schizophrenia. Rather, they portray an audacious sense of creative evolution that embodies a response to issues of painting and the society in which he has worked. Actually, from the examples of more than 30 years of painting on display, Goldman might be successfully discussed as both a model for other artists and an encapsulated history of painting in himself.

Goldman's representational works of the late 1970s were painted in a time when abstraction reigned. He, along with a cadre of artists such as Donald Sultan (whose linoleum paintings from this period are now on view at the Contemporary Arts Center), Susan Rothenberg, Philip Guston and local painter Constance McClure, forced images and representation back into their paintings in spite of their unpopularity within the art establishment.

In Goldman's case, paintings of the interiors of his house, emptied of nearly all of

the furniture, eventually gave way to laconic views of Holocaust gas chambers, such as “Chamber I” from 1981. The inclusion of this stark, planar work — with furnace glow ominously shining across the ceiling of the chamber — charges even the most abstract paintings alongside it with a sense of social conflict.

Goldman’s persistent saccharine pastel hues are not the experiences of quietude that one might expect, but are instead arranged in paintings that are at times mesmerizing in their simplicity and tense in their intentional sense of compounded visual crisis. From the outside wall of the room painted a misty teal, to the sherbet orange painted within its arched entryway, back to the wall painting in “Elysian,” the gallery hung with his paintings gets drawn into the color language Goldman elucidates. “Elysian” itself makes the wall part of the painting as a grid of small square panels, dappled and streaked with color are spaced across the lavender expanse.

In “Couch" from 1981 (pictured above), pink and robin-egg blue are iced into a minimally depicted interior space surrounding a couch (little more than a rectangle) in the center of the composition. The space appears to be bathed in white light, bright enough to be able to carry the visual weight of a hot orange rectangle painted thickly near the right edge.

If this is a window to the outdoors, why does the color of the light enter the space so palely? The visual ambiguity of the scene is not a problem at all but is rather the kind of poetic license abstraction affords, beholden to Cubism and related to some of the degrees of abstraction found in Richard Diebenkorn’s work of that period, such as the museum’s own “Interior with View of Buildings.”

Goldman modulates the supposed divisions between representation and abstraction. Many of the formal qualities in “Couch” are also found in the much more recent abstract painting “Slope,” an oil-on-linen from 2006. The 2-foot-square canvas is mostly a flatly painted field of salmon pink, with a flurry of white and rose-colored shapes banking across the bottom edge of the square. Here Goldman conceives the same eloquently empty space as the rooms he painted 30 years earlier, without the need to anchor the visual experience in a recognizable picture.

It is daring that the museum and Jessica Flores, its associate curator of contemporary art, continue to intersperse contemporary exhibitions that feature vital members of the Cincinnati art world alongside international stars like Ryan McGinness and Mark Bradford. *Presence Through Absence* offers the chance to celebrate a long-term pursuit of aesthetic surprises in Goldman’s career and a clear case that painting, especially abstract painting, is a persistently relevant and energetic means to encountering and responding to the world we inhabit.

Sea Change: Characterizing his Community's Disparate Temperament

Sunlight's Daily Dance

There must be a dozen ways to analyze the progress of Stewart Goldman's oeuvre since his 1981 series *Chamber I-VI.* I would like to see how far I can go by discussing his paintings as heat-sensitive fields that measure a particular era's mood, registered over the duration he spent working on each piece, rather than recorded over brief time spans as photographs, portraits, and landscapes do. Like John Marin, the painter he most admires, Goldman's vision remains trained on his immediate environment, intent to transform subtle movements into enduring marks. Not surprisingly, he considers Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning his two favorite Modernist painters. Remarkably passionate painters, the former cast an introspective glance, while the latter directed his sight outwards. More likely to gaze both ways, Goldman's painting style and palette run even hotter than theirs. Prone to employ reds, golds, pinks, oranges, plums, limes and forest greens, the most recent paintings actually evoke fanning flames, radiation, the birth of stars, explosions, combustion, and infrared satellite maps. Paintings like *Greenseas* (2003-4), *Blue Heat* (2007), *Pulse* (2007), *Lava* (2007), or *Fog* (2005) sport weather-related titles, while *Greenland* (2007), *The Divide* (2006), *Red Sea* (2003-2004), *Sinai* (2003-2005), propose disputed territories and political hotspots. Like the animated satellite maps that forecast air currents pushing west, east, north or south, most Goldman paintings provoke a sense of movement, as patches drift downward, get caught in crevices, and/or rebound upwards. What I view as indicative of changing weather patterns (humidity, frost, fog, haze, visibility, mist), Goldman insists is sunlight's daily dance as the sun shifts from east to west, getting stuck behind clouds, pollution, and built/natural obstacles. Whether weather or light, a Goldman painting is an inquiry concerning atmospheric conditions over time.

With the dark and musty *Chamber I*, one glimpses clouds floating outside the window, while a golden sunlight blankets the ceiling, whose red-orange glow echoes the electrified ceiling fixture affixed to the floor, like Marcel Duchamp's *Trebuchet*. Stranger still, daylight emerges from the basement. The tree shadows dancing atop the floor and gate-leg table in *Chamber II* evoke the midday sun. Although a tree is visible through the left hand-window, the trees casting shadows must actually be situated in front of a high-placed window stretching along the unpictured wall, which explains each I-beam's yellowy edge and the patches glowing on the ceiling. The distant view of a smoky factory is balanced by a toxic red edge, which seeps along the floor molding, eventually aligning with the shadow on the table, and the candle's flame in the window sill on the right.

The overall darkness of *Chamber III* coupled with its fiery pinky-yellowy reflections from the open oven door recalls the intense burst of light spread across the darkness during sunrise. A sizzling cauldron of wispy vapors and fiery particles, rising upwards through a rectangular shaft toward heaven, occupies the center of a dingy ceramic tile floor in *Chamber IV*. Similarly edged in red, these sweaty walls, dusted with soot support the ceiling rigged with noxious showers, while a lone white towel basks in the smolder, as dusk reclaims the nightsky. Fully bathed in artificial light, a dissecting table takes center court in *Chamber V*. The overseers are complicit, since their room above doubly illuminates this sinister scene. In *Chamber VI*, daybreak has come, but so have harmful emerald fumes. Despite visions of a better world (à la Dürer), the furnace's walls close in, further provoking restriction, suffocation, and hopelessness. A

highlighted escape ladder hangs just outside the gas chamber's exit, while a running water hose floods the floor. Those trapped inside could never know how close they were to getting out. In cycling through these six existential scenes, where promise and despair commingle, light becomes the actor, who steps out to arouse and direct viewer sentiment.

These six paintings reference the holocaust, both metaphorically and literally. Fifteen years later, he produced a boxed set of thirteen etchings, *Tales of Slavery and Deliverance* (1997), in direct response to holocaust survivor Dr. Anna Ornstein's girlhood stories of living at Auschwitz with her mother. Two of these plates contain elements from the *Chambers* series, such as *III*'s flung-open oven door and *VI*'s image in reverse. Rendered in black and white, these images evoke ascendance, whereby, their top halves seem to float away from their more grounded bottoms. One imagines that the concentration-camp victims' ghosts and spirits have infiltrated these killing fields, where overwork and starvation were just as likely causes of death as extermination. The words "Arbeit Macht Frei" run across the top of *Rock,* reminding one of the impossibilities of a life of hard labor sustained on only 180 calories a day. Despite being two-tone, several of these etchings convey light sources, such as the coal-fired black smoke billowing out of a determined train's smokestack, lamps posted on security fences, the crematoriums' eerie flames, or light poking behind clouds. As *Chamber V* portends, evil lurks in darkness, so vigilance is man's first line of defense. My favorite etching is *World*, whereby an earthly globe, whose latitudes and longitudes are demarcated by barbed wire, is being set free by three plant roots which aim to split the man-made limits asunder. Once again, the man-made is merely artifice, and wickedness is more exemplary nurture than nature.

Those who view Goldman's tape drawings as a blip, or "just a phase," overlook the fact they hold his interest, precisely because they don't hold. They come unstuck, sag, flop, and reposition themselves, a process that Julian Opie has occasionally explored. The "tape" drawings visualize time, thus "un"memorializing otherwise public monuments such as bridges, concentration camps, and towers. More recently, he's placed taped maps of controversial river cities such as Washington D.C., New Orleans, Baghdad on the wall, only to watch these great cities' streets fall away, as if some conquering army or natural disaster had visited instead.

His most enigmatic works, the *Rubens* series, are strangely his most conceptual, which seems like a contradiction in terms, since conceptual works whose rules are transparent are most often straightforward. Trapped, as all painters were in the late 1980s, by a desire to rekindle visual pleasure, but an equally strong fear of reprisal from the theorists whose politically-charged critiques of beauty had rendered creating compelling objects a crime, Goldman found a way to make colorful paintings that eschewed the retinal. In fact, one could argue that they're difficult to look at for too long. Rather than seduce spectators, they push them away, though they're still remarkably charged, perhaps because one assumes that there's an identifiable pattern, not unlike a Sol LeWitt wall drawing. Hoping to grasp each painting's structure, one stares as long as possible, only to realize that there is no unifying system, save that each square is rendered in a different color. *Variation on Rubens #10* is perhaps the most unified, since one can extend the square patches vertically or horizontally to find squares that combine elements of the four colors meeting on one square, though it's hardly flawless, since the square where yellow, brown, brick, and light blue join up is predominately red. Nearly a decade later, Sherrie Levine presented classic pictures as

pixilated grids, which may be what Goldman had had in mind. However different the net effects, his painterly paintings from that era stand as the test cases for the floating, moving, and dancing patches of color that have held his interest since the millennium. In most instances, the color-blocked edges were added later, making the works seem more rule-driven than they actually were.

In examining these *Rubens* paintings, he somehow realized that marks interested him more than figures, since he soon dropped imagery all together, moving into an abstract realm whose focus is abstraction in the Ellsworth Kelly sense, that is, worldly details that are not identifiable. While the *Rubens* works are hot and fiery, full of the passion required to storm the ban on visual pleasure, the next body of work was remarkably cool, almost distant, though no less colorful. Unlike the prior flame-like patches, his new tool was the mostly vertical patch or mark. Rather than subdivide a giant canvas into colored squares, he opted to build large-scale works from grids of small squares (easier to transport back from a residency in Germany). Rather than move from the border to the center, as the *Rubens* paintings direct the eyes, one's eyes glide all around, absent a particular focal point. Moving much slower through *Feldafing II* (1997), from one panel to the next, either down or right, one senses slight variations from one panel to the next, as if the grid paintings double as story boards. In some cases, he left a lot of white ground, similar in effect to De Kooning's '80s paintings, while in other cases, such as *Feldafing Scape* (1997) and *Mellow Yellow* (2001), Goldman completely covered the canvas.

His real breakthrough came with *Hericlitus Mind* (2001), a painting comprised of sixteen one-foot square panels. Each of these little paintings is like a movie unto itself, whereas the 1997 grid required the eye to move to produce the storyboard effect. All of sudden, the colored patches are buoyant. They fly and dive, abut against one another, hover, push, and even disappear, as the white space transitions from ground to figure. In those days, I didn't consider satellite maps, per se, though weather crossed my mind, since some images seem crisp and frosty, while others are sunny and clear, though none are particularly gloomy. Some evoke crashing waves or snow-capped peaks, so they still feel linked to landscape. At first glance, *Elysian* (2001-2004), which took several years to resolve, resembles *Feldafing II.* On further inspection, it seems like a singular work that's been chopped up, since many marks extend onto their neighboring squares.

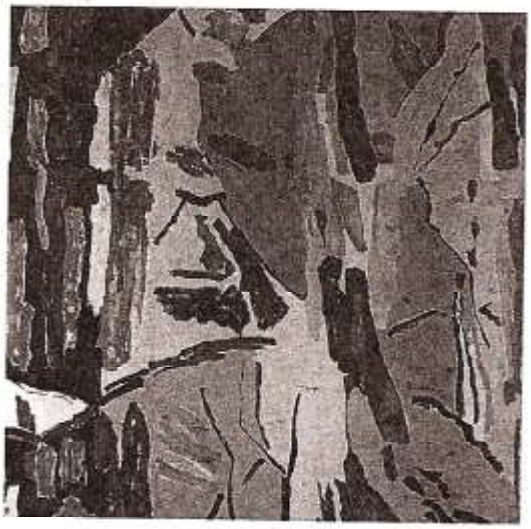
After moving to Cincinnati in 1999, I visited Goldman's studio at least once a year, so I kept abreast of his studio progress. Lacking the perspective I've since gained, I used to ask why cool, smooth, monochrome patches adjoined fuzzy edges, scumbled strips, or hot chunks. I now see that each surface's virtual moves come from this incongruous painterly device. If I once felt like he couldn't decide between hard and soft edge, I now realize that the unlikely simultaneity of such marks perpetuate events. Consider *Slope*, whereby the top white patch instigates an avalanche, *Trey,* whose reversing figure (aqua/plum) /ground (white) bits beckon back and forth, or *Fog*, whose grayish shards float everything northeast. *Blue Heat* simulates the turmoil caused by arctic air masses blasting into hot Santa Anna winds, alternatively viewed as diametrically-opposed political positions. *Flit, Greenseas*, *Sinai* (all painted between 2003 and 2005), *The Anatomy Lesson, Incursion, Pulse* and *Virginia* (all four from 2007) elicit spontaneous explosions, randomly spewing fragments and embers in all directions. These seven are equally reminiscent of distant galaxies' otherworldly events, such as exploding asteroids and the birth of stars. Goldman recalls painting *Virginia* in response

to 2007's Virginia Tech shootings: one can thus infer that other paintings reflect real-world events. The super calm *Greenland* (2007) is primarily red, with an upward patch of white melting into blue, a clear reference to rising temperatures causing its glaciers to recede. *The Divide* (2006) suggests an imaginary map of the Mediterranean Sea, the Jordan River and the precious aquifers dividing Israel and Palestine.

Topsy-Turvy

In addition to light's changing impact and people's varying temperaments, Goldman doesn't hesitate to rotate the spectator's perspective. If you've ever seen a video of Helen Frankenthaler making a painting, then you might know what I mean, though I don't believe that Goldman actually swivels the canvas around on the floor, as she does. I believe he keeps the painting upright, even when painting scenes upside down. The six *Chamber* paintings demonstrate his paintings's twirling perspective. *Chamber I* is actually a room, the foyer of the old Art Academy, turned upside down with several added features (climbing bars on the walls and a ladder placed on cabinets, tilted toward the ceiling) (I recommend holding the catalog upside down to see this for yourself). Similarly, the staircases hanging from the ceilings in *Chamber III* and *Chamber V* make more sense as bleachers or staircases positioned on the floor. This effect is especially prevalent with the most recent works. With *Orange Stripe,* the orange-red and blue edges waffle between being flat borders and becoming cliff's edges, as seen from above. This same painting's orange portions, especially the pointy parts, shift from being flat peninsulas, as seen from above, to being craggy edges that restrict one's view of the sky, as if one were trapped below. Rather than wrap up this essay with a summary of the "Goldman Report," I leave it to engaged spectators to look at these paintings with fresh eyes and try to assess what's moving and shaking in Goldman's world, a place where we all play an integral role.

Curator at the Abington Art Center, Sue Spaid writes regularly about experiential art for *artUS*. The author of *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies,* she's currently preparing that exhibition's follow-up, "Green Acres: Artists Farming Fields, Greenhouses and Abandoned Lots," an exhibition concerning twenty-two artist-farmers.



Stewart Goldman, *Babe Blue*, 2001,
oil on linen, 72 x 72".

ARTFORUM
November 2001

Some artists seem to grow younger as they grow older. There is lilt, buoyancy, a sense of being freely unmoored in a calm sea. De Kooning had it: While time worked its debilitating damage, he soared, painting ribbons of pure color borne aloft on white fields. Mondrian, a septuagenarian émigré in Manhattan in the early "40s. fairly shivered with syncopation. Hanging out in jazz clubs bore fruit in tilted, lozenge-shaped canvases whose grids shook loose on contrapuntal patterns like boogie-woogie discourse in piano bars of the period. And then there's Matisse, who cut and pasted his way through *Jazz*, *The thousand and One Nights,* and *Swimming Pool* in his final years. These artists, toes tapping, had their feet on the ground.

At the zenith of his career, Stewart Goldman has created the "Neo-Jazz paintings, 1997-2001, as refreshing as a summer in the south of France. They are his most abstract works to date but are clearly about nature: Twigs and branches twiddle through jiggled planes of pastel corals and violets, creamy yellows and verdant greens. These are landscapes of a sumptuous fertility compressed into wavering patterns on the canvas. The zones of color, each distinct unto itself, are irregularly contoured, like lakes and streams whose borders flow in incipient and sympathetic coordination with the others. Subtle features reveal a strict infrastructure--the vertical thrust of the major forms and the calculated application of gestural strokes. Despite the impression that these paintings are impulsively generated, judgment and restraint determine what we experience as an improvisational performance.

In an earlier series, “Variations on Rubens, “19856-93, fauns and maidens frolic amid swirls of richly saturated colors surrounded and supported by bold checkerboards of primary and secondary hues; this antiphonal discourse is both raucous and reassuring, as nothing is out of control in a structural system that both sustains and provokes natural exuberance.

Goldman has always celebrated the square and its multiple, the grid. It is a unitary form echoing the picture plane and a principle of his pictorial linguistics. This foundation frees him to float, to be expressive without meandering, sentimentalizing, or succumbing to illusionism, Two large walls of this show are covered with small square paintings like a compendium of Fauvist landscape details, each fragment a particle of nature seen in flickering sunlight. No two adjacent “sketches” coincide gesturally: Their strokes wiggled apart, yet all was harmonious. Never coalescing into a uniform view, the overall installation resembled a Book of Hours, demanding to be read page by page.

The highlight of the show was a six by six foot painting, *Babe Blue*, 2001. The left side of the canvas is braced by a startling swath of black paint; scored by scored by streaks of fuschia, orange, blue, and green, the form suggests a tree trunk dappled with shafts of sunlight. By inference, the luminous fields of yellow, blue, green, and violet to the right register as hills, lakes, and sky, but the predominant axis of these irregular patches is insistently upright, producing a dazzling sequence of consecutive views that read simultaneously vertically and laterally like a well-honed riff on a classical theme. *Babe Blue* is as “neo-classical” as it is “neo-jazz” in its pictorial structure.

- Joan Seeman Robinson

1991

This Exceeding Brightness

by Maureen Bloomfield

Stewart Goldman, *Landscape With Bell Tower* oil on latex canvas (34 1/2' x 8')
The Cincinnati Bell Training Center
Erlanger, KY 1990

"The exceeding brightness of this early sun
Makes me conceive how dark I have become..."
Wallace Stevens, "The Sun This March,"
The Collected Poems

"Color in itself is light. In nature, light creates the color; in the picture, color creates light." Hans Hofmann, *Search For The Real*

The only landscape painters that Edward Lucie-Smith considers in his problematic *Art In The Eighties* are Neo-Expressionists for whom landscape is a way of talking about history and for whom the large painting is an opportunity for making a public (i.e., political) statement.[1]

If one accepts Lucie-Smith's assessment as axiomatic of current critical discourse, Stewart Goldman's stunning commission for The Cincinnati Bell Training Center, at first glance, has no place. Amid alternating 12" x 12" squares of pungent color, limner gestures suggest terraced hills, undulating clouds, and Tuscan trees; this *Landscape* has nothing in common with the theatrical bombast and the turbid encrustations that have characterized recent international art. Goldman's brilliant composition is, instead, as complex as its light is limpid; this 34 1/2' x 8' panorama has at once the bravado of American Abstract Expressionist motifs and the rigour of a modular design. *Landscape With Bell Tower* eschews both elegy and apocalypse; it manifests humor rather than irony; it is informed with cerebral light rather than emotional darkness. It seems, in essence, to celebrate not only a different time, but a different conception of time. For all these reasons, *Landscape With Bell Tower* is difficult to categorize.

It is also difficult to find. First, one has to take I-75 South to 275 as if on the way to the airport, and then suffer the dislocation of realizing that the lush expanse of hills has been graded flat in order to accommodate yet another series of tubular malls, flanked by signs reading "Now Leasing." Just off the Mineola exit, brick streets lead to an undistinguished, vaguely Art Deco building of terra cotta stone which a Peter Harringer sculpture announces as The Cincinnati Bell Training Center, situated on a desolate, man-made lake. The Training Center's upper stories are tiers of blue, rectangular windows that multiply the American flag and mirror the changing sky. Once inside, the rectangles—of those windows, of the bricked entryway, of the building stones, and of the interior windows—are blissfully repeated by the squares of Goldman's splendid *Landscape* that fills the atrium's wall.

By using the square as a matrix, Goldman has divided the huge painting (actually completed in nine sections which were then seamlessly wallpapered to the wall) into a grid; each 12" x 12" square is thinly painted one, radiantly unnatural, non-primary color. Though the module as a basis of design conjures up the idea of the field-generated system, Goldman's arrangement seems rhapsodic rather than analytical. In contrast to Jennifer Bartlett whose recent work uses the white-bordered square as a way of breaking up the continuity of the single image, Goldman paints each square as a discrete picture and places it flush with its surrounding squares. The effect is insistent and intense, especially since the color is truncated, so that a rose square, for example, abuts a blue, which abuts an orange square. The vivid color, at once pastry and unearthly, seems Mannerist, right out of Pontormo or Veronese. The fields and hills are not green, but salmon and yellow—the same colors that inform the sky. Against this grid of effulgent color, fluent contours, reminiscent of Clyfford Still's fire shapes or of Milton Avery's ghostly hollows, suggest bushes, clouds, trees, but since each square is its own picture, with its own scale and perspective, the squares offset and refract each other, until the viewer perceives the visual sensations of light and line through shifting vantages, alternating points of view. With no visual center, but instead a series of visual centers, the picture is in motion; it unfolds like a screen, and the effect is of an aerial vantage, a way of seeing in fragments, and then, as one steps back, all at once. Thus, *Landscape* is an old-fashioned panorama, whose antecedents reach back to the Early Renaissance, rather than to nineteenth century painters of the sublime. There is nothing of Claude, of Caspar David Friedrich, or of the American Luminists; in place of awe, Goldman posits latter grace; his landscape is a continuum of terraced hills that testify to a fecund domination of nature and that evoke Ambrogio Lorenzetti's great cycle, *The Effects Of Good*

Stewart Goldman *Landscape with Bell Tower*, detail, oil on latex 34.5' x 8'

And Bad Government (1339, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena). The final, sly joke is that place of the cathedral that would bless a town, Goldman has, in the far right, implied, by a few ribbony lines, a bell tower: a play on the corporation's logo and an argument that the landscape's fruitful order implies the efficacy of man's and, by extension, the corporation's intervention.

While *Landscape* harks back to Goldman's earlier, lyrical series of Italian landscapes, it is possible that one of the privileges a commission confers is the opportunity to make a public statement that is not primarily personal or political, and hence more likely to be exultant or serene. In spite of the fact that *Landscape* evokes the vanished hills that Cincinnati Bell and other corporations have remade, it is not nostalgic or mushy-headed; it seems, instead, to be an essay on a difficult, disharmonious idea—that of progress: a state in which men and women subdue nature and yet still find solace in the garden. While *Landscape* then superficially extols the corporation, it really insinuates the ideal of communication—with the self, with Nature, with others—as harmony, emblemized by the bell. The idea of harmony implies a question of transcendence, which the poet-critic W. S. DiPiero argues, "has a social meaning, if we accept Erich Fromm's view that transcendence means overcoming the limitations of selfhood, the prison of the self, of solipsism and alienation, and opening ourselves to others, to relatedness to the world."[2]

It is this harmonic "relatedness to the world" that contemporary art-watchers rarely find; it is the quality that another Cincinnati commission, Karen Heyl's wonderful wall-relief of *The Creation* (Good Shepherd Parish, Symmes Township) so joyfully expresses, and it is the quality that Goldman's multi-faceted paean to an orderly world invokes, as well. In fact, the pride with which the laity regard Heyl's wall relief has something in common with the gratitude which corporate trainees may feel as they escape the wasteland of I-275 into the radiance of *Landscape*. The square that is the picture's matrix is what one finds everywhere in the building—the modular couch snaking around the atrium, the TV screen announcing conference titles, the floor and ceiling tiles, the windows, the phones. The square is, of course, an image of a cell, and the reality of blocky telephone operators and "square" corporate trainees behind computer terminals is an image of a prison, an image that has its corollary in the idea of the self within the body's box. Goldman's *Landscape* finally may posit a way of seeing contemporary landscape as a paradise that can never again be "natural," but can still be redeemed, if one breaks out of the cubicle of the self, making a connection with other cells, with other, infinite sources of light. It is the humorous charm of this dazzling, challenging picture that the idea of harmony can be translated into the image of the bell, and the idea of transcendence into the module of the phone.

Stewart Goldman *Landscape with Bell Tower* oil on latex 34.5' x 8'

[1] Of the 101 artists discussed, only 8 are women. Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art In the Eighties*, New York: Phaidon Universe, 1990.

[2] W. S. DiPiero, *Out of Eden: Essays On Modern Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p. 168.

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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 become more than gestural and interact with color changes through matrices of square elements.

"I became interested in pushing way 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" (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 "Grey" (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 "Heirlitus Mine" (2001), and the slowly evolving gestural forms of the 36 paneled "Elysian" (2003-04) on its large pink background.

The tape pieces, initiated in his 2000 installation "Reminder" at the Wasata 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 early form seen as outline on colored squares in an oil on linen from 1988), 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.

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

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

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 8 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.springfieldart.museum.

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