

Land and Cityscapes

Stewart Goldman's "Old Square/New Square"

By Jud Yalkut



STEWART GOLDMAN'S "FOLD" (2003-04), OIL ON CANVAS

Stewart Goldman is one of the most quietly renowned and respected artists in the Cincinnati area, with his 33-year tenure until 2001 at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. A profound influence on several generations of younger artists, Goldman was recognized as an Outstanding Individual Artist with a Cincinnati Post-Corbett Award in 1988. He also received three Ohio Arts Council grants in support of exhibitions he organized in Europe.

Still vitally active, Goldman maintains a studio in Camp Washington, continuing his coloristic explorations of landscape-inspired abstractions with paradoxically and inventively amalgamate principles of dynamism and minimalism. Too little seen in recent years, his work during the opening years of the 21st century is now afforded a beautifully mounted and copious exhibition at the Weston Art Gallery in Cincinnati's Aronoff Center for the Arts through June 17. Goldman's last large solo show was featured at the Miami University Art Museum in 1994.

A sabbatical from the Art Academy in 1985 allowed Goldman to absorb the Italian countryside, which has drawn artists of all persuasions over the centuries. This inspiration served as a foundation for a 30-foot-wide mural commissioned from Goldman by Cincinnati Bell in 1990, which spurred him further into the exploration of grid-like formations of square painting modules of varying sizes.

With the current show, "Old Square/New

Square," Goldman has evolved his abstractions from elements of landscape into paintings ranging from four to six feet square, as well as examples of his grids ranging from nine to 36 smaller panels. In some images, the colors swirl as though frozen in a chemical or geological interaction, while elsewhere reclining in meditative elegance with a reductive constraint.

On a large, pink wall, 36 small panels describe the work, "Elysian" (2001-04), 88" X 88," with simplified color movements emphasizing the color and line within each piece. While contained and elegantly complete within itself, each panel subtly references its neighbors and finds echoes and unreferenced flows without any contrivance — Zen-like in its accepted place in Goldman's universe.

On a reduced scale, the nine panels of "Weidy's View" (2001) has white areas traversing pastel rivers of color, meandering off edges in blue, trailing between red edges and a sea of blue, or smoke-like in its inner conversations with pale lavenders and blues.

Organic floes, like fluid paint frozen into still motion, have red swirling with yellow highlights into the white enclosures of "White Wash" (2001-02). White streaks with their pink companion recline left of a field of red in "Slope" (2006), and a gently zigzagging white streak divides a lighter and darker blue into individual entities in "Side, Slide" (2004).

Simplified forms of white form a cantilevered bridge beneath a deep blue in "Pile Low" (2004), and a triangular expanse of ocher and

shades of green with their torn-edged shapes become collage-like in "Bolt" (2006). Green-feathered edges around deep yellow bloom form the perimeter of a deep blue, which abuts on a white river that tears past red and golden fields in "Fold" (2003-04).

"Old Square/New Square" also introduces installation-style wall drawings by Goldman, which he uses to explore sociopolitical issues. Originating from a Warsaw Project Space in Cincinnati in 2000, he started using colored electrical tape as a drawing medium applied directly to the wall, first inspired by architectural images of Holocaust-related bridges and guard towers.

The latest manifestations of these wall tape drawings for the Weston installation derive from current world arenas of turmoil. Combining lines of tape with latex paint, "Baghdad" (2006) shows the fragmented city sections bisected by the snakelike river, with close examination of the tape revealing curling edges, bending barriers, and the peeling away of clear delineations.

In "New Orleans" (2006), the painted white Mississippi runs through gray land masses under the white expanse of Lake Ponchartrain, with crumpled and crinkled blue tape almost following the street lines but unable to hold its true shape. The portrayal of these sites of devastation, destruction and conflict become truly disintegrative images.

Another site for political turmoil rather than an outwardly destructive manifestation, is "Washington, D.C." (2006), with the city as an amorphous blue outline on a sea of red, impinged from within by a wedge-like rectangle of white that reaches toward the red-veined Potomac River. Streets outlined in white are traversed by stretches of blue and red tape, either smoothly applied or curling and peeling.

Near a skeletal tower drawn with electrical tape, an American "Flag" is partially painted in latex with its field of stars on blue. The stripes have red and white tape partially paralleling the painted stripes beneath, but then peeling and hanging off the ends for dear patriotic life.

The Weston Art Gallery is located in the Aronoff Center for the Arts at the corner of Seventh and Walnut Streets in downtown Cincinnati. Gallery hours are 10 am-5:30 pm Tuesday-Saturday, and noon-5 pm Sunday. For more information, call (937) 977-4165 or visit www.CincinnatiArts.org/Weston.

Reach DCP art critic Jud Yalkut at contactus@daytoncitypaper.com.