

# rachel uffner

CURATOR

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Joanne Greenbaum | Artist



Joanne Greenbaum lives and works in New York City. Over the past twenty years she has participated in numerous shows in the U.S. and Europe. Most recently Greenbaum has exhibited her work at the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Crone Gallery, Berlin, Van Horn Gallery, Dusseldorf, Texas Gallery, Houston, and Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York. Other recent solo shows include greengrassi, London, Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles, Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago and D'Amelio Terras, New York. An upcoming exhibition of new paintings and sculptures will run May - July at Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York.

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**You have a solo show opening at Rachel Uffner Gallery on May 20th. Can you tell us a little bit about the exhibition (what will we see, and perhaps placing it in context to your body of work/direction)?**

With this show I am choosing to show new paintings and sculptures together for the first time in New York. This show will consist of about 6 large paintings and tables of sculptures upstairs. The sculptures are made of a few different materials; cast aluminum, porcelain and a type of air dry polymer clay that I've been using for a long time that I paint on.

I think there is a conversation going on with the painting and sculpture that I have never explored before in an exhibition. I've always kept it separate, so now I think I am ready to show them together. I always was a bit shy about showing sculptures, but in time I have come to realize that this is something I really need to do.



**Can you talk a bit more about your sculpture work?**

I started making sculpture in clay and other materials in 2003. It was not out of a preconceived strategy for broadening my work to other materials, but a true investigation of what was going on in my painting at the time. The painting seemed to be about a fictionalized three dimensional structure that was begging to be made into something real.

I enrolled in a local studio's beginning hand building class and immediately enjoyed not only the feel of the clay, but the shared studio with all different kinds of people - from professional potters/sculptors to hobbyists, to retirees. It was not an "art world" place, and I loved the anonymity of going there and just trying things out with no self consciousness.

I learned from scratch and by watching what other people did. My goal was not be become a

ceramicist so much as just learn to make something that would stay standing and not blow up in the kiln. Over time the pieces got better and I learned that I was not that interested in glazing, but in making a structure that I would either hand paint or color in my own studio, or leave just the way that it was. Now I am also trying out other materials like casting, and air dry surfaces that can be hand painted.



**We first came across your work in the early 2000s at D'Amelio Terras Gallery. At that time, your paintings felt very open in terms of space. As your work has evolved, your canvases have become more fully activated. Can you talk about this evolution?**

When I first starting showing in the late 90's/early 2000's, my work was very spare. Even though the painting has become more activated, the motivation and the intent are pretty much the same. I still think of the paintings as performing on the blank ground, even though that ground may be more busy with drawing and layers. Also I believe in moving and not making the same thing over and over again, so there is a desire to push myself to areas that I am uncomfortable with. One of those things was gesture, thicker paint and the artists hand, which were absent in the earlier paintings. There is always a feeling that I want to go back to those purer canvases, but that never seems to happen...

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**You've mentioned in past interviews that classic modernism served as a key touchpoint for you coming up as an artist. What is it about that movement that resonated with you, and does it continue to inform your work/process today?**

I just remember always looking at modernism and somehow internalizing it, so when I became an artist myself it was a starting off point. I am not so sure if i even think of these things when I am painting, but somehow it is there in my DNA and tends to rear its head coloristically and structurally. I also like to flirt with rejection and acceptance of certain modernist tendencies and be able to pick and choose. The thing about modernism that interested me was the idea of moving and changing and playing with the history of painting.

I do have the motivation to do something new in painting and that is something that I think is basically modernism. It can be seen as an old fashioned way of thinking in today's world, but I don't care. I don't necessarily buy into the thought that everything has been done. If it hasn't been done by me yet than I say just go for it. I think that there is room for both belief and non belief at the same time, and in one artwork.



**We've read that you like to have movies playing in the background while you're painting. Are there any specific directors and/or films that inspire your work? And in general, we would love to get some insight into what inspires you and your work.**

No, not really. I think the movies or television that I may have on in the background is simply white noise. Its not always on but sometimes I put the TV or computer on and it serves as a type of background presence and I half watch and listen when I am working. I like that type of attention/inattention state of mind. I don't really look to media for inspiration, and in a way I don't even believe in inspiration. Mostly I get my motivation from making things that I want to see and I use my past work to influence what comes next. I think about Lucio Fontana as an artist who influences me, and how his painting and sculpture unify perfect pure color and physical form.

**You're represented by some really great galleries. How do you choose the dealers/galleries you show with?**

Some of these relationships are long standing and some are new. I never really sought out these galleries. Some of them came to me through the primary gallery early on, and some, like Richard Telles in Los angeles or Van Horn in Dusseldorf, which are new relationships, happen when they see my work at an art fair, or other exhibition. Usually the conversation starts in the studio, and then it moves on from there with an invitation to exhibit. I've managed to show with galleries that are really invested in the growth of the work over time.

**Is there a group of artists/painters that you feel most closely aligned to, either in style or in spirit?**

I have never really aligned myself with a particular group of artists. My tastes are unpredictable in that I look at so called outsider art at the same time as very refined minimalism or a great new figurative artist. I just saw a terrific show of the works of Marcia Hafif - paintings from the 60s that moved me a lot, and also a show of brand new paintings by Carmen Herrera. The paintings of both of these artists felt so fresh and open and clear. It was a great revelation in their steadfast commitment to what they believe, but also on looking at this work realizing that you have to stay true to yourself no matter what and not give up or in. Thats what the paintings of these two women said to me. When I see work that makes me want to go right back to the

studio I know that's the most influential. Sometimes it's just one little thing you may see gives the signal to go back right now to the studio.

**You're in the middle of a very busy exhibition schedule (concurrent shows at Richard Telles Fine Art, greengrassi, and Rachel Uffner). What's on your plate for the rest of the year?**

I like to keep busy but right now I am tired. However, I think in that tiredness new things can happen that are less self-conscious and a bit off the beaten path of whatever direction I seem to be headed. I always have other studio-related projects going on, such as a series of handmade drawing books, sculptures, and works on paper I will work on before the next group of shows in 2017.

Portrait: Costas Picadas