



**ABOVE:** *Untitled*, oil, ink, acrylic, Flashe, and oil crayon on canvas, 2016. **RIGHT:** *Untitled*, ink on porcelain, 2016.



## JOANNE GREENBAUM

*In her colorful, free-flowing paintings as well as her small-scale ceramic constructions, this New York-based artist takes a hands-on approach.* BY JULIE L. BELCOVE

"I've always been a drawer. I'm sitting here now scribbling," Joanne Greenbaum says one morning in her rented house on New York's Long Island. Scribbling, in fact, helped the artist find her groove more than 20 years ago. "I took my drawings—I really hate the word *doodle*, but there is something about the un-self-conscious type of drawing that I was doing—and I applied that to the paintings, without a lot of editing going on."

Greenbaum has never been part of a scene or adhered to any "ism," relying instead on

her gut and stream of consciousness to make her vibrantly colored, idiosyncratic paintings and sculptures. "I'm working on six things at once," she says of her process. "I'll do one thing on one, then go and have a cup of coffee, then scribble on something else. If there's a move I don't like, I don't cover it up, for the most part. I tend not to reject those embarrassing moments."

The result, in independent curator Bob Nickas's view, is a picture-making practice that is at once old-fashioned and ▷





Untitled, 1998.

very fresh. “You can really see the mind is there, the hand is there, the element of time is there,” says Nickas, who has included Greenbaum in several group shows, such as “The Painted World” at MoMA PS1 in 2005. “There’s a lot of invention. If you’re looking closely, she shows you how she got there.”

In an untitled work from 2015, for instance, Greenbaum appears to have stained most of the canvas yellow, then filled it with a dizzying pattern of multicolored lines, as if it were a road map having a nervous breakdown. Much of her work bears a resemblance to maps, though the artist says any reference is metaphorical: “I guess you could say that all art is a blueprint of one’s thinking.”

After growing up in a New York City suburb—and haunting the Museum of Modern Art on weekends—Greenbaum graduated from Bard College in 1975 and moved into the city. While the art world was focused on figuration in the 1980s, she quietly stuck to abstraction. In the early ’90s, influenced by so-called process artists and her friend Tony Feher, who subtly altered found objects, Greenbaum explored ways to incorporate similar ideas into her paintings. “I threw everything out and started from scratch with



very minimal spills and pours, letting the chemistry of what was going on take over,” she says. Enamored with paint, she experimented with color straight from the tube, as if it were a found object. Next, she says, “I started interjecting my own handwriting and personality. I don’t use only oil paint. I use acrylic. I use Flashe paint. I use pencils. I use markers. I use inks. Whatever is called for,” she says. “Allowing myself to feel free with my materials opened up a lot of avenues.”

Greenbaum’s sculptures grew directly from her paintings. “I was making paintings that were reminding me of sculptures,” she says. So she bought a bunch of colorful Sculpey clay, a children’s crafting favorite. “I started making two-inch sculptures that sat on my desk. I was kind of embarrassed that I was baking these tiny sculptures in my oven. But I liked them a lot, so I began making many, many of them.”

Greenbaum enrolled in a ceramics class at Greenwich House, not far from her TriBeCa studio, and eventually grew adept at working in porcelain. “I don’t glaze. I hand-color it myself—very much the way I make paintings. I pour ink on it or color it with Magic Marker.” She also turned to metal, having pieces cast in aluminum at a foundry. Her sculptures, such as a 2015 untitled aluminum work resembling curling ribbons, are intimate in feel, like three-dimensional drawings. “I really like the tabletop size,” she says. “I make monumental, big paintings, but I feel that with the sculptures, it’s a conscious decision to keep them handmade and small.”

Greenbaum still attends ceramics class and says it’s a welcome break from her studio. “I love going there and sitting with the others. It’s very joyful.” But it’s not just companionship that keeps her coming: “I love sitting at a table and making things.” ■



Untitled, 2014.