



**JOAN THORNE** RECENT PAINTINGS

Rediscovered  
**MASTERS**

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[www.joanthorne.com](http://www.joanthorne.com)

Selected works by Joan Thorne can also be seen at:  
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Designed by Stinehour Editions and printed in the United States of America by Colorfast Company.

ISBN-10 0-932087-26-4  
ISBN-13 978-0-932087-26-3

Front cover image: *Ananda*, oil on canvas, 66 x 56 inches

# JOAN THORNE

## Recent Paintings

October 12 – November 10, 2013

*Sideshow*

319 Bedford Avenue · Williamsburg · Brooklyn, New York 11211

718-486-8180

“The free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wings  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.”

from

*I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*

MAYA ANGELOU



# Ecstasy

By STEPHEN WESTFALL

JOAN THORNE'S PAINTINGS have gone through at least three major iterations over the course of her distinguished career. Her early paintings were clearly inspired by both Miro and Frankenthaler. Her forms were biomorphic, like gestural aquatic life rendered transparent to the raw canvas. In subsequent paintings, which were featured in the 1981 Whitney Biennial, Thorne's color intensified and her paint surfaces thickened. Her compositions carved up her now denser field of overlaying small shapes and more opaque brushwork with elbowing, geometric linear elements. These were the first paintings of hers where the viewer had a mounting sense of looking through successive planes of incident even as a blink in the gaze would restore the surface to an allover, all-at-once "integrity." I put quotes in there because "integrity" with regards to a sort of material literalism, or concreteness, seems like such a quaint idea; but back then the scolding moral shades of both Greenberg and Marx were still haunting studios like a fusion of the ghosts of Hamlet's father and Savonarola: something about task-orientation and measuring, a kind of anti-commodifiable aesthetic tied to truth in materials and the end of painting from both the right and the left. You probably had to be there, but Thorne was already messing with it. She was a kind of New Image abstraction painter. While there was even precedent for that (see Al Held's *Taxi* series from 1959), she was clearly coming up with something intensely her own.

It looked for a moment like Thorne was going to create an extensive body of work as a new and gnarly iteration of abstraction, but it didn't turn out that way, or at least not in the way we might have foreseen at the time. Instead, by the late 80s she was reopening and expanding the surrealist elements in her earlier biomorphic, while applying the perceptual lessons from her more hardcore abstract paintings. Over the course of the 80s her unity of field had separated into clear figure/ground oppositions with shapes exposing sides that turned them into objects hovering in shimmering, celebratory ribbon and confetti-like brushstrokes. The subsequent paintings basically set the stage for the work of the last 20 plus years. Certain shapes expand to crop out of the picture, thereby setting up competing fields comprised of those ribbony brushstrokes in intensified, luminous color. Where these pictorial fields meet along a jagged or curving border, the edge is sharp and clean. Smaller shapes in more delicate, translucent color float in the fields sometimes cross the boundaries between them, thereby moving the picture plane back toward us. These smaller shapes hover on the edge of recognition like plankton or boudoir utensils in some Surrealist *mise-en-scène*.

Many of the same compositional and chromatic features obtain in Thorne's recent paintings, but there is a subtle shift in attention from the drama of figures in a field to a more allover sense of color felt through what at first appears to be a simplification of composition. In almost

all the recent paintings the interaction between two or three principal shapes that break the containment of the rectangle is the dominant pictorial event. Even in *Naga* (2013), where a number of smaller shapes spill over each other and burst out of the large central area and pierce the green corner on the bottom right and the yellow wedge on the top right, the real pictorial drama is in the three fields, the green bottom corner and angled yellow edging on top acting more like margins to the central blue violet area. Of course, it's misleading to use a one color assignment to identify these areas since, like all of Thorne's fields, they are comprised of a weaving of different kinds of brushstrokes of different colors, one kind of mark to each color. So the green corner is interspersed with a repeated set of darker green zigzags; the yellow wedge with loosely parallel diagonals of pale sky blue; and the central area is comprised of at least four colors, not counting the floating abstract shapes that seem to be springing from it. On the blue violet ground there are swirling mauve pink brushstrokes, slashing light blue angles that seem to form boxy rectangles except that the closing fourth sides are hard to make out; and finally there are narrower, very light blue green carats, or arrow point angles. All four of these colors overlay to create a fractured fog of light in a certain temperature range that's hard to pin down, but you know it when you see it.

All these separate gestural patterns become discernable with prolonged looking. The floating shapes in *Naga* are by no means an after-thought, instead they are the principal declarations of spatial separation in Thorne's pictorial construction and they bring the balm of a warmer spectrum, cerise and orange, to the palette. But the first optical division is lateral rather than spatial: areas biting into areas like aggressive neighboring states. Thorne's sensitivity and exuberance with color renders the optical energy of her compositions delicious, or erotic, rather than jarring.

Viewing these paintings in the studio I started to count the colors in each painting, something I don't recall ever bothering to do in the many years that I have been looking at her work. I suppose it's a way of pinching myself, to make sure that there is indeed a quantifiable aspect to what I'm looking at, as if the demand for material logic still obtains. And it does, since it proposes that an order underlies most of what's visible. Every so often art is supposed to shake itself and remind us that order is fun to play with and challenge. There is nothing in nature so chaotic as a bad painting, for instance, but a painting that comes together after blowing itself up is something supremely human, and therefore a worthy addition to the life of forms in nature.

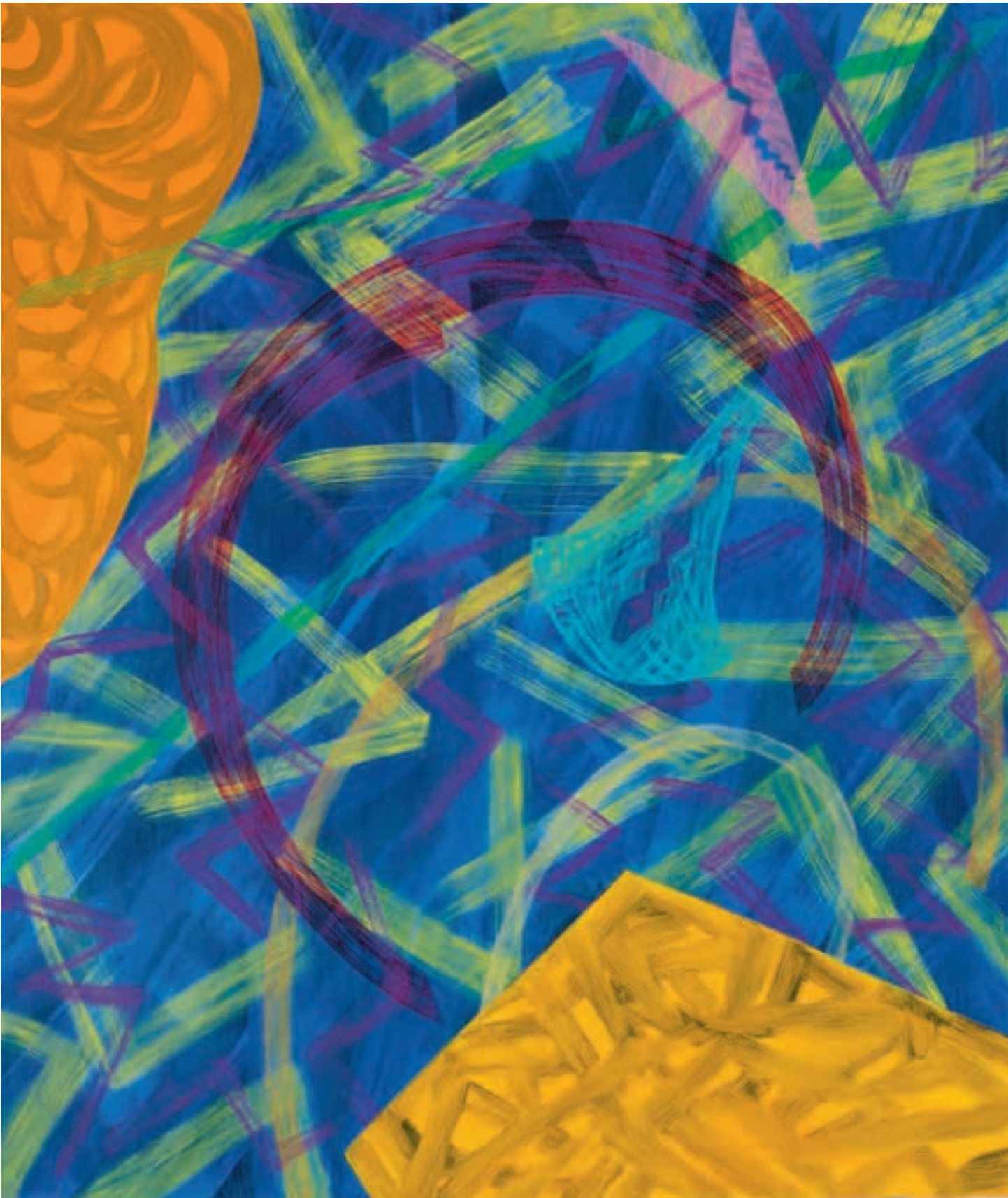
So, anyway, I counted. *Naga* has 13 distinct colors, though the violets of the two goalpost-like bracket forms floating in the upper left of the painting and the related rectangle on the center

right margin with the point in the middle of its bottom horizontal (the two open brackets on the left also have that point) are so close as to be the same color (except that the right rectangle is darker). *Hunter* (2012) also has 13, thanks to an almost subliminally registerable transparent orange curl that runs from the middle center of the bottom margin to nearly brush the center right margin before curling inward. *Ananda* (2013) has ten by my count, but you might find one I'm overlooking. The game is fun because there is a logic to the rule: one mark = one color. As one looks across the range of the recent work, however, it becomes apparent that other rule sets are broken, and the work is released into ever shifting relations between juxtapositions of chromatic light (no one has accused Thorne of referencing naturalistic light) and figure/ground relations.

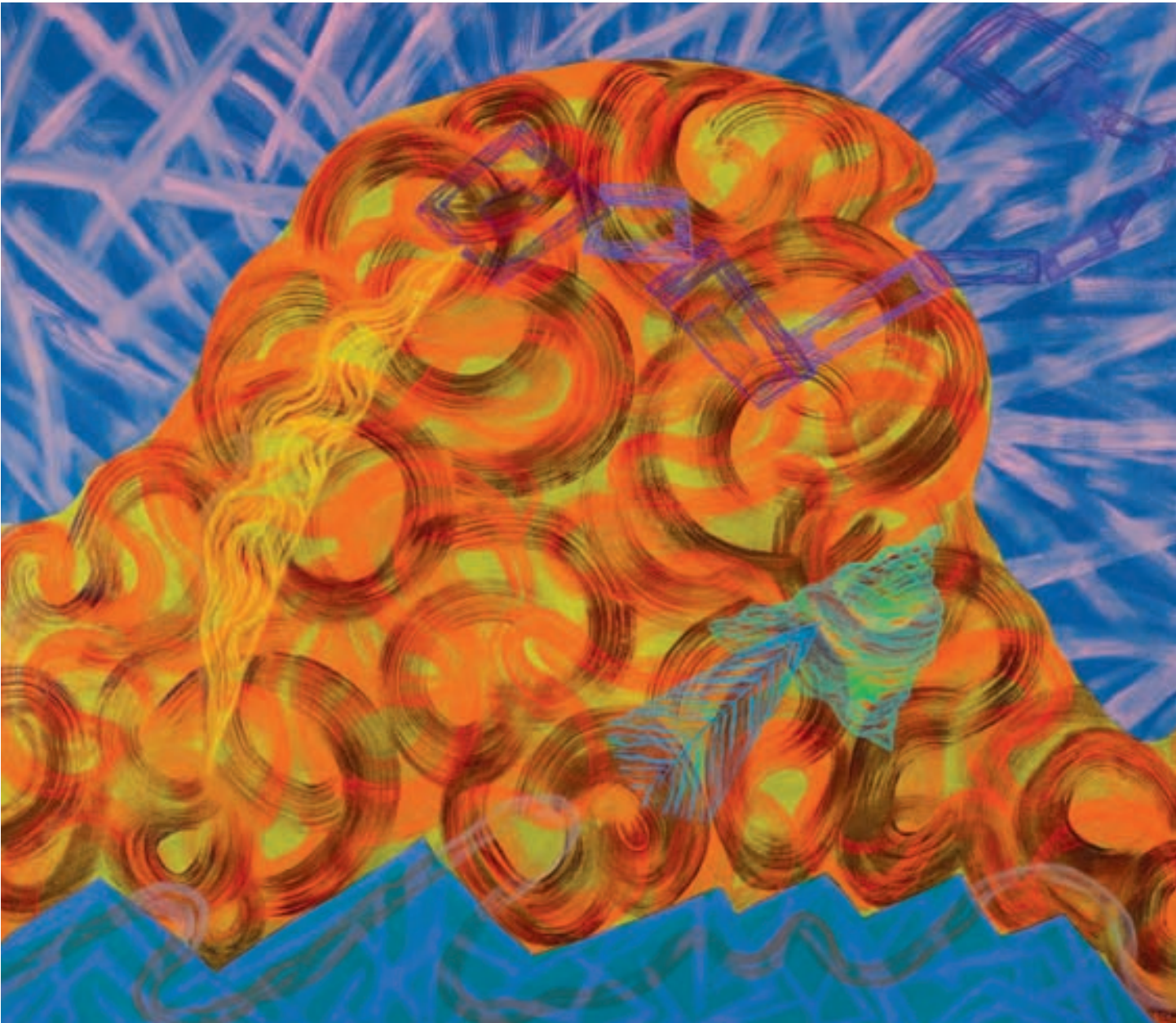
Such shifts can be seen in the difference in containment between *Orchia* (2012) and *Mandalay* (2013). The undulating line that runs across the jagged toothed boundary between the light blue dominant (there are at least three other colors) field on the bottom and the swelling center shape with its warm, light green ground overlaid by orange and deep crimson swirls is a wild magic event: something not really predictable from other paintings, since the undulation not only breaks free of the borders between the larger shapes, but also serves as a mask in the light blue field, revealing that colors have different identity under the light blue/green scrim. Nothing like that occurs in *Mandalay*, and in many of the other paintings, where the smaller floating shapes are just that, shapes, and they stay within the perimeter of the central field. But *Mandalay* has its own distinction in its hot, forward pressing contrasts in the large center area of broad, dark crimson brushstrokes and vigorous swirls of bright red against a yellow green background. This unusual color combination is both threatening and erotic. It's hard to believe a painter can rein in such color and make sense out of it, but Thorne's smaller floating shapes of blue and light violet hovering on top of all that energy manage to push the hotter chromatic contrasts back into a bristling alignment with the serrated plane of light violet ribbons on a darker violet on the top margin and the wedged plane of medium and dark blue on the bottom.

The other reason I found myself counting the colors in each painting is that I became aware that reading the spatial "level" of each color was key to understanding the pictorial ambition of her work. Even as she has moved firmly in the direction of abstraction in her recent paintings, she is posing a renewed, vital, imaginative, phenomenological pictorial space rather than post-Minimalist signage. We look through levels of color and decipher spatial conundrums; we experience color and brushstrokes as psychologically suggestive; every formal element is a vehicle for emotional content: anxiety, tenderness, and joy. Sometimes I wonder if we've gotten used to asking less of painting than we have in other epochs. Thorne dares us to ask more, then delivers.





Hunter, oil on canvas, 69 x 65 inches



Orchia, oil on canvas, 59 x 50 inches



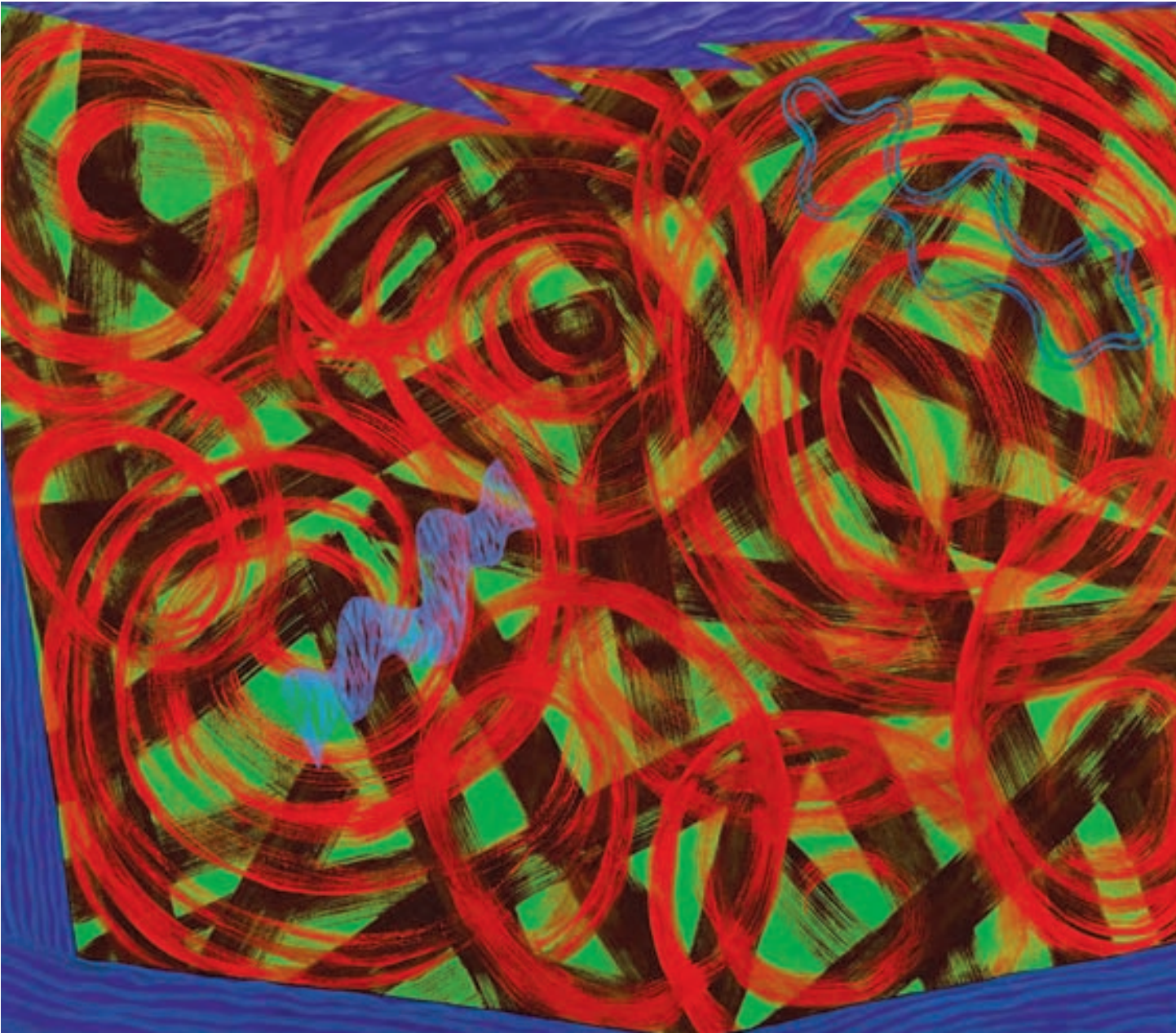
Siam. oil on canvas, 66 x 56 inches



Yangon, oil on canvas, 60 x 69 inches



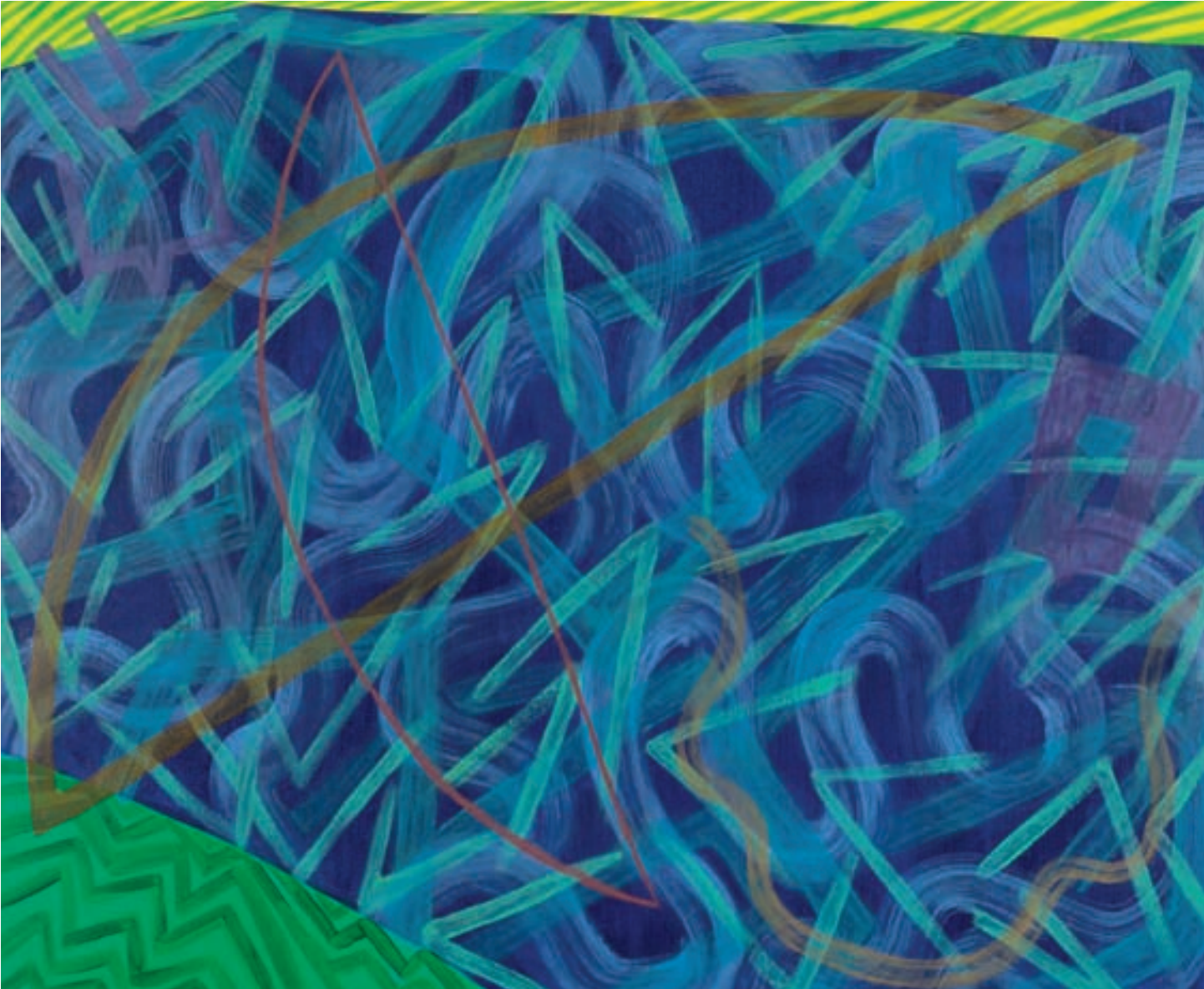
Bagan, oil on canvas, 69 x 65 inches



Mandalay, oil on canvas, 60 x 69 inches



Gwalior, oil on canvas, 59 x 50 inches



Naga, oil on canvas, 46 x 38 inches





Banaras, oil on canvas, 38 x 46 inches



Shiva, oil on canvas, 66 x 56 inches

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

**2013**

Gallery 125, Bellport, New York  
Sideshow Gallery, New York

**2010**

Sideshow Gallery, New York

**2005**

Chris Winfield Gallery, Carmel, California

**2001**

Andre Zarre Gallery, New York

**2000**

Retrospective: Museo de Las Americas, San Juan, Puerto Rico

**1998**

A Retrospective: Museo Voluntariado De Las Casas Reales, Casa de Bastidas, Santo Domingo, Dom., Rep.  
A Retrospective: Museo Patronato Plaza de la Cultura Santiago Apostol, Santiago, Dom., Rep.

**1996**

Ramapo College, New Jersey

**1990**

Graham Modern , New York

**1989**

Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

**1988**

Graham Modern

**1986**

Ruth Bachofner Gallery, Los Angeles  
William Halsey Gallery, Simon Center for the Arts,  
College of Charleston, Charleston, SC

**1985**

Graham Modern

**1983**

Lincoln Center Gallery, Lincoln Center, New York  
Dart Gallery, Chicago  
Gloria Luria Gallery, Bay Harbor Island, FL

**1982**

Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
Willard Gallery, New York

**1980**

Willard Gallery, New York  
Dart Gallery, Chicago

**1979**

The Clocktower: Institute for Art and Urban Resources,  
New York

**1977**

Galerie Veith Turske, Cologne Art Fair, Cologne, Germany

**1975**

Alfred University, Alfred, NY

**1974**

Fischbach Gallery, New York

**1973**

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

**2013**

Sideshow Gallery, New York

**2012**

Southampton Fair-Hollis Taggart Gallery, Southampton, New York  
Sideshow Gallery, New York

**2011**

Sideshow Gallery, New York,  
Janet Kurnatowsky Gallery, New York

**2010**

Sideshow Gallery, New York,  
Janet Kurnatowsky Gallery, New York

**2005 -10**

Sideshow Gallery

**2009**

Sideshow Gallery "Works On Paper" Curated by Vared Lieb and  
Richard Timperio.

**2003**

Biennale Internazionale Dell'Arte Contemporanea, Florence, Italy  
Gallerie Alessandro Bagnai, Florence, Italy

**2002**

Gallery Uno Spazio Su Misura, Milan, Italy

**2001**

"PAINTED: Viewpoints of Recent Developments of Abstract  
Painting in New York," curated by James Little at the Joe and  
Emily Lowe Art Gallery, Hofstra Museum, Hofstra University,  
Long Island, New York

**2000**

The Painting Center, New York, "Straight Painting," curated  
by James Little

**1998**

R.B. Stevenson Gallery, La Jolla, California, "Illuminated  
Under White Light"

R.B. Stevenson Gallery, La Jolla, California

1996 Museo Voluntariado de Las Casas Reales, Casa de Bastidas  
Encuentro", Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

**1995**

Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter  
College, New York "News, Surprise and Nostalgia"  
Corporate Art Directions, "Loan Show Lobby of 909 Third Ave.,"  
New York

**1994**

Andre Zarre Gallery, The Exuberant 80s,  
Andre Zarre Gallery, Through Thick and Thin

**1993**

Alto de Chavon, "Los Artistas Residentes," Dominican Republic

**1991**

Andre Emmerich Gallery, "Abstract Painting of the 90's",  
curated by Barbara Rose.  
New York Stock Exchange, Invitational Graham Modern, "Selections"

**1989**

Graham Modern, "Synthesis"

**1988**

Andre Zarre Gallery, "More Than Color", New York  
Graham Modern, "Preview From The Past"

**1987**

One Penn Plaza, "Romantic Science", New York  
American Academy in Rome, "American Acad. in Rome  
Annual Exhibition", 1987 Prix de Rome Paintings, Rome

**1986**

Graham Modern, "Diptychs, Triptychs, Polyptychs"

**1985**

Pam Adler Gallery, "Paintings 1985," New York  
The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, "The Art of the  
1970's and 1980's", Ridgefield, CT  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, "An Affair of the Heart", Buffalo, NY  
Kamakazie Gallery, "Non-Objective Painting", curated by  
Stephen Westfall, New York  
Graham Modern, "Summer Yellows"  
College of Charleston, "Charleston Show", Charleston, SC

**1984**

Visual Arts Museum, "Heroic/Poetic", New York  
Sidney Janis Gallery, "American Women Artists", New NY  
Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, NY

**1983**

One Penn Plaza, "Luxe Calme et Volupte: Nine Abstract  
Artists & Their Use of Color", curated by John Yau, New NY  
Graham Modern, "Small Works/Fine Works" Nine Abstract  
Artists & Their Use of Color", curated by John Yau, New NY  
Graham Modern, "Small Works/Fine Works"

**1982**

Mattingly Baker Gallery, Dallas (two-person show)  
Guild Hall Museum, "Artists from the Edward F. Albee  
Foundation", East Hampton, NY

**1981**

Whitney Museum of American Art, "1981 Biennial  
exhibition", New York  
Susan L. Usdan Gallery, "The Broken Surface", Bennington  
College, VT. Traveled to Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York  
Sidney Janis Gallery, "New Directions", curated  
by Sam Hunter, New York  
Nina Freudenheim Gallery, "Paper Work", Buffalo, NY

**1980**

Societe des Artistes Independents, Grand Palais, "L'Amerique  
Aux Independents", Paris  
Sidney Janis Gallery, "Seven Young Americans", New York  
Landmark Gallery, "Drawings 1980"  
Guild Hall Museum, "Paper-works for the Serious Collector",  
East Hampton, NY

**1979**

Willard Gallery, New York  
Neilson Gallery, "The Implicit Image", Boston  
Susan Caldwell Gallery, "Generation", NY  
Grey Art Gallery, "American Paintings: The Eighties",  
curated by Barbara Rose, New York. Traveled to The  
Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; American Cultural Center, Paris  
Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, NY

**1974**

Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, "Tenth  
Anniversary Exhibition", Ridgefield, CT  
State University of New York, "Tight and Loose", Potsdam & Albany

**1973**

Whitney Museum of American Art, "Whitney Annual", NY  
Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, "Spring Annual", Ridgefield, CT  
Hamburg Museum, "GEDOK American Women Artists  
Show" Hamburg, Germany

### SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT  
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY  
Codetel, a subsidiary of GTE, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic  
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas  
Krannert Museum, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL  
Museo Voluntariado de las Casas Reales Casa de Bastidas, Santo Domingo,  
Dominican Republic  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas  
Prudential Corporation, Corporate Collection, New York, New York  
Portland Museum, Portland, Maine  
M. Smorgon Family Collection of Contemp. Art, Melbourne, Australia  
Sloan Kettering Hospital, New York, NY  
Dr. Mark Reiner, New York, NY

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**2011**

Douglas, Manson, *Art In America*, review April, 20.

**2010**

Ken Johnson, *New York Times*, review, November, 26  
*Art on Review*-Joan Thorne 'Recent Paintings', Sideshow Gallery, November 26  
Emily Canal, review, *The New York Observer*, "Joan Thorne Recent Paintings",  
Sideshow Gallery, December 22.

**2005**

James Kalm, "Works on Paper" review of a show at Side  
Show Gallery, Brooklyn, New York for the *Brooklyn Rail*.

**2001**

Morgan, Robert C., "Mythical Journeys, Power and Flight,"  
essay for the catalogue of one person show at Andre Zarre Gallery, New York  
Morgan, Robert C., "PAINTED: The Presence of the Past,"  
essay for the catalogue of the show at the Joe and Emily  
Lowe Art Gallery, Hofstra Museum, Hofstra University, Long Island, NY  
Marceles, Eduardo, "La Pintura metafisica de Joan Thorne,"  
*Vida Hoy*, November 2, New York.

**2000**

Westfall, Stephen, "Wild Beauty," essay in catalogue for  
retrospective exhibition at Museo de Las Americas, March, April  
Morgan C., Robert, "Straight Painting", essay for brochure  
of the exhibition at the Painting Center, New York, October  
Barrios, Mario Alegre, Sunday, "Thorne en el espejo de su obra,"  
*Por Dentro El Nuevo Dia*, Sunday, March 5.

**1998**

Vine, Richard, *Art In America Magazine*, June, review of retrospective museum exhibition at: Museo Voluntariado De Las Casas Reales, Casa De Bastidas, Santo Domingo, Dom. Rep. Southgate, Therese M. MD, Cover of JAMA *The Journal of American Medicine Association*, September 16.

**1991**

Dumas, Ann. "Joan Thorne." *Arts Magazine*, January.

**1989**

Clarke, Orville O. "Joan Thorne." *ArtScene*, May.  
Geer, Suvian. "Joan Thorne." *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May.

**1988**

Malon, Lenore. "Joan Thorne." *Artnews*, October, p. 184.

**1986**

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McDonald, Robert. "Enigmatic Abstractions." *Artweek*, 26 April.  
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**1985**

Westfall, Stephen. "Dance Electric." *Art in America*, December, p. 98-101.  
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**1983**

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Yau, John. "Joan Thorne's Visionary Universe." *Arts*, September.  
Cohen, Ronny. "Joan Thorne." *Artnews*, January.  
Westfall, Stephen. "Joan Thorne." *Arts*, January.

**1982**

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**1981**

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**1980**

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**1979**

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Foster, Hal. "A Tournament of Roses." *Artforum*, November, p. 63-67.  
Rickey, Carrie. "Joan Thorne." *Artforum*, September.  
Yau, John. "Joan Thorne at the Clocktower." *Art in America*, November.  
Perreault, John. "Rose and the Thorns that Scratch." *SoHo Weekly News*, 27 September, p. 59.  
Frank, Peter. "Rates of Exchange." *Village Voice*, May.  
Rose, Barbara. *American Painting: The Eighties*, Grey Art Gallery, New York. Exhibition catalog.  
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**1978**

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Ratcliff, Carter. Thick Paint, University of Chicago, Chicago. Exhibition catalog.  
Weintraub, Linda. "Eight Abstract Painters." *Arts Exchange*, Philadelphia.

**1974**

Heinemann, Susan. "Joan Thorne," *Artforum*, December.  
Frackman, Noel. "Joan Thorne." *Arts*, November.

**1973**

Baro, Gene. *Joan Thorne*. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Exhibition catalog.

**1972**

Picard, Lil. *GEDOK American Women Artists Show*, Hamburg Museum, Hamburg, West Germany. Exhibition catalog.  
Goldberg, Lenore. "Four Painters." *Changes Magazine*, October.

**AWARDS**

2006 - Adolf Gottlieb Foundation Grant for Painting  
2001 - Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant in Painting  
1986 - Prix de Rome, American Academy in Rome  
Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant in Painting  
1983 - National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship in Painting  
1980 - New York State Council on the Arts, Grant for Painting  
1979 - National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship in Painting  
1976 - Grant in Painting, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts  
1975 - New York State Council on the Arts, Grant for Painting  
1974 - Grant in Painting, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts  
1972 - Artist of the Year, Aldrich Foundation

Photography of original paintings and portrait by Bill Orcutt.

Back cover photograph by Rena Small.

