

Press Release

Joan Snyder

Love from an Abstract Artist

2 September—4 October 2025

Opening Tuesday 2 September 2025, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac London

Ely House, 37 Dover Street, London, W1S 4NJ



Love from an Abstract Artist, 2025
Oil, watercolour, paper and ink on paper. 57.15 x 76.835 cm (22.5 x 30.25 in)

Love from an Abstract Artist is an exhibition spanning over six decades of American artist Joan Snyder's work on paper. Featuring nearly 50 new and historical works, dating from the mid-1960s to the present day, it bears witness to the important position drawing has always held in Snyder's practice. Often diaristic and autobiographical, these varied works encompass Snyder's grids, symbols, landscapes and strokes, and incorporate

collaged materials including fabric, rope, berries, herbs and hand-pressed paper pulp, among others. Snyder has continually expanded the possibilities of drawing. Her works on paper are, as the American critic and art historian Faye Hirsch writes, 'independent and self-sufficient objects'. *Love from an Abstract Artist* follows the artist's first solo exhibition, *Body & Soul*, at Thaddaeus Ropac in London in 2024.



Stripes/Mounds, 1968.
Pastel and graphite on paper. 22.86 x 30.48 cm (9 x 12 in).

Snyder is recognised for developing a new, distinctly embodied language of abstract painting at a time when legacies of Abstract Expressionism loomed large and Minimalism espoused new conditions of sterility and mechanical facture in American art. In this male-dominated climate, she dissected the ‘anatomy’ of painting to its constituent parts and, in the mid-1970s, began adding personal motifs to her work such as bodies and breasts, vulvas and hearts, totems and fields of flowers. ‘It seemed to me that in order to go forward, I had to push back hard,’ she reflects. ‘To again embrace ideas that were at the very foundation of all my thinking about painting – about structure, about application, about meaning, about materials.’ The earliest works in the exhibition including *Stripes/Mounds* and *Green Strokes* (both 1968) reveal how drawing offered the artist a framework, outside of painting, through which to deconstruct its most fundamental elements. ‘My drawings are the skeletons upon which I plan to add muscle and bones and flesh,’ she has said. Presenting a series of reduced marks – blobs, lines, stripes and strokes – these works contain the pictorial discoveries that would catalyse one of the artist’s major bodies of work, the Stroke paintings.

Five important drawings from 1970 capture Snyder’s deepening interrogation of mark-making as a type of notation, as she begins to explore the dualities that now define her work: that of figuration and abstraction, logic and feeling, planning and impulse. In *Marks and Strokes*, scribbles and dashes of brightly coloured oil pastel, watercolour and graphite dance over graph paper, as though the grid – with its potent associations of Modernist art and its discourses – is a system in whose fixity she rebels. Similarly, in *Untitled (1970 series 1_2)*, thick strokes

of dark-pink watercolour are arranged in horizontal rows that smudge and bleed across pencilled lines. Organising structures recur throughout the exhibition as Snyder considers the autonomy of the gesture within a strict formal context, and how a painterly mark might animate a surface like the written words on a page or musical notes on a stave. ‘Throughout Snyder’s entire oeuvre, the grid functions as a metronome,’ the curator and art historian Jenni Sorkin writes, ‘a device of precision, a tempo upon which to rely, or, conversely, to transgress.’

Behind Snyder’s work on paper, and her practice at large, is a descriptive, autobiographical impulse: ‘[I] tell my story with marks and colours and lines and shapes,’ she says. ‘I speak of love and anguish, of fear and mostly of hope.’ Many of the works in the exhibition are diaristic, including *Summer 6/12* and *Summer 6/14*, two watercolour sketches made a couple of days apart in June 1983. Their stippled landscapes loosen and dissolve into abstractions, and in the former, an opaque, blackened heart hangs low on the horizon like a sun, reflecting the artist’s unique ability to fuse subjective feeling with representation.



Ancient Radar, 2013. Paper pulp with berries, fabric and dried flowers on burlap. 87.63 x 69.85 cm (34.5 x 27.5 in).



Dear Molly, Maggie, Mira, 2015, Acrylic, watercolour, paper, ink and graphite on paper.
67.31 x 101.6 cm (26.5 x 40 in).

The complexity of Snyder's drawings develops over the chronology of the exhibition, as her early experiments in elemental forms make way to increasingly dense and layered surfaces. A series of paper-pulp works shows the artist's near-sculptural approach to the medium, including *Ancient Radar* (2013), which is affixed with additional sheets of leopard-print fabric. 'As with other materials and images to which she returns periodically, Snyder keeps building on her past applications of paper, altering its role and developing new associations through it,' explains the art historian and curator Sarah Anne McNear.

Language plays an important part in Snyder's art-making, where it is applied like an additional material, layered and deconstructed. While her early works are often annotated with details about structure, line and colour choice, since the mid-1970s Snyder has combined text and image for both formal and narrative effect. Throughout the exhibition, sprawling handwritten and painted words seem to capture fragments of the artist's voice, which is at times poetic and at others confessional, grief-stricken, playful, deadpan or enraged. *Dear Molly, Maggie, Mira* (2015) is a visual letter addressed to the significant women in Snyder's life that begins with emotionally written words and slowly blooms into four painted roses. In *You Bastard* (2016), disordered letters seem to scrabble and fight for coherence against a lattice of overlapping handprints.

By resisting legibility, Snyder invites us to consider language beyond its referential meaning, to see it instead as another graphic mark or embodied gesture. In *Don't Try to Read This* (2025), one of the most recent works in the exhibition, Snyder playfully acknowledges this resistance, scrawling

the titular words along the lower edge of the composition. The work which lends the exhibition its title, *Love from an Abstract Artist* (2025), is also ironic. Composed almost entirely out of words, it further complicates the idea of drawing as an exclusively pictorial mode of representation. The artist presents us with a list that is an inventory of personal motifs: buds, grapes, ponds, roses, herbs, faces, hands, bodies, trees, flowers, breasts, totems, strokes and moons. Her signature, 'LOVE FROM AN ABSTRACT ARTIST', serves as a valediction and nods to a semiotic game where list-making becomes mark-making, and mark-making, in turn, becomes abstraction. 'It is the absolute congruence of formal and autobiographical discovery that distinguishes Snyder,' writes the art historian Hayden Herrera. 'Because the message is conveyed through abstract language as well as through images and words, self-exploration never becomes trivial self-display.'



You Bastard, 2016. Acrylic and fabric on paper.
57.15 x 76.2 cm (22.5 x 30 in).

About the artist



Portrait of Joan Snyder, 2025. Photo: Lauren Fleishman.

Joan Snyder was born in Highland Park, New Jersey, in 1940 and now lives and works in Brooklyn and Woodstock, New York. First exhibiting her *Stroke* paintings in the early 1970s, she has since shown work in numerous institutional exhibitions, including solo presentations at the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY (1998); Jewish Museum, New York, NY (2005; travelling to Danforth Art Museum, Framingham, MA); and the Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ (2011). She participated in the Whitney Biennial in 1973 and 1981, and the 34th Biennial of Contemporary American Painting, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 1975.

More recently, her work has been included in such group presentations as *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (2006–8); *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age* at the Brandhorst Museum, Munich (2015) and *mumok*, Vienna (2016); *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible* at the Met Breuer, New York, NY (2016); *Epic Abstraction: Pollock to Herrera* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

(2018–20); *Art After Stonewall: 1969–1989* at Leslie Lohman Museum of Art, New York, NY (2019–20); *Out of Place: A Feminist Look at the Collection* at Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY (2020); *Tender Loving Care: Contemporary Art from the Collection* at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA (2023–25); and *In the Studio: Painterly Gestures* at Tate Modern, London (2023–25).

In recognition of her pioneering contribution to contemporary American art, Snyder was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship in 2007. Her works are held in the collections of the Guggenheim Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, Jewish Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA; Museum of Fine Arts Boston, MA; National Gallery of Art and National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; and Tate, London, among others.

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