

CHROMATIC EXUBERANCE: Hermine Harman's Brilliant Art

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Hermine Harman loves color. This is manifest in the way she paints, in the way she decorates her Maui home, and in the way she dresses (especially when she dons an elaborate costume for a special art event!) Colors explode across her canvases, creating dynamic realms of pigment, texture, and collage. Colors drape her household walls--indeed, she calls her studio "The Museum of Color." And colors, especially purple and red, become the decorative themes of her dramatic outfits, from outrageous headgear to abundant stacks of jewelry to hand-painted shoes.

Harman paints on wood panels, canvas, paper, and, occasionally, fabric. She works totally intuitively, allowing her subconscious to direct the movements of her hand over the painting surface. Although she had some art training in school and, later, in classes at Esalen Institute (in Big Sur, California, where she lived before moving to Maui), her most important instruction has come from her 2018-19 workshops with Nicholas Wilton, who helped her with composition and color relationships. Inspired by Wilton, she moved from largely figurative work to expressive abstraction.

The roots of Harman's recent work can be seen in the 1950s movement known as Abstract Expressionism, especially in the female practitioners Joan Mitchell (1925-1992) and Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011). Mitchell, whose 1960 *Untitled* sold for the record-breaking sum of \$11.9 million, seemed to attack the canvas, using her brush as an aesthetic weapon. She swept, splattered, scraped, and piled thick fields of color across the white background, creating scintillating zones of often-warring pigments. In contrast, Harman works on a smaller scale, adding glitter, gold leaf, and collage elements cut from art history texts. In *Red Always Wins*, the dominant crimson is animated by irregular geometric shapes of burgundy, gold, and pearlescent white. The closely related *Passion Personified* is scarlet with smoky white highlights and liquid splatters of dark garnet.

In late 2019, Harman began to introduce more subdued colors, the medium-toned ochre, turquoise, and brown that she calls her "Midcentury" palette. Her *Paved with Gold* is a diptych weaving paint and gold leaf with energetic geometric patterns that recall wallpaper from the 1950s.

Even as she grows and changes, Harman maintains her visual focus on color, building her compositions into expressive chromatic explosions that delight the eye and inspire the mind. She is indeed (as she says) a "Color Maximalist!"