



In her brilliantly hued prints, Susan Goldman explores antiquity, abstraction and a love of the medium

LAYERED BEAUTY

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When Susan Goldman entered the studio-art program at Indiana University Bloomington, she planned to become a painter. That was before she took a required class in printmaking. “There was a lot of excitement around the print department,” she recalls. She was intrigued by the creative output of artists working in studios that focused on lithography and etching, intaglio relief and screenprinting. “It was so much more interesting than painting,” she says. “After my sophomore year, there was no looking back.”

Four decades later, that momentum has propelled her in unexpected directions. While continuing to develop her own art, Goldman is also a master printer, collaborating with artists at Lily Press Studio, which she founded in 2000 and where she welcomes renowned local artists including Sam Gilliam and Renée Stout, as well as others farther afield, like Keiko Hara of Walla Walla, Washington.

Goldman returned to the Midwest in 2005 to begin research on a documentary she later produced about seminal mid-century printmakers. More recently, she curated works by 10

trendsetting printmakers for an exhibit on view at American University’s Katzen Arts Center; a companion dance performance at AU will feature her bold geometric prints on costumes she designed in collaboration with choreographer Keira Hart-Mendoza. “Those are my print elements come to life,” says the artist, smiling with pleasure.

Dressed in black, Goldman is a statuesque figure with a modest, kindly

Goldman (above) sits by the printing press in her Rockville studio. Her latest screenprints layer richly colored geometries over a bold blossom (top, left) and classical vases (above, left), in square and vertical designs.

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—SUSAN GOLDMAN



Clockwise from far left: While screenprinting, Goldman discusses the alignment of a Victorian-flower pattern with assistant Erwin Thamm, who uses a squeegee to pull the ink over a work in progress. The artists examine the results before repeating the process on another print, each one a unique impression.

manner and gentle voice. She stands in the spacious, light-filled studio that her husband, architect Jeffrey Owens, designed as an addition to their Rockville home. A massive printing press occupies a central position. Everything else—long worktables, neatly organized shelves, a tall rack for drying prints—is on wheels to accommodate most types of fine-art printing methods.

The artist herself works with screenprinting, which involves pulling ink through polyester mesh; monotypes, similar to drawing or painting with ink on a smooth surface; and woodcuts, imprinted from a woodblock that she carves by hand. “I can do singular impressions, limited impressions, or I can print 40 at a time,” she notes. Though her press can handle prints up to 40-by-72 inches, she recently licensed blowups of her designs, enlarged to 60-by-40 feet, for a hotel in Abu Dhabi.

Clipped to the studio’s white walls, Goldman’s latest screenprints radiate brilliant, intensely saturated color. “You need sunglasses,” she jokes. The geometric works in progress contain bullseye or flower-blossom circles decoratively

overlaid with blocks, triangles and segmented dots. “I’m playing with what can happen inside a square,” she says. In another vertical group, flattened vases in acid yellow or startling fuchsia cover the lower portion of the sheet or become solid panels of pure color. Like classical Greek columns topped by capitals, these bases are crowned by simple rectangles or rounded targets. Both series represent variations on themes that Goldman has continued to reconfigure over time.

“It comes out of a love of pattern, still life, antiquities,” she explains. It also reflects her interest in simplifying recognizable forms into abstract compositional elements. Underlying all is a passion for color. “The basic premise is beauty, making the world beautiful,” she explains, “because the world is not always beautiful.”

When Goldman begins a piece, she chooses from a library of some 30 images stenciled on separate screens. Combining images requires a separate printing for each. And every color change involves its own printing, as the layers build. “What will happen when I play with different colors and overlays?” she asks at the start.

“Some of it I don’t know until I get going.”

On a recent afternoon, the artist considered those possibilities during the last print run of the day with her skilled assistants, Erwin Thamm and Jermaine Ashman. Heading to the garage, they laid a Victorian-flower engraving, already digitally enlarged and printed out by Goldman, on top of a blank screen coated in light-sensitive emulsion. After exposure to light, the emulsion area hardened, leaving the pattern transferred to the screen and, like an open stencil, ready to be inked.

Back at the worktable, Ashman saturated a squeegee, then smoothly and powerfully pushed and pulled ink—in a color Goldman had blended—through the mesh onto a test paper. Satisfied with the result, Goldman selected one print and then another as the push and pull proceeded. “Several things happen at once, so it helps to have extra eyes on a project,” she observes. “It’s a collaborative type of medium.”

The artist’s love of the process extends from its structured deconstruction, repetition and layering to its playful improvisation and surprises. “There is an element of mystery to what the medium gives you,” she says. “The way it all comes together, printmaking gives back to me a result I couldn’t have seen at the beginning.” ■

Goldman’s prints are part of a group show at McLean Project for the Arts through June 1. “Forward Press: 21st-Century Printmaking,” curated by Susan Goldman, is on view at the Katzen Arts Center through August 12; a companion dance performance at American University featuring costumes and sets designed by Goldman takes place on May 9. susangoldman.net