

# JASON MCCOY GALLERY

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## HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

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### Home Remedies

by

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Glenn Goldberg, "First Elixir" (2011) (all images courtesy the Jason McCoy Gallery)

The large paintings in Glenn Goldberg's recent exhibition are part of a series collectively titled *Elixir*. They are half as tall as they are wide. "Eighth Elixir" (2011) is less than four feet tall and over seven feet wide, but most are slightly less than three feet high and five feet wide. Done in acrylic and ink on pale gray, gessoed grounds, the paintings have an undulating visual hum to them — think Philip Glass and Terry Riley — which is both soothing and disconcerting. This is because Goldberg effectively meshes two palettes on a gray ground — one is black and white, while the other consists of muted, often transparent colors ranging from near primaries to turquoise and violet.

Goldberg lays down a layer of variously colored shapes, and then uses the black and white palette to make the dots that fill them in. The transparent washes suggest stained glass windows, which the tactile dots contradict. The paintings convey a subdued glow literally marked by visceral dots; they marry a hushed state with a rhythmic staccato that recalls chanting. Busy areas alternate with the gray grounds. The dots might lead one to say pointillism, as many observers have, but frankly I have never encountered anything quite like these paintings. They occupy a territory that is their own, and on that basis alone should be given their due.

The narrow, horizontal format is panoramic, a wide-angled view that I associate with landscape photography and John Ford's shots of Monument Valley in *The Searchers* (1956) and *Stagecoach* (1939). But, instead of opening onto deep space or an aerial view, Goldberg contradicts our assumptions through his precise articulation of space that is simultaneously shallow and deep, confined and airy.



Glenn Goldberg, "Second Elixir" (2011)

In "Second Elixir" (2011), starting at the painting's bottom edge, a trapezoidal plane, which is patterned in diagonally oriented blue and black and green bands, tilts back toward a pale gray plane that is set back in space, and is both conterminous and parallel to the surface. On this back plane the artist has painted a layered shape that is evocative of floral motifs, mandalas, tantric art, Shaker art, esoteric symbols, and pinwheels — speaking both to the sophisticate in us, and the child.

The three flanking columns in the painting's immediate foreground, as well as the flanking ones in the background, both frame and further define the space. Made of dots, the leaf-like shapes — think swarm of bees in formation — joining both sets of columns collapses the space, while the tilting plane pushes it open. At the same time, that same plane us in, until our eyes meet the floral motif, which seems as if it's made of light (transparent washes) and sand (the dots). Here, another contradiction arrives — the symmetrical shape is both substantial and insubstantial, a vision.



Glenn Goldberg, "Fourth Elixir" (2011)

Tensions of this sort exist in all of the Elixir paintings, compelling us to keep reorienting ourselves within their precisely orchestrated space. They mark a departure from the layered flatness of his earlier works, such as the ones shown at Luise Ross (2009). The space Goldberg is able to excavate and reshape from the picture's surface plane is ripe with imaginative possibilities, and it certainly can't be read in any simplifying or reductive way. The realm he confronts us with is artificial and constructed, and yet it is made of natural forms, of leaf- and flower-like shapes. It is a world that a child might want to get lost in — the rows of dots remind me of a candy I bought while growing up in Boston —but it also seems remote and foreboding.

The other difference is that there are no birds or any other evocation of movement, as one encountered in Goldberg's earlier work. An unearthly stillness prevails throughout these paintings, which vary between symmetrical and asymmetrical views. The asymmetrical views are another radical development in the artist's body of work, and it is something that I would like to see him pursue further, because I believe it offers him the opportunity to open up another new territory for himself.



Glenn Goldberg, "Seventh Elixir" (2011)

We cannot be sure if the paintings are directed toward our sight or our body. We can see into the space, but can we imagine ourselves physically entering it? If so, what size would we be? And what does this tell us about the scale of the things within the painting? We have fallen down the rabbit hole, like Alice. The diminutive and the monumental keep changing places. It is along this seam of speculation that all kinds of contradictions begin to announce themselves. They speak to us viscerally. The meshing of shapes, transparent washes of color, and black and white dots compelled me to step closer and then back. At a distance, everything in these paintings coalesces into legibility, which we discover is pressured by the constant visual hum of the myriad dots. In the asymmetrical paintings, we are likely to be thrown off balance, which I found intriguing.

By wanting his paintings "to take you toward, not away," Goldberg rejects spectacle, entertainment, anything that tries to distract you from time passing, everyday life, and mortality. He has developed and honed a process that requires his precise and repeated attention, particularly with the application of the dots, and through this process he transforms his paintings into a record of an act of devotion as it comes into being. While his paintings' roots are in Abstract Expressionism, particularly painters such as Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning, Goldberg has redefined process and diary-like concentration into a form of unwavering daily prayer. In this regard, they cannot be more different from their historical antecedents.

We cannot experience Goldberg's paintings fully until we recognize how they were made, and the quality of direct and simple attention that he has brought to bear on them. This is where their spirituality is most evident and most primeval. By introducing an architectonic space into his paintings, Goldberg departs from the flat, diagrammatic formats of his visionary forbears (Simon Gouveneur, Alfred Jensen and Emma Kunz), as well as contributes something original to the dialogue. It is no small achievement, particularly in an age where the worship of material acquisition, excess and frivolity are routinely upheld as desirable goals.

Glenn Goldberg: Elixirs, Tales and Remedies is on view at the Jason McCoy Gallery until March 2.