



GILDA SNOWDEN

album: a retrospective | **1977-2010**

GILDA SNOWDEN

album: a retrospective | 1977-2010

curated by dick goody

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY
ART
GALLERY

(on cover) *Three Degrees: Antoinette and Gilda*, 2010, photographs on panel with encaustic, 12 x 16 inches



GILDA SNOWDEN

ALBUM & ABSTRACTION

An abstractionist is one who views the world idealistically, transforming the imperfect into something perfect – something visionary. Abstraction is not absolute. There are varying degrees depending on the distance traveled between realism and non-representation. Traditionally realistic images, such as the landscape or the portrait, may be extrapolated by an artist until the subject becomes unrecognizable.

– Gilda Snowden, artist's statement, 1995

This statement was written during a period when Gilda Snowden was wrestling with serious issues pertinent to abstract painting. However, in terms of the timeline of her career, she did not enter painting immediately or by means of a direct approach. Her access was oblique, founded not upon the tradition of painting and drawing, but rather within the realm of dressmaking: assembling clothing from precut fabric rendered from patterns. As a teenager at Cass Technical High School in Detroit, she had wanted to become a fashion designer.

My work at this time runs along three parallel, yet related tracks. I have chosen the tornado, the self-portrait and the album as the constants as far as image and concept is concerned. These themes manifest themselves physically as large oil paintings, pastel drawings and constructions/assemblages. Basically they all refer to my nightmares (tornados); my personal identity (silhouetted self-portraits); and the environment I live and work in (assemblages).

Jones, Dawn — “Catalyst: Gilda Snowden,” *Arts Midwest Monthly Magazine* (October 1990)

This exhibition, with its archivist-inflected title: *Album*, is a look back at a varied and impressive oeuvre, almost 40 years in the making. It is also a reflection on Gilda Snowden’s extensive career and community presence as an artist, activist, teacher, peacemaker and doyenne of the visual arts in Detroit.

But first must come the work, because it defines the artist. What delineates Snowden’s work are the imperatives of introspection, meditation and production. These facets, which are both contemplative and robust, facilitate objects and images born out of necessity, bursting with assurance, expressive resonance and personal history. There is also the overt physical presence of an amalgamation of the biographical and historical with the physically extant — the interior and implicit juxtaposed against the exterior and explicit.

Her approach to making art was defined at the tail end of what we now loosely refer to simply as “The Cass Corridor.” An extremely productive period for the arts in Detroit, it embraced visual art, music and literary pursuits. The visual artists were energized by a renewed self-awareness, a heightened appreciation for avant-gardism, and were further empowered by a sense that this was their time: a new period of unity and confidence across the board, both in terms of patronage and institutional support. In short, infrastructure, opportunity and talent aligned like never before. Their métier was to combine an unabashed, urgent formalism with *objets-trouvés* rendering the urban vernacular in assemblages, paintings, drawings and sculpture, much of which expressed an affinity with Robert Rauschenberg’s work from the 1950s. Throughout the 1970s, under the astute patronage of businessman James Duffy, these artists initiated for themselves a thriving sense of productivity and community. Never a movement as such, the artists — Brenda Goodman, John Egner, Michael Luchs, Nancy Mitchnick, Gordon Newton, Ellen Phelan, Robert Sestock, et al — experienced the culmination of their early mid-careers in an exhibition organized by the Detroit Institute of Arts: *Kick Out the Jams: Detroit’s Cass Corridor 1963-1977*. By the time the exhibition opened in 1980, the loose collaboration or cooperative — the enterprise — had expended most of its cohesiveness. Egner, Snowden’s teacher at Wayne State University, was a particularly important influence, not just in terms of how to assemble a work of art, but what it meant to flourish and feel a sense of *esprit de corps* in the milieu of a particular cohort of artists — in this case, an irrepressible, mostly white demographic.

The mid-to-late 1970s saw Snowden initially studying advertising design, but two things convinced her to switch to painting. The first was what she describes as “an unfortunate but serendipitous experience.” She had applied to do an internship at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. She duly showed up with her portfolio, whereupon the art director informed her that her techniques were completely out of date. She left the office, threw her advertising projects in the trash and decided to commit herself to painting. The other thing that happened was that she signed up for a composition class with Egner where, rather than design, he taught his students more about the scene. “He took us to every collection, gallery and exhibition space, so we met collectors, dealers and

artists, and got a real sense of the world outside of the painting studio.” She began studying painting in earnest. Her undergraduate paintings were comprised of small, rapidly executed, flat ochre and umber still lifes inflected with the utilitarian pedagogical capability of her painting teacher, Robert Wilbert. However, at a crucial time in her development, having embarked upon her M.F.A., Wilbert departed for an extended sabbatical. Tom Parish, another figurative painting professor at Wayne State, was still in place and left an indelible impression, but Wilbert’s replacements — Guy Goodwin, Judy Rifka and Ron Gorchov, all abstract artists, with no particular affinity for academic figuration — completely transformed her approach to making art.

Snowden’s encounters with these radical artists, the years she spent at Cass Tech, a contrarian instinct to challenge conventionality and orthodoxy, and the desire to assert *herself* in her art (as a stand-in for the notion of adopting a more traditional exterior muse), led her into the uncharted waters of assemblage. Here she could combine things she had an affection for with objects for which she had a particular affinity. In doing so, she began to explore how to insert her identity into her makeshift formalist constructions. A self-confessed pack rat, she had the means, motive and opportunity to acquire the rags and bones, and the archive images so necessary for the collagist. Yet her “collages” were not mere paper cutouts. Made of rescued three-dimensional remains, remnants and fragments, they possessed all the equivalent stoic grandeur and formalistic mass of a Romanesque tympanum. The former Cass Tech fashion student was using her cut-pattern sewing skills and combining them with everything she knew about painting, all of it mediated by her sense of self and biographical history, as well as the history of the African American diaspora made manifest in the stories of her family’s southern-to-northern migration.

If she ever came close to becoming a sculptor, it was during the ’80s with assemblages like *Album* and *Album J & C*. These iconic works were by an artist working in relief. She had an affinity with the assemblages of Joseph Cornell, although there was nothing effete in the scale or direction she was now taking, but there never had been. At this point in her artistic disembarkation, there were financial restraints. Her constructions were wrought thriftily with recycled material and encaustic, the unifying wax that preserved the integrity of her assemblages. The more colorful pigments were too expensive, so she depended on black, white and economical earth tones ordered from New York. Her sculptural reliefs, she claims, would have been supremely colorful had she possessed the resources to acquire the more chromatically rich powdered pigments, which lay just beyond her reach. She had studied Jasper Johns’ encaustic wax technique at Wayne State, but still needed to teach herself how to melt the wax and mix in the pigments. In essence, this epitomizes her autodidactic artistic practice. If the works from the 1980s now appear to be extraordinarily unified, it is, in part, because of the economic restrictions placed upon her during their production, making them monochromatically reductive.

Snowden was not a vanguard African American painter; Shirley Woodson Reid, Naomi Dickerson and others had come before her, but she was part of that minority. She was definitely aware that this was her time to succeed, and this realization had considerable value; a less confident character would have found it difficult to maintain this viewpoint. She also understood that her position was one that required an unrelenting vigilance not to be anything other than a self-defining artist. She had always been self-sufficient. Now, in short, she was on a mission. If she were to be successful, two things would have to be assured, and these were not negotiable. One, she would only make her work on her own terms; two, that it would have to be made in the context (at that time) of the white, chiefly male art world of downtown Detroit.

Nevertheless, it was an intensely welcoming enclave comprising roughly 10 blocks along Cass Avenue from Willis Street to Alvin’s, a bar located at the northern rim of Wayne State University. Alvin’s, for her, became a clubhouse — as it was for many artists working along the corridor. Here she was accepted and found a natural place to reside and develop her confidence. Here, also, she was to meet her future husband: William Boswell, an actor and writer 14 years her senior, whose heritage was strikingly different from her

own, his ancestors hailing from Scotland. They were married in 1987, and eventually they were to have a daughter, Katherine Snowden Boswell.

Snowden's parents both died relatively young, in their mid-60s, and in the same year. *Album J & C* pays homage to their memory. Another encaustic work, *The Poet's Place*, 1988, is for her father. In the center of the work is a newspaper obituary photograph of John Snowden, DDS. To the right is a photograph of Edgar Allen Poe, a favorite of her father's. He had wanted his daughter to be a physician, but ultimately accepted her decision to become an artist. The year 1987 was a delineating one for Snowden's oeuvre. The years before had seen her use the photographic portraits as an elemental source for her work. After 1988, photographs ceased to make an appearance and are absent from her work for almost 25 years. One could say that after 1988, embarking on married life, the past became simply that — the past. Her work became less introspective and looked forward to a more condensed, formalistic, painterly, and, most important, abstract future.

The late '80s saw Snowden establishing herself as an important emerging artist. In 1988, she had a solo exhibition at the Broadway Gallery in Detroit. Several important Detroit artists were also showing there, including Peter Williams and James Stephens. In fact, throughout the '80s she showed her work in more than 80 group and seven solo exhibitions.

A transitional work between the 1980s *Album* series and her emergent *Tornado* series is *John T*, a red-earth encaustic relief with a triangular nautical cast. One sees it almost breaking apart before one's eyes; it has an explosive quality — that of a tightly wrought form about to disintegrate. In comparison, *Tornado*, 1988, appears to be incapable of breaking up; moreover, its expanded palette points ahead to a growing interest in color. Looking at it today, it appears like everything from the past has been swept up and reconstituted into the twisted whole of a spinning vortex. Akin to the birth of a new phase, it indicates the more formalistic, abstract approach to come. Still not a painting per se, certainly it presages her pure abstract paintings of the 1990s. It is a grounding work physically, too, as it points down to the earth's surface. Metaphorically, also, it roots itself into practical matters: those of making a purer, more universal abstract art rather than specific memorials and scrapbook assemblages relating to the past.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the tornado form chose Gilda Snowden or she selected it for herself. Is it a subject, an image or a theme? She started using the form because, as she has often stated, she fears tornados. It is an exotically menacing form, which she has wrestled with again and again, but it rapidly became a defining leitmotif. Initially, it provided the impetus to abandon more narrative approaches to making art in favor of ones that became increasingly formalistic and abstract. In a manner of speaking, the tornado is Snowden's version of Cubism, not in the sense that it pays homage to Modernism (it does not), but if, for example, Cubism emancipated form from realism, then the tornado provided her the freedom to become an abstract artist.

Having said that, Snowden has always refused to stick to any particular singular practice. By 1993, she may have been on the way to becoming an abstract painter, but one that remained rooted in her environment. *City Album 1929*, 1994, a work on paper, is evidential of her parallel artistic career as appropriator (recalling her use of a photographic archive). She would ride around downtown Detroit on a bicycle with rolls of paper and pastels and periodically make rubbings of manhole covers. Back in the studio, she would work up these facsimiles with colorful oil pastels, once again becoming a memorialist. These works are rooted in design and symmetry, two important progenitors for the artist. They also helped to assert the flattened plane of an abstract surface, hierarchically reinforcing the painterly over the sculptural. Indeed, considering her career, one envisions an artist absorbed by various parallel bodies of work, ebbing and flowing between beginnings and endings.

While appropriating manhole covers, in counterpart, her paintings became almost non-referential. *Phantom*, 1993, is loosely divided into two halves; one side has more activity, but it is a close call. There is some color, but, with the whiteness of the ground, the color exists to delineate one type of form from another. Frenetic, today it looks as if the artist has just set her brushes down for the day, in all probability having finished her painting. The paint still looks wet. It is Snowden at her most spontaneous, and yet, paradoxically, most cool. This is what defines it as one of her best paintings of the period.

A more effervescent body of work was her extensive suite of monochromatic self-portrait drawings. *Chronicle*, 1994, is a good example. These graphite and pastel drawings depict Snowden in silhouette at a time when she let her hair grow into long dreads; these appear blown by a vortex, and in a way, transition in and out of her tornado period (and the impersonal) back to the biographical (and personal), and is yet another example of the shifting polarities in her output.

These portrayals are inscribed with Snowden's sense of identity. On the subject of being a black artist, she has said that some people expect African American artists to make work about one thing and one thing only: being black. She counters: "To be an African American artist, especially a female artist, is a political statement. This opened me up to abstraction." In other words, she is a political artist, but maintains the right to select her vehicle of expression.

As a self-defined abstract artist, she would ultimately choose to make work that is less cool and more colorful than *Phantom*, work more inscribed with the ethos of Matisse — and the notion that "a painting should be like a comfortable armchair." In short, she believes that painting is self-reflexive and primarily concerned with aesthetics. Today, to her, the tenets of Abstract Expressionism are less informing than the enduring influence of Claude Monet, Pierre Bonnard and the School of Paris, in general. However, in the 1980s, Abstract Expressionism was a powerful influence.

Since 2000, her painting practice has divided itself between formal themes relating to the sky at night, urban gardens and chairs. The latter is a perennial obsession. Snowden states: "... a chair is a very strange abstract object. ... [it] has a seat, a back, and three or four legs. ... [chairs] are seats of knowledge, seats of learning, seats of power; these are the metaphors that come to mind." Hence, the chair has become another enduring leitmotif.

The chromatically intense night sky and urban garden paintings, on the other hand, are both personal and universal themes. Once again, as with her tornado paintings, Snowden has taken something universal and claimed it for herself as a means to achieve an abstraction. The night sky belongs to everyone, but in Snowden's *Bright Stars at Night* series she is documenting the sky both within and outside Detroit — Detroit being her default position. Similarly, in her *Flora Urbana* series she deals with botany and gardening in an urban environment. This is something we can all relate to, but, particularly in Detroit, the theme embodies a city once in decline, now proactively apprehending renewal, and, in this case, being rejuvenated and reclaimed through urban farming.

Gilda Snowden was awarded an inaugural Kresge Art in Detroit Fellowship in 2009. This honor was conferred upon her by the jurors: Susan Bades, Aaron Betsky, Lorna Simpson and Richard Tuttle. Initially, they knew nothing of her long-enduring commitment to the visual arts in Detroit — her 30-year career as a teacher at the College for Creative Studies, where she has educated, inspired and nurtured hundreds of aspirant artists and where she continues to be an enduring matriarchal presence. Neither were they aware of her 25-year stint as the gallery director for the Detroit Repertory Theatre. What they saw, appreciated and ultimately selected was the work: the 20 images submitted for their scrutiny.

Full circle, in 2010 Snowden began using encaustic again. She had, in fact, been using it for several years in her garden paintings, but the latest works combined encaustic with photographs of ancestors and current family. These are some of the same themes as in her *Album* assemblages from the 1980s, but now they are greatly pared down in their visual economy. *Three Degrees: Antoinette and Gilda*, 2010, is a good example. Encaustic is applied like cake icing over the photographs. Color is not an issue in these works, in the sense that only one or two colors appear in each. The photographs are mediated by the wax and not by its color — the wax acts like a time capsule, sealing in the photographic image, reinforcing Roland Barthes' declaration that a photographic portrait is ultimately a *memento mori*. Wax is provisional, though; it can be melted away.

Above all, this new work carries with it the weight and provenance of memory, the intrinsic power of an image, and the transformative and transitional nature of abstraction: three of the constant presences that make work by Gilda Snowden so memorable and enduring.

Dick Goody, June 2013



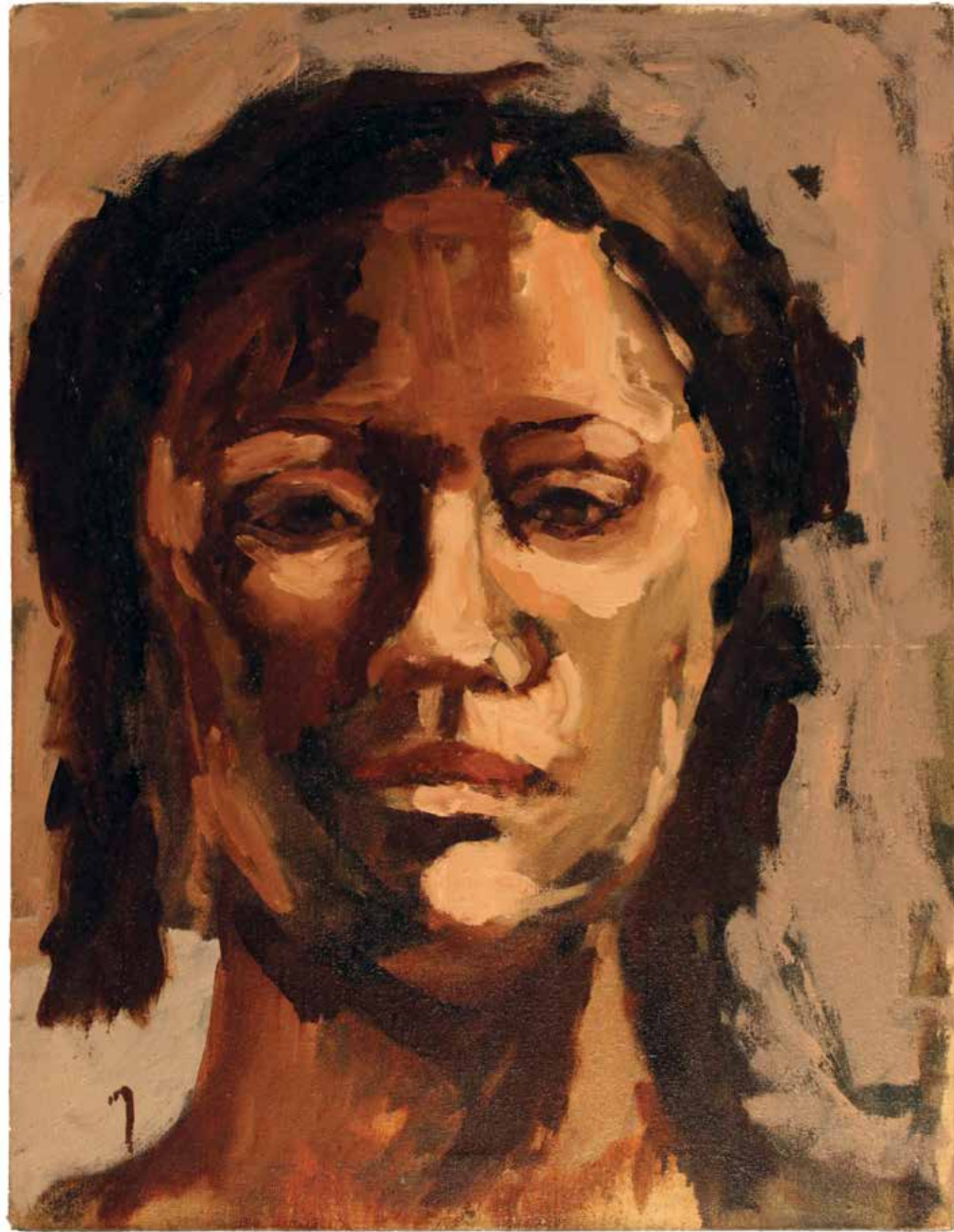
Chair, 1977, oil on canvas, 25 x 23 ½ inches



Still Life with Film Canisters, 1977, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches



Still Life with Brush, 1977, oil on canvas, 16 x 30 inches



Self-Portrait, 1977, oil on canvas, 26 x 20 inches
Collection of Dan Grashuck



Inverness, 1981, oil on canvas, 51 ½ x 25 ½ x 3 inches
Collection of William G. Boswell



Bellwork, 1981, encaustic construction, 32 ½ x 24 x 21 inches



Album, 1985, encaustic construction with photographs, 34 ½ x 60 ½ x 6 inches



Album (detail), 1985, encaustic construction with photographs, 34 ½ x 60 ½ x 6 inches



Album with Mirror, 1985, encaustic construction with photographs, 23 ½ x 43 ½ x 5 ½ inches



Cross Fetish, 1985, encaustic construction with T-shirt, twine and screws, 24 ¼ x 12 ½ x 4 inches



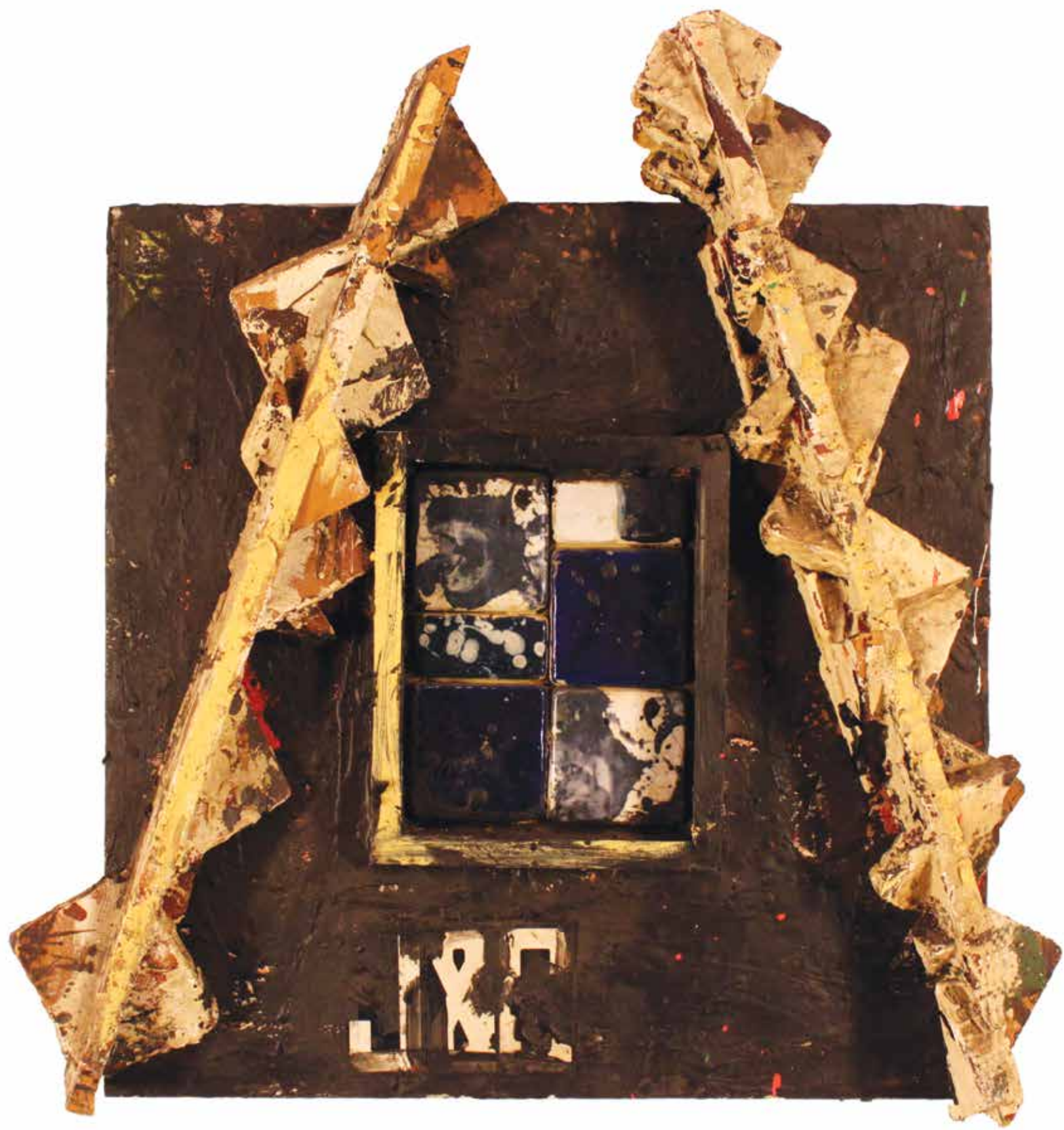
Doll, 1985, encaustic construction with wool and copper wire, 12 x 11 x 4 inches



(left) *Wrapped Fetish*, 1985, encaustic construction with twine, 22 x 13 ½ x 3 inches
 (right) *Donna's Dilemma*, 1985, encaustic construction with twine, 72 x 8 x 6 ½ inches



Altar for Julia, 1986, totemic construction, 48 ½ x 9 ½ x 13 ½ inches



Album J & C, 1987, encaustic construction with ceramic tiles, 29 x 28 ½ x 5 inches



John T., 1988, encaustic construction, 61 x 91 x 5 ½ inches



The Poet's Place, 1988, encaustic construction with objects, 48 x 48 x 4 inches



Tornado, 1988, encaustic construction with oil paint, 108 x 72 x 6 1/2 inches



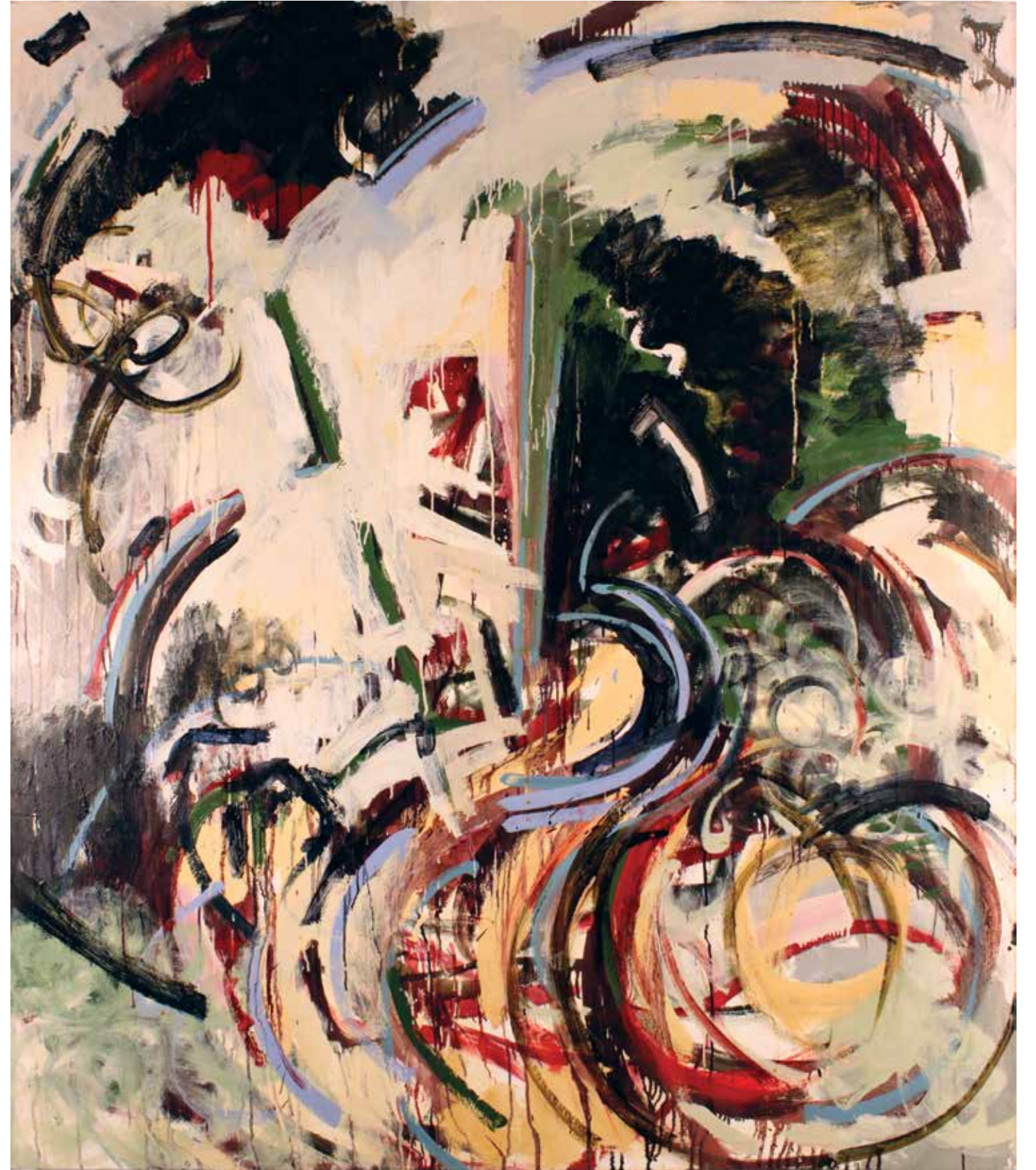
Album: Sculptor, 1989, encaustic construction with photographs, 24 x 24 x 2 inches



Album: Yavi and Yavi Brother, 1989, encaustic construction with photographs, 24 x 24 x 3 inches



***Tornado: Red Wind**, 1990, pastel on paper, 42 x 30 inches
Collection of William G. Boswell and Katherine S. Boswell*



***Phantom**, 1993, oil on canvas, 72 x 68 inches*



Sorcerer, 1993, encaustic construction, oil on canvas, 72 x 68 inches



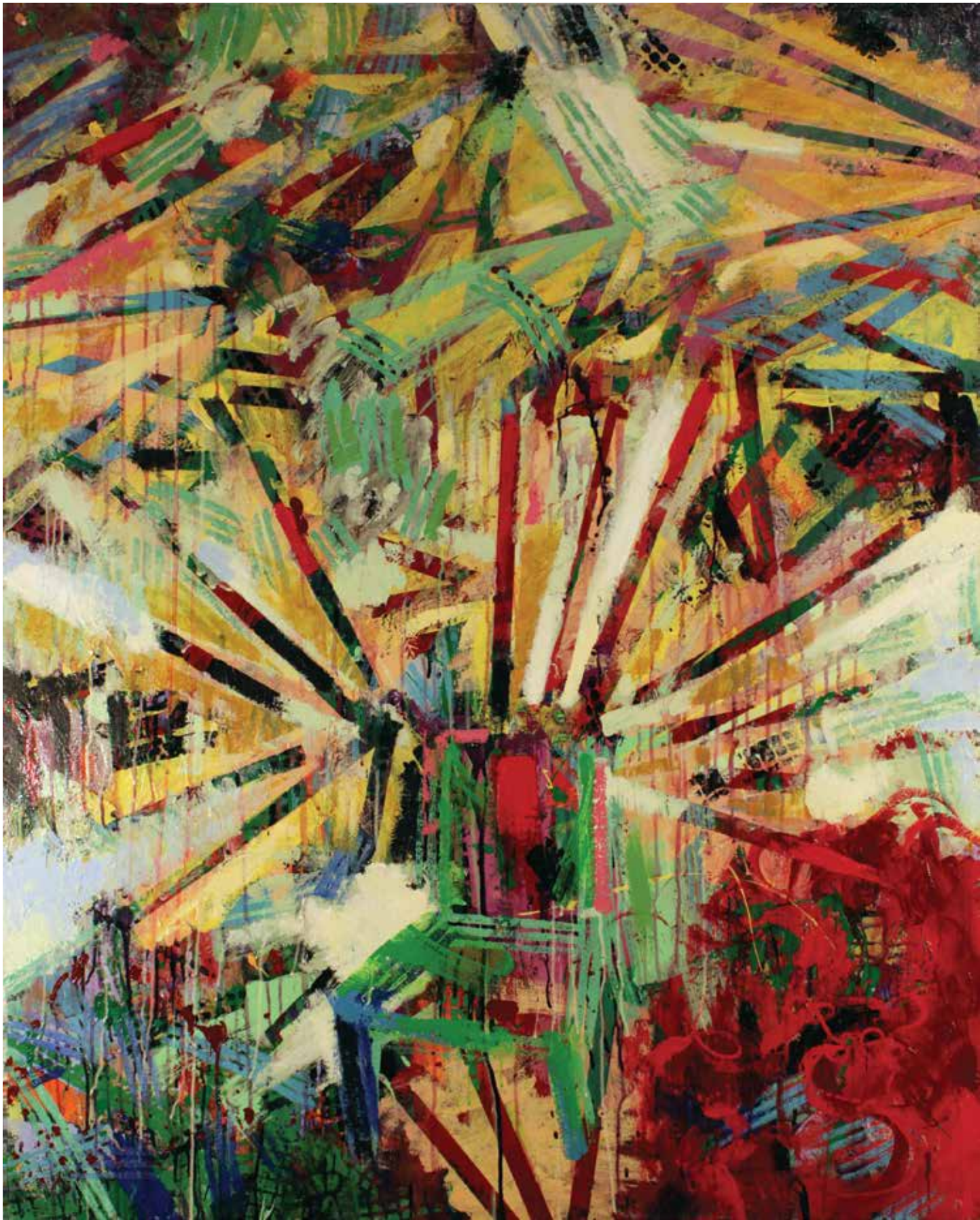
Chronicle II, 1994, graphite on paper, 30 x 22 inches



City Album: Department of Railways 1929, 1994, oil stick and paste on paper, 36 x 36 inches



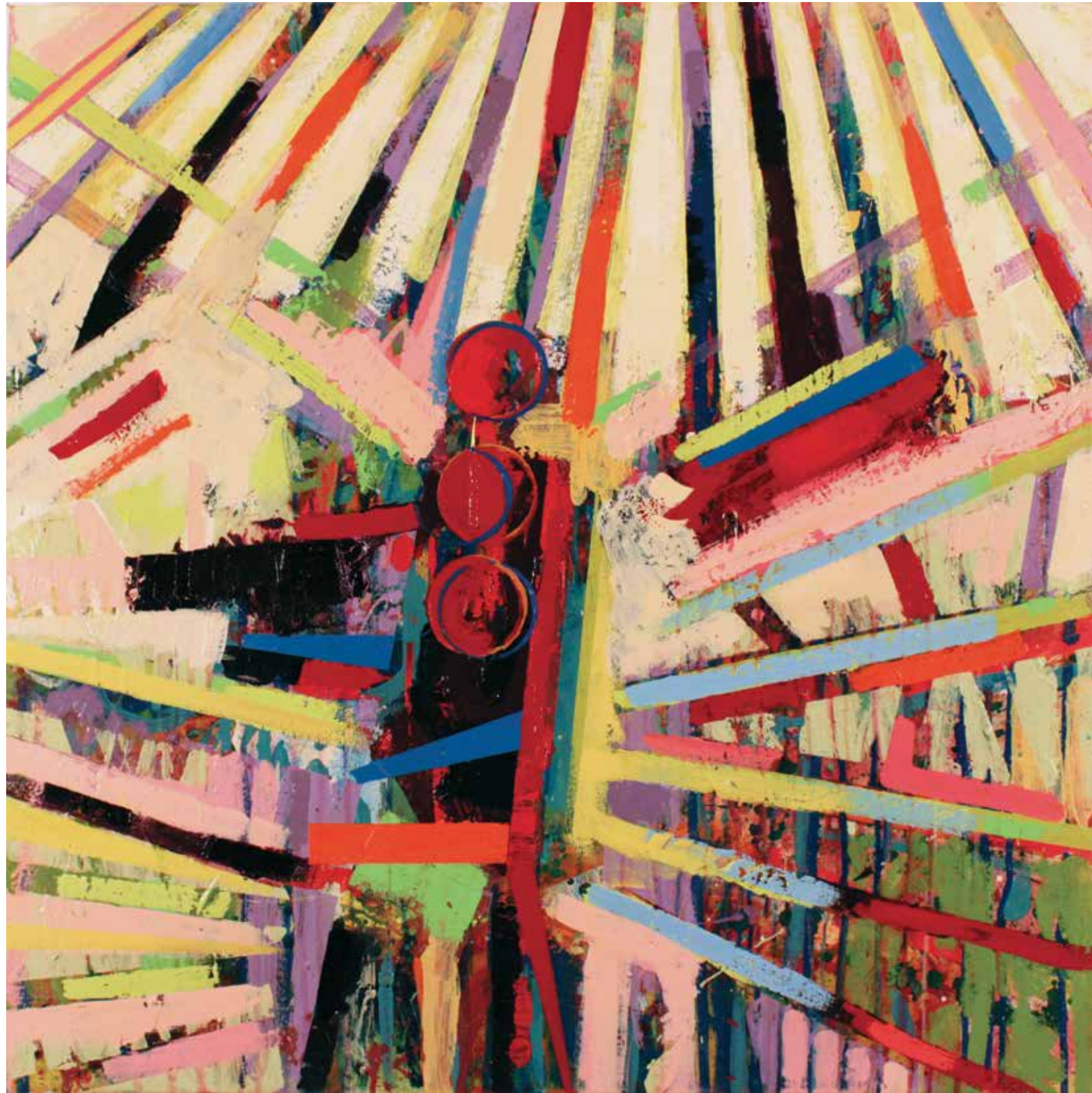
City Album: Public Lighting Commission 1936, 1994, oil stick, pastel and collage, 36 x 36 inches



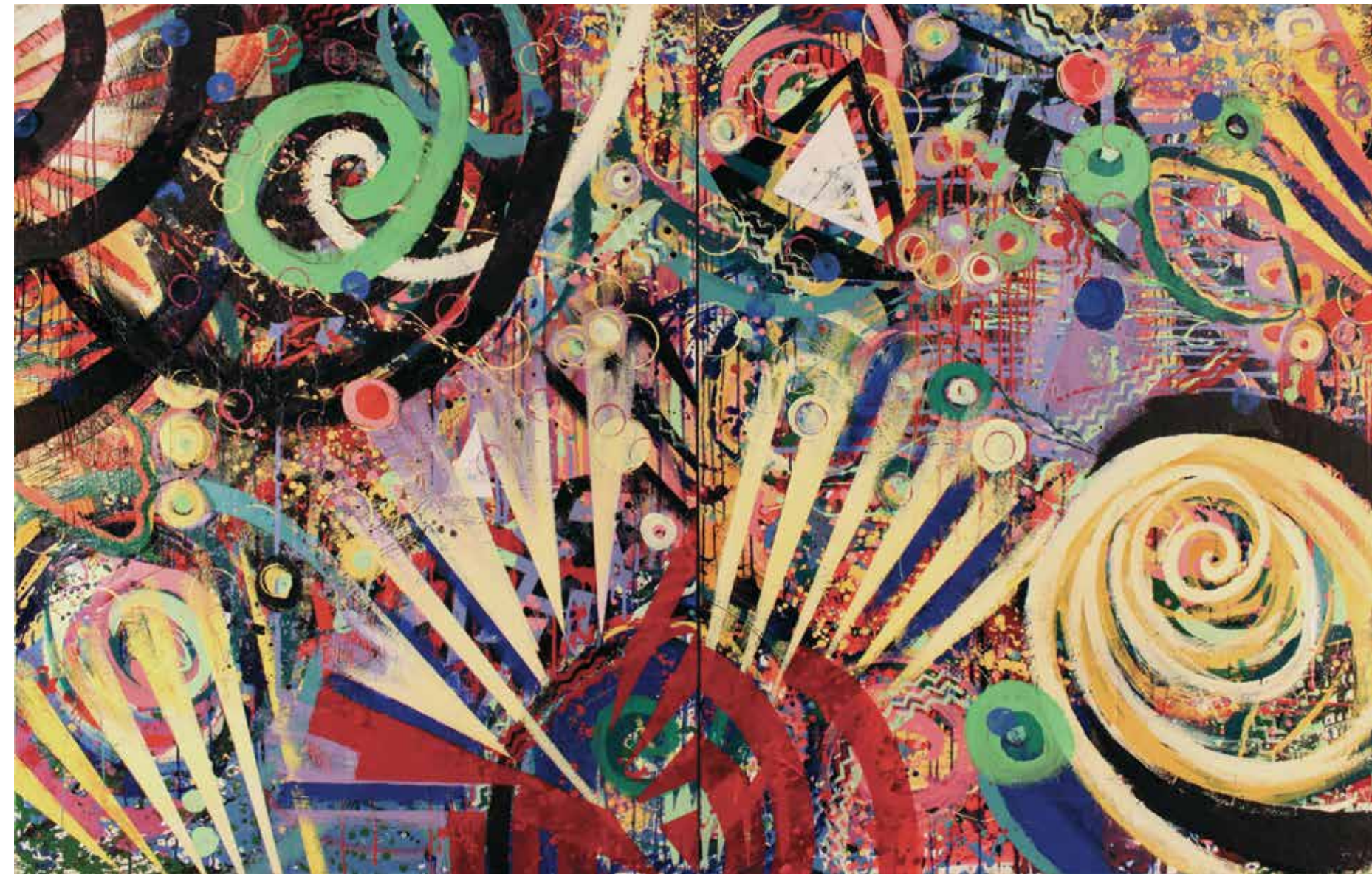
Green Chair: Bright Stars at Night, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 48 inches



Imaginary Landscape, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 60 inches



Sunray Chair, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36 inches



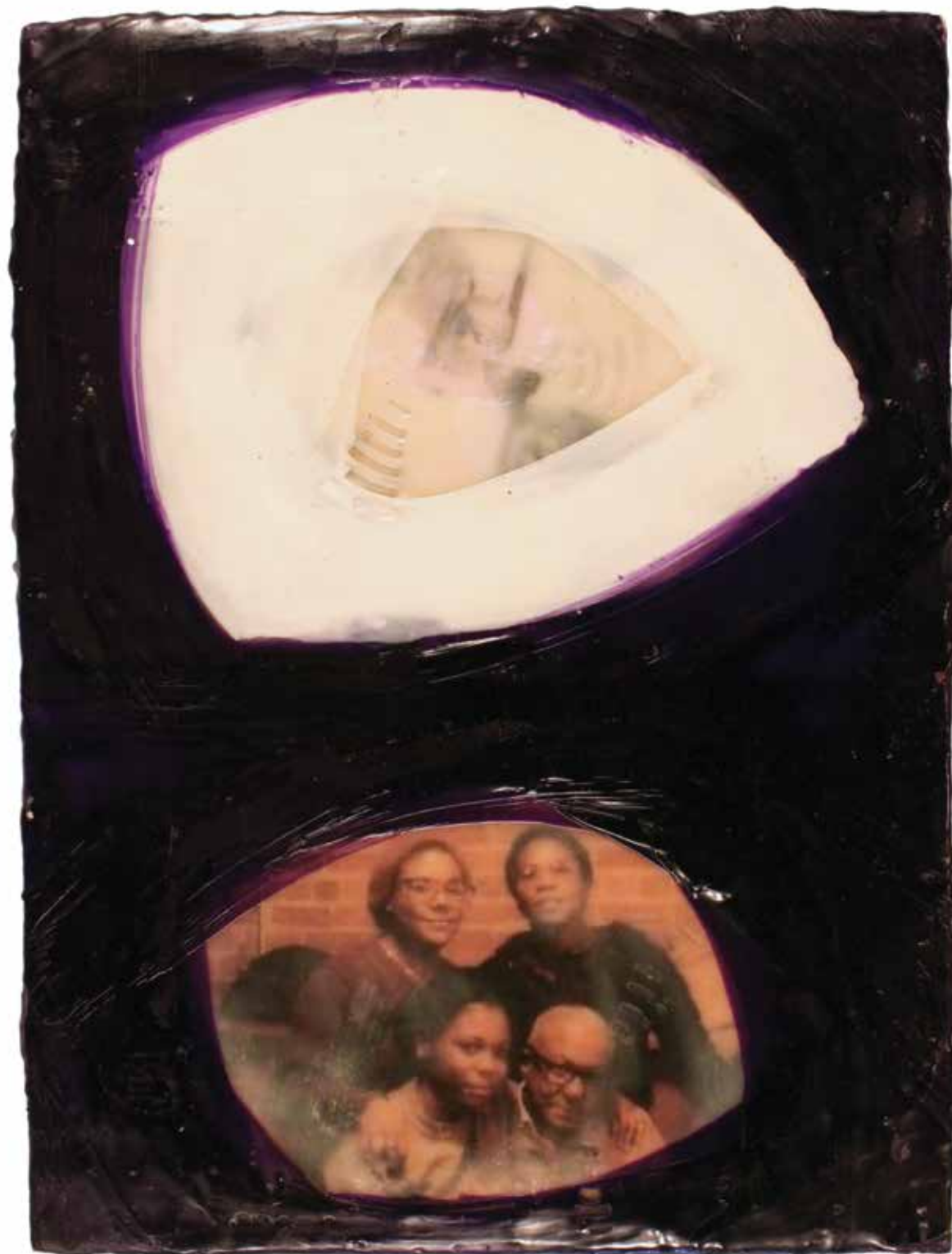
Bright Stars at Night (diptych), 2008, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 96 inches



Three Degrees: Antoinette and Gilda, 2010, photographs on panel with encaustic, 12 x 16 inches



Three Degrees Between Scholar: Leila and Katherine, 2010, photographs on panel with encaustic, 12 x 16 inches



Zero Degrees: John T. and Daughters, 2010, photographs on panel with encaustic, 16 x 12 inches

GILDA SNOWDEN

INTERVIEW

Dick Goody: *What was your first recollection of Detroit when you were a child?*

Gilda Snowden: That's hard because I've always lived here. I grew up here and was born here. I think the biggest thing was when the riots took place; we were on the national news — there was a huge spotlight on Detroit — negative of course.

You must have been about 13?

Twelve going on 13. My father's office — he was a dentist — was right at the epicenter: Clairmount and 12th Street, and he couldn't go there. It was the weekend of my birthday [July 29], but the neighbors came out and protected the building because people respected him. He did a lot of pro bono work in the neighborhood.

I remember you telling me that your father was frustrated that you were taking sewing classes in high school because he wanted you to be a physician. What did you feel that your future held?

I had no idea. I went day by day. I knew I was going to go to Cass Tech, because everyone in my family went.

What was it like?

It was wonderful — the best school there was. I was studying fashion design, and you knew if you studied there you could go right into a field. My teacher said, "Diana Ross, she sat right there in that chair."

How did taking fashion design influence your future work — in the sense that you never took drawing in high school?

I did take one drawing class, but I didn't think of it in any other way than it was supplementing my fashion. I had to

construct everything from patterns. Fashion taught me about how to put things together, about process. You created it, you assembled it, and you wore it. We never wore the same thing twice. Every day, I went to Midwest Woolens on Broadway. I'd get fabric and every night I'd make something new. What's interesting is that later in my life Midwest Woolens became the Broadway Gallery. When I started showing there, I told the owner that it used to be a fabric store because he was a fashion designer, too. Crosscurrents like that aren't accidental, and they're always happening in my life.

Who were some of the other artists showing at the Broadway Gallery?

Peter Williams, Brenda Barnum, James Stephens.

Artists younger than the Cass Corridor generation?

Definitely.

So ultimately you went into painting rather than fashion.

Yes, I decided not to do fashion and majored in advertising design instead. I took painting classes as electives. After that, I found I didn't really like advertising.

Probably the most influential person during your undergraduate and graduate years was John Egner. How would you characterize his influence?

Egner showed us how to tie together the things that we did with the people that we wanted to be. I took Composition with him. It originally was listed as a design class, but instead he took us to every collection, gallery and exhibition space, so we met collectors, dealers and artists, and got a real sense of

the world outside of the painting studio. We saw the Duffy collection, both at Mr. Duffy's warehouse on West Jefferson and in his condo in Grosse Pointe. We met with Lee Krasner at the Susanne Hilberry Gallery when she had a show there. Through this class we met Charles McGee in his Gallery 7; at the time he was showing Allie McGhee, who had roughly surfaced abstract paintings ... and I thought, why is this guy making paintings with sunflower and pumpkin seeds all over the surface? It made no sense to me because at that time I thought I was only a figurative painter.

So you were quite traditional starting out.

Very much so: figure, landscape, portrait. We all were. I took classes with Robert Wilbert. He was the epitome of a figurative painting teacher. Egner gave us the lifestyle and sense of community and an understanding of our PLACE in the art world. When I was taking classes with Egner, in his own work he was concentrating on large gridded constructions, but that work didn't imprint itself on me directly. Tom Parish's paintings at that time were large compositions of rock patterns. Tom would invite us to his studio in Capitol Park to see his latest works. But we never emulated our instructors works directly, because they told us we had to find our own way and be our own persons as artists.

What happened after you got your MFA in 1980? I ask because you'd done a painting called "Inverness" – you lived near Inverness Street in Detroit, but it was also based on the idea of four Scottish rivers. Were you living with your parents?

I lived at home until I was 26 in northwest Detroit on La Salle, two streets over from Inverness. I liked the idea of naming paintings after structures in the city — places that meant something to me, making them kind of autobiographical. When I started hanging out with [William] Boswell — he was of Scottish descent — he said, "Oh, Inverness [The River Ness], that's one of the four rivers in Scotland." So I made a structural painting made of four pieces, each mathematically 1 inch smaller than the one next to it. I gave it to Boswell.

Around 1981, you started really wrestling with assemblages — I'm thinking of "Bellwork." Where did you get the pieces of wood and other objects that you constructed these works from, and how did you choose and archive these bits and pieces?

Well, I've always been a scavenger. Whenever I saw something in multiples I'd grab it: pieces of wood, stacks of photographs, collections of boxes. I like the idea of collecting multiples.

Did you do that as a child, too?

Yes, but it was difficult because if I didn't hide them my mother would throw them out. My mother said, "You'll never be a good housewife." I said, "That makes me so happy!" I've never been interested in housework. Anyway, I like multiples and I always work in multiples. I saw Tom Parish recently and I asked him how he managed to make paintings one at a time, because I'm always working on 10 things at once. He said: "Gilda, that's just your one piece." I guess he's right. I've been out of school 30 years and he's still teaching me!

In a 1982 interview you said, and I quote: "The new work is about walking from my house to Alvin's Deli on Cass Avenue at 12 midnight and being accosted by a pimp. I take more risks now. There is more of a search." If you could talk to that 28-year-old Gilda Snowden, what would you say to her?

Oh my God, I forgot about taking all those risks! And I'd walk home from the New Miami, which was even farther away. I felt that to be an artist, especially one influenced by the Cass Corridor, you had to be tough on the outside. What would I tell her? I'd tell her you only have to be tough on the inside.

What was going on between 1981 and when you began a new body of work — the "Album" series, which started around 1985, and was less sculptural but was still not necessarily pure painting? Were these years difficult?

Between '81 and, I'd say, '88, looking back on those years, they were challenging, not as an artist, but my personal life was in flux. In '87 both my parents died within six months of each other. They were quite young, in their mid-60s, but I had moved out before that, in '81.

How were you making a living?

I was teaching part time at CCS, Wayne State and the Heritage House and also doing telephone sales, selling Time-Life books like *The Great Gunfighters*. I was terrible. One time I was calling people in Utica, and I didn't know but they were all hunkered down under a tornado watch, and they were shouting, "Why are you calling me, don't you know there's a tornado coming?"

After your parents passed away in 1987 some people might say that you started making elegiac work, but it was not necessarily a negative time because the work itself was given free rein to explore things — things other than gritty formalism — things of a more emotional, historical and geographical nature, like your father's birthplace, Alabama, and your mother's, Texas. You started producing work that was expansive and lush. What kind of new freedoms were you aware of at the time?

I felt free to tap into my own history, biography and genealogy. I became interested in where I came from. Before that, painting was schoolwork. The kind of migration that my parents made was what a lot of African Americans were making in the early 20th century. I was exploring that which took me into documentation of all kinds, especially photographs. So I made work that combined these things. I was looking at a lot of abstract African American art because I didn't want to do things specifically about politics. To be an African American artist, especially a female artist, is a political statement. This opened me up to abstraction.

Was that an intellectual or intuitive choice?

Intuitive. I tried to make art about being a black artist. I would imprint the word "BLACK" in my paintings — things like that — but it just didn't feel right to me.

In 1987 you married the actor and writer, William Boswell. How did this influence your work?

Oh, it influenced me in many ways. I used to hammer my work together with nails. He gave me an electric drill. He said, use this with a Phillips head bit and you can screw everything together and it won't come apart. He's 13 years older than me. He taught me how to traverse the Cass Corridor, because I was naïve. He helped with my street smarts, which is humorous because he's white. You'd think it would have been the other way around — it's very funny! He's still teaching me.

So you were working these different jobs and making your work.

Yes. I had one job where I worked at Feigenson. [The Feigenson Gallery, now defunct, was in the Fisher Building]. I learned a lot from that. I always did a lot of walking to and from my different jobs.

You didn't have a car?

No. I don't like driving. I've never had a car. When I met Boswell, he had a car and would drive me, but I did a lot of walking.

In 1988, ARTnews said of you: "She is a blood-and-guts urban artist whose work has a vibrancy and wholeness of spirit..." Is this necessarily how you saw yourself at the time?

Oh, my! No, my only focus was on making my art. I put everything into my work — if you want to call it blood and guts you can, but I wouldn't call it that; it was about working hard every day.

One of your best works from the 1980s is Monument. What do you remember about how it came about?

I was thinking about my parents after they died. I think I realized this after I had this hexagonal shape, but then I didn't want it to be too obvious what it was about so I kept adding layers. If I'm making narrative work, I like the idea to be hidden. It's about the thing being visual, not explaining everything — that's the most important thing.

The 1990s saw your work become more involved in drawing than previously. It's a period personified by your representations of tornados. In a sense, the beginning of this period marks an end to a span of about 10 years when you were preoccupied with assemblages dealing with locale and relationships. What caused you to taper off from doing that sort of work?

My interest in tornados had always been there. I had nightmares about them when I was little. But in a way, it's a universal theme. Yet, at the same time, it was a gift because it was my image. It's in my psyche. My assemblages were more about external emotional things, but the tornados were more about me.

In a way, the assemblages were about looking backward, whereas the tornado paintings were looking forward. Did they also have a metaphorical significance?

Very much so; all my work has. If it didn't, it wouldn't interest me. *Julia*, *John T* and *Teether* are portraits, but they're metaphorical. They have hidden aspects that only I see. Maybe the people I'm portraying don't even see them.

You are an extremely consistent artist that traditionally has completed bodies of work that take several years to complete, overlapping with other bodies of work. So as one body is ending another has already begun. How do you know when it's time to change?

I never like to acknowledge that a body of work has ended. The ones I did in school — the still lifes — I'm not doing those again. I reserve the right to spiral back and revisit something. For example, chairs are something I often come back to in my work. To me, a chair is a very strange abstract object. You can deal with it in many different ways, and this gives me an excuse to paint.

It works like a default position for you.

Exactly. A chair has a seat, a back and three or four legs. I don't make a specific chair. I make them out of my mind. For me, they are seats of knowledge, seats of learning, seats of power; these are the metaphors that come to mind.

You have alluded to the fact that you consider yourself to be an abstract artist. In the early '90s, you started doing realistic work — realistic in the sense that the work was a facsimile of something that already existed. What made you begin the round manhole cover drawings, and did you ever consider them to be a branch of realism?

I never considered them to be anything other than manhole covers. I consider them to be like the albums [from the 1980s]. They are an example of my eclecticism. I noticed them while riding my bike. They are really old. The oldest one was from 1911.

Did you photograph them or take impressions of them?

I took impressions. I'd get a roll of paper and charcoal and do rubbings on them. In my neighborhood, by Elmwood Cemetery, there were lots of them. Some of them were from the Edison Illuminating Company, and I thought, man, that's Thomas Edison. There were some down by the riverfront. Some had significant dates, like 1939 or 1929. I made impressions of them, but I'd get stopped by police. I always had to have my CCS ID card with me. Either they thought I was crazy, or they thought I was trying to steal them. I'd tell them I was a professor at CCS, and I'd say, "Look at these, they all have a different date on them." So they started looking at them, and they'd say, "That's really interesting." People always want to learn stuff. You look them in the eye

— I'm not afraid to look a policeman in the eye anymore — and they want to know what you have to teach them. This is an extension of me being a teacher, which is my "other" career.

Someone looking at your assemblages from the 1980s, when confronted with your work from 2000 onward, would be shocked by the brilliant palette of these newer works as compared to the monochrome cast of the earlier ones. How did you transition to using color?

Out of necessity. When I was using encaustic, I only had the money to buy earth-tone pigments, and black-and-white because they weren't as expensive as the pure colors. Then I found I could add oil paint to the encaustic, and this opened up my work to color. It became much brighter, and I couldn't go back after that. I love color and am drawn toward subject matter that has color.

Having said that, limiting yourself in the early days out of financial necessity caused you to make a really interesting body of work.

I agree, a hundred percent. But I like to be able to make my own choices, too. I can relate this back to when I was 9 or 10, and I went to school one day wearing all red, bright red. My mother said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm going to school." "You can't go to school wearing that." "What's wrong with it?" "You look country." That was negative. "Go upstairs and put on something less soul." Ever since then, red has been my favorite color. African American mothers would want to drab down their daughters so that they wouldn't be objects of desire — to protect them. I didn't realize that at the time. I found out much later when I started studying these histories. It's weird how all these things enter your biography and how they cause you to make the choices you make.

What is the underlying idea behind the Bright Stars at Night series?

Living in the city and not being able to see the stars. When you go out to the country, you realize that the city has this constant blur of light at night. In the country it's different: pitch black, and you can see the stars. Of course, city lights at night have a beauty all their own, too. That's what these paintings are dealing with.

When we consider works from the "Urban Garden" series, which clearly are yet another example of you reflecting on your locale and how the landscape of Detroit is undergoing yet another transformation, we also might consider that they possess an affinity to impressionism; do you embrace this connection to late 19th century French painting?

Totally. The first artist I looked at and loved was Monet. It was about nature. It was abstract. It was about painting. When I saw the water lily paintings for the first time in person, I couldn't believe it. Monet and Van Gogh were my entry into painting. Then I discovered Abstract Expressionism, and found a true home as far as scale, physicality and sheer gutsiness was concerned.

Do you think at this stage in your career that you are more aligned with painting than you have ever been before and, if so, what do you think of the state of painting in the second decade of the 21st century?

Painting is healthy. There are so many young painters doing great paintings. I love the way the urban environment influences painting through graffiti. Painting is doing just fine. The definition of painting is expanding and continually flexing its muscles. When I was in school, I never thought that I would be using the media that I use now. It seems that the older I get, the more radical I am in my own visual practices. This is an outgrowth of my early experiences as a young artist in school, observations and immersion in the Cass Corridor community, and a constant study of art history. To be radical is required for forward progression.

More than ever, your recent painting is a clear expression of aesthetics. You seem to completely embrace the idea that your paintings are a personification of beauty — that they have to be pleasing to the eye. What drives you to make this work?

When I work on the *Flora Urbana* or *Graphic Garden* or *Graphic Baroque* paintings, I am always conscious of color, beauty, history, of nature. My interpretations may seem benign on first glance, but with constant reading I hope other "issues" are revealed. Those issues are one thing for me and very different for the audiences.

Your newest work is completely different from these riotous, layered, brightly colored paintings. They are compelling because of their conceptuality in that they deal with history, identity and photography. The first time I saw these new paintings in an

exhibition I didn't understand them. The second time I saw them, and there were more of them to see because they were in your studio, I was completely taken with them. They're very serious, extremely sensitive and at the same time merge your early assemblage and encaustic practices with your compulsion to make work that is taken up with aesthetics. Where do you think this work is going to take you?

The works where the photography is more assertive than the painted surface are, for me, very quiet and very visually bombastic at the same time. They were difficult initially because they are so different from other pieces that have riotous color. Very often I will work on two or more series that bear no obvious visual bridge ... but that bridge is there — more metaphorical than anything else. All the works that I do are about some notion of documentation. All I ask of the work is that it takes me to the end of the day.

Most of the time I don't understand my work. I have a tremendous work ethic where, if I just get to my studio and start mixing paint or heating up wax, I am ahead. The blank canvas or board is a new world. A photograph shouts back at me to pay attention, create a new synthesis between the past and the present. Discovering new paints and techniques, like with the spray paints, forces me to take my familiar lexicon and bend it, maybe to the point of breaking. I work in multiples because I like to be surrounded by the recent efforts ... a challenge, because they may all start on the same page but have to assert their individuality, like continually giving birth to septuplets.

A doyenne of the Detroit art scene, you're at practically every opening, always taking photographs — you are a great photographer, actually. What keeps you so positive and optimistic?

My documentation of the shows I attend is meant to share our community with as many people as possible, especially those who were originally from here but have moved away. Social networks and media, plus the ease of using tools like specific apps on my phone make the process somewhat easy. Anybody can do this. ... I wish more people did. Exhibitions and events here should constantly be shared, discussed, argued, etc. As a person, as a middle child, I believe in being positive.

TIMELINE

Born 1954, Detroit, MI. Lives on LaSalle Blvd., two blocks west of Inverness Street.

1969

Enrolls at Cass Technical High School, Detroit, majored in clothing/textiles.

1972

Graduates from Cass Technical High School.

Begins studies at Wayne State University, major: psych/social work (changes major to advertising, 1974; changes major to fine art/painting, 1975).



1975

Brick Still Life, 1975, oil on canvas. Collection of John and Linda Dunne Egner.

1977

Awarded B.F.A., Wayne State University.

Exhibition: *Two Women: Stephanie Crawford & Gilda Snowden, Artist Guild of Detroit Gallery*, Detroit.

Two Women, exhibition poster. Snowden recalls: This was lithographic print. We ran the edition late one night in the litho studio at Wayne State. Stephen Goodfellow was the printer ... he was instrumental at the Artist Guild of Detroit Gallery. The posters were sold. Each artist got five copies. The drawing was done by Stephanie Crawford and signed by her.



Still Life with Brush, 1977, oil on canvas.

Artist Guy Goodwin, one of Snowden's professors at Wayne State University, scraped out background in this student painting.



Chair, 1977, oil on canvas.

Self Portrait with Braids, 1977, oil on canvas. Collection of Dan Graschuck.

Still Life of Film, 1977, oil on canvas.



1978

Awarded M.A., Wayne State University. Snowden's mentor/faculty adviser was

John Egner.

Begins work-study job in law library parking lot and subsequently meets law professor Edward Littlejohn, who becomes a patron.

Ink Bottle Still Life, 1978, oil on canvas.

The choice of subject matter was influenced by Visiting Artist John Lees, who painted iconic ink-bottles.



1979

Awarded M.F.A., Wayne State University.

Photograph used in the M.F.A. graduate poster; Snowden notes that her hair at the time was still straightened.

After graduation, takes an upper flat studio at 1729 Clairmount, Detroit; this building was the two-family

home where her father had his dentist office and was located near the epicenter of 1967 Detroit riots (at Clairmount and 12th Street). At work in the Clairmount studio.



1980

M.F.A. Exhibition at the Community Arts Gallery, Wayne State University.

Inverness, 1980, oil on shaped canvas.

This work references Inverness Street and William Boswell's observation that the River Ness is one the four great Scottish Rivers (Boswell, who is of Scottish descent, and Snowden will eventually wed).

1981

Moves studio to 427 E. Edsel Ford Service Drive, a three-bedroom flat, where a large number of constructions are embarked upon.



Begins working at Feigenson Gallery in the Fisher Building, Detroit, where she works until 1985.

Solo exhibition: Recent Work, Willis Gallery, Detroit; Patricia Soderberg, director.

Wills exhibition poster. Snowden states: The drawing indicates the bus route I took to go home each evening, and the items along the way. I based a number of paintings and assemblages on the titles of the local storefronts and streets. RUTH'S RAJAH was a store that I then named a piece after, one that is in the same visual vein as Inverness. GORDON'S MARKET made me think of Gordie Newton. The Ink Bottles are in there, as well as diagrams of

assemblages; "K & G" stood for the location in Capitol Park where Kurt Novak and Gary Mayer had a studio ... I hung out there quite a bit. I guess this drawing is a kind of 'album' of my travels at the time.



Snowden at the Willis Gallery exhibition opening.

Cartouche, 1980-81, encaustic construction on canvas.



This work, which Snowden refers to as a "totemic piece," was in her Willis solo exhibition.

Bell Work, 1981, encaustic construction

Resembling a prie dieu, this sculpture from the Album Series was inspired by "bell work," which were assignments given to students at the beginning of classes at George A. Custer Elementary School, between the first and second bells.

1982

Begins teaching as adjunct at Center for Creative Studies (now College for Creative Studies), Detroit; Aris Koutroulis is chair of Fine Arts and her mentor. Also, worked as adjunct instructor at Wayne State University.

Exhibition: ...till Human Voices Wake Us, Detroit Artists' Market's "Other Space" at the Hudson's Department Store, downtown Detroit.

Awarded a Michigan Council for the Arts Individual Artist Grant.

Façade, 1982, encaustic construction.

This work is influenced by the brick façade of the studio/living space at 427 E. Edsel Ford Service Drive.



Snowden states: *This is where I lived from 1981 to 1992. It functioned as my studio until 1987. It's a four-family flat building; my flat was on the lower right side (my door is in the shadow). This was my first space after living at home; I was 26 years old when I moved. It was spacious, having three bedrooms, full living room, full dining room, large kitchen, and I had access to use half of the basement. It was three blocks away from Alvin's, and in close proximity to my jobs at Wayne State and at CCS. At that time I was also teaching at Your Heritage House Museum School for Youth, on Ferry and John R.*

Shelf, 1982, encaustic construction.

Such extreme rectangular works, vertical or horizontal, were influenced by constant exposure to the "furniture" in parking lots called "deadmen."

Photo: G.R. N'Namdi



Exhibition: *Currents* at Jazzonia Gallery, George N'Namdi's first gallery located in Harmonie Park, Detroit (left to right: Adam Thomas, Gilda Snowden, Reginald Gammon, Yolanda Sharpe).

Exhibition: *Detroit Originals*, Detroit Artists Market, juried by Robert Wilbert.

1983

Solo exhibition, Detroit Repertory Theatre Gallery, Bruce Millan, artistic director.

Exhibition: *Sculpture with Pedestal*, Detroit Focus Gallery; Juror: Richard Hunt.

Teaser Tormenter, 1982, encaustic construction. *Post-Newsweek* commission.



1984

Solo exhibition: *Recent Work*, Detroit Council for the Arts.

Exhibition: *Viewpoint '84 — Out of Square*, Cranbrook Academy of Art; Roy Slade, director.

Exhibition: *Three Women: Crossed Borders*, Artcite Gallery, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

1985

Begins teaching full time at College for Creative Studies.

Solo exhibition: *Works on Paper*, 55 Peterboro Gallery, Detroit.

Awarded a Michigan Council for the Arts Individual Artist Grant.

Album with Mirror, 1985, encaustic construction from the Album Series.



Cross Fetish, 1985, encaustic construction with T-shirt, twine and screws.



Album, 1985, encaustic construction with photographs.

The people in the cut up contact sheet photographs were customers at Alvin's, a bar frequented by artists, located on Cass Avenue in Detroit.



1987

Marries William Boswell.

Solo exhibition: *Gilda Snowden*, Paint Creek Center for the Arts, Rochester, MI.

Begins being represented by art dealer Tony Scandrick at the Broadway Gallery, Harmonie Park, Detroit.

Moves studio to 206 East Grand River, Merchants Apparel Building, Harmonie Park, Detroit.

Snowden states: *I was showing at the Broadway Gallery at the time, which was on the first floor of 206. Tony Scandrick [the owner/director of the Broadway Gallery] suggested that I move in 206, found a space for me in the building on the fifth floor, in the back. It was a great space, still somewhat raw, but since I didn't live there that was okay. This is where I continued to make assemblages and constructions, as well as the large tornado paintings and the series of self-portrait pastels of dreadlocks. I was able to do these here because of the abundance of wall space. It was also convenient because all I had to do to get my large works in the gallery was to take them down the elevator to the basement, and then move them through the tunnel into the basement of the gallery.*

Sextangle, 1987, table w/ ceramic tiles.

Made during a residency at Pewabic Pottery, Detroit.

1988

Solo exhibition: *Gilda Snowden — New Works*, Broadway Gallery, Detroit; this show was reviewed in *Art News* in December 1988.

Exhibition: *Black Creativity*, The Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago; Martin Puryear, juror.

Awarded a Michigan Council for the Arts Individual Artist Grant.

The Poet's Place, 1988, encaustic construction.

This memorial portrait of Snowden's father, Dr. John T. Snowden, alludes to the 156 days he endured in a hospital prior to his passing. Dr. Snowden had been an avid reciter of poetry, hence the encaustic embedded image of Edgar Allen Poe. At the time, Snowden says she was also thinking about the work of Joseph Cornell.

Tornado, 1988, encaustic construction.

This work links Snowden's interest in tornados with her practice of making assemblages.

Monument, 1988, encaustic construction.

Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts | Founders Society Purchase, Chaim, Fanny, Louis, Benjamin, Anne and Florence Kaufman Memorial Trust.

The symbols in this work reference Snowden parents' origins and includes their initials and the number of members in her nuclear family.

1989

Exhibition: *Friends of Meadow Brook II*, Meadow Brook Art Gallery, Oakland University, Rochester, MI; Kiichi Usui, director.

Album: Sculptor, 1989, encaustic construction with photograph.



1990

From the *Signature Images* catalog.

Exhibition: *Signature Images: Michael Luchs & Gilda Snowden*, Detroit Institute of Arts; Jan van der Marck, curator (catalog).

Exhibition: *Gilda Snowden and Yolanda Sharpe*, Mark Masuoka Gallery, Las Vegas.

Photo: Dirk Bakker

TIMELINE

Exhibition: *Ancestors Known and Unknown*, Coast-to-Coast Women of Color National Box Project, Art-In-General Gallery, New York.

Awarded a Michigan Council for the Arts Individual Artist Grant.

Twin Tornados, 1990, pastel on paper
Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts
Gift of Ann and Ralph Youngren.



1991

Represented by Sherry Washington Gallery.

Exhibition: *Sculpture in the East Village*, Vacuum Gallery, New York.

Exhibition: *Among Friends: Contemporary Works On Paper*, from a collection formed by Ingeborg and Jan van der Marck (catalog), Detroit Institute of Arts and multiple venues.

Awarded a New Forms Regional Grant — Randolph Street Gallery (NEA), Chicago, IL.

1992

Exhibition: *Michigan Art Acquisitions*, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

Exhibition: *Women of Color*, Dahl Arts Center, Rapid City, SD.

Publication: *The Nineties — Moving Forward*, Reach Back / A Multicultural Odyssey, IKON #12/13.

Moves from 427 E. Edsel Ford Service Drive to Lafayette Park.

Katherine Snowden Boswell, born August 5, 1992.

1993

Solo exhibition: *Abstract Realities*, Sherry Washington Gallery, Detroit.

Solo exhibition: *Tornados*, Kendall College of Art and Design, Grand Rapids, MI.

Solo exhibition: *Recent Paintings*, Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, MI.

Solo exhibition: *City Albums*, Mott Community College, Flint, MI.



Exhibition: *Conversing in Words & Images*, National Conference of Artists/New Initiatives for the Arts (NIFTA) catalog, Westbeth Art Gallery, New York.

Publication: *The Art of Black American Women: Works of Twenty-Four Artists of the Twentieth Century*, Robert Henkes, McFarland & Company, Jefferson, NC, ISBN-13: 978-0899508184.

Phantom, 1993, oil on canvas.

1994

Exhibition: *Ancestors Known and Unknown*, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Publication: *Manual 1993-1994 — Art in General*, Art in General Gallery, Issue #2, New York.

Chronicle II, 1994, charcoal on paper.



1995

Exhibition: *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Carlos Diaz & Gilda Snowden*, Center Galleries, College for Creative Studies; sabbatical exhibition, curated by Dennis Nawrocki.

Exhibition: *Voices*, Charles Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, in association with the National Conference of Artists and New Initiatives for the Arts (NIFTA); multiple venues, including six in Africa.

Publication: *Gumbo Ya Ya: Anthology of Contemporary African-American Women Artists*, introduction by Leslie King-Hammond, Snowden essay by Jan van der Marck, Midmarch Press, New York.

1996

Solo Exhibition: *City Albums & Altars*, Detroit Repertory Theatre, Detroit.

Exhibition: *Interventions*, Detroit Institute of Arts; Jan van der Marck, curator; Detroit.

Exhibition: *Viewpoint: Detroit Art*, Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI.

Exhibition: *Carbonara*, Michigan Gallery, Detroit.

Awarded a Creative Artist Grant, Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs.

1997

Publication: *St James Guide to Black Artists*, Thomas Riggs, Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

1998

Moves studio to Alternative Work Site Studio, third floor, Brooklyn Building, Corktown, Detroit.

Publication: *Narratives of African American Art & Identity*, David Driskell, University of Maryland Press, MD.



Publication: *Collecting African American Art: Works on Paper and Canvas*, Halima Taha, McGraw/Hill Publishers, Columbus, OH; ISBN-13: 978-0517705933

Detroit New Millennium, 1998, encaustic construction
Blue Cross Blue Shield commission.

1999

Exhibition: *Twister Vision*, Visual Arts Center, Louisville, KY.

Exhibition: *Narratives of African American Art and Identity*, The David C. Driskell Collection (catalog) High Museum of Art, Atlanta; The Newark Museum, Newark, NJ; and other venues.

Initiates genealogy research, originally to obtain family medical history, but growing interest fosters a desire to explore family history. Documentation becomes even more important with several personal losses of family and friends.

Board member, Detroit Institute of Arts, Friends of Modern Art.

2000

Exhibition: *Color: The Black Fine Art Exposition*, hosted by Oprah Winfrey, Navy Pier, Chicago.

Awarded a Creative Artist Grant, Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs.

2001

Solo Exhibition: *Scapes, Storms and Self-Portraits*, Detroit Repertory Theatre Gallery, Detroit.

2002

Solo exhibition: *Sorcery: Paintings By Gilda Snowden*, Saginaw Museum of Art, Saginaw, MI.

Solo exhibition: *Recent Paintings*, University Liggett Art Gallery, Grosse Pointe, MI.

When Flames Besiege, 2002, acrylic on canvas.
Collection of Richard Rollins.

Reads *Romancero Gitano*, a series of poems by Federico Garcia Lorca.



2003

Solo exhibition: *The Lorca Show*, Cass Cafe, Detroit, in collaboration with poet/translator William G. Boswell.

2004



Exhibition: *Recent Acquisitions*, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

Exhibition: *Reverberations*, Klemm Gallery, Adrian College, Adrian, MI; Marion Jackson, curator.

Awarded a National Conference of Artists Vision & Excellence in the Arts Award.

Participates in *On the Edge*, an acoustic-guide audio tour featuring a lively and candid conversation between Snowden and Detroit Institute of Arts Director Graham W.J. Beal.

On the Edge poster.

2005

Publication: *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African American Women Artists*, Lisa Farrington, Oxford University Press; ISBN 019516721X.



2006

Green Chair: Bright Stars at Night, 2006, acrylic on canvas.

Solo exhibition: *Abstractions of Life: New Paintings & Drawings*, Sherry Washington Gallery, Detroit.

Becomes acting chair of the Fine Art Department, College for Creative Studies, Detroit.

2007

Moves studio to Alternative Work Site Studio, first floor, Brooklyn

Building, Corktown, Detroit.

2008

Solo exhibition: *Flora Urbana: New Paintings*, Sherry Washington Gallery, Detroit.

Detroit Festival of the Arts poster, image by Gilda Snowden.



2009

Awarded a Kresge Foundation Fellowship, Kresge Arts in Detroit.

2010

Solo exhibition: *The Rawness of Real*, Dell Pryor Galleries, Detroit.

Publication: *International Review of African American Art*, Vol. 24, #2, cover; pp 32-37.

3 Degrees: Antoinette and Gilda, photographs on panel with encaustic.

Snowden begins a new body of work using photographs of past generations of maternal and paternal family members; some photos are discovered in the albums of recently deceased aunt and uncle.

Three Degrees Between Scholars: Leila & Katherine, 2010, photograph on panel with encaustic.



GILDA SNOWDEN

album: a retrospective | 1977-2010

curated by dick goody

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to so many people that have contributed to my growth as an artist. First, I want to thank John Egner and Aris Koutroulis for having faith in a young artist and budding academic. They showed me by example that having a clear vision of one's self as an artist, and giving all to one's community is of paramount importance. Edsel and Shirley Woodson Reid, Sherry Washington, Dell Pryor, and George N'Namdi noticed me before I noticed myself, and enveloped me in an entire community of artists that I depend on to this day. My late parents, Dr. John T. Snowden and Clara Perry Snowden, always encouraged me and never doubted my choice of a life in the arts. My siblings, Donna, John Roger and Myra Snowden, have always been here to offer unyielding support. But the ones closest to me now, my husband William G. Boswell and our daughter, Katherine Snowden Boswell, continue to make me realize just how important it is for me to continue to create. Lastly, thanks go to Dick Goody for curating this exhibition and helping me to see my own work within the context of personal and local art history.



Oakland University Art Gallery
Department of Art and Art History
College of Arts and Sciences
208 Wilson Hall
2200 North Squirrel Road
Rochester, MI 48309-4401
(248) 370-3005 | oakland.edu/ouag

Director, Dick Goody

Assistant to the Director & Registrar,
Jacqueline Leow

Designed by Debra Lashbrook

Printed by ArborOakland Group

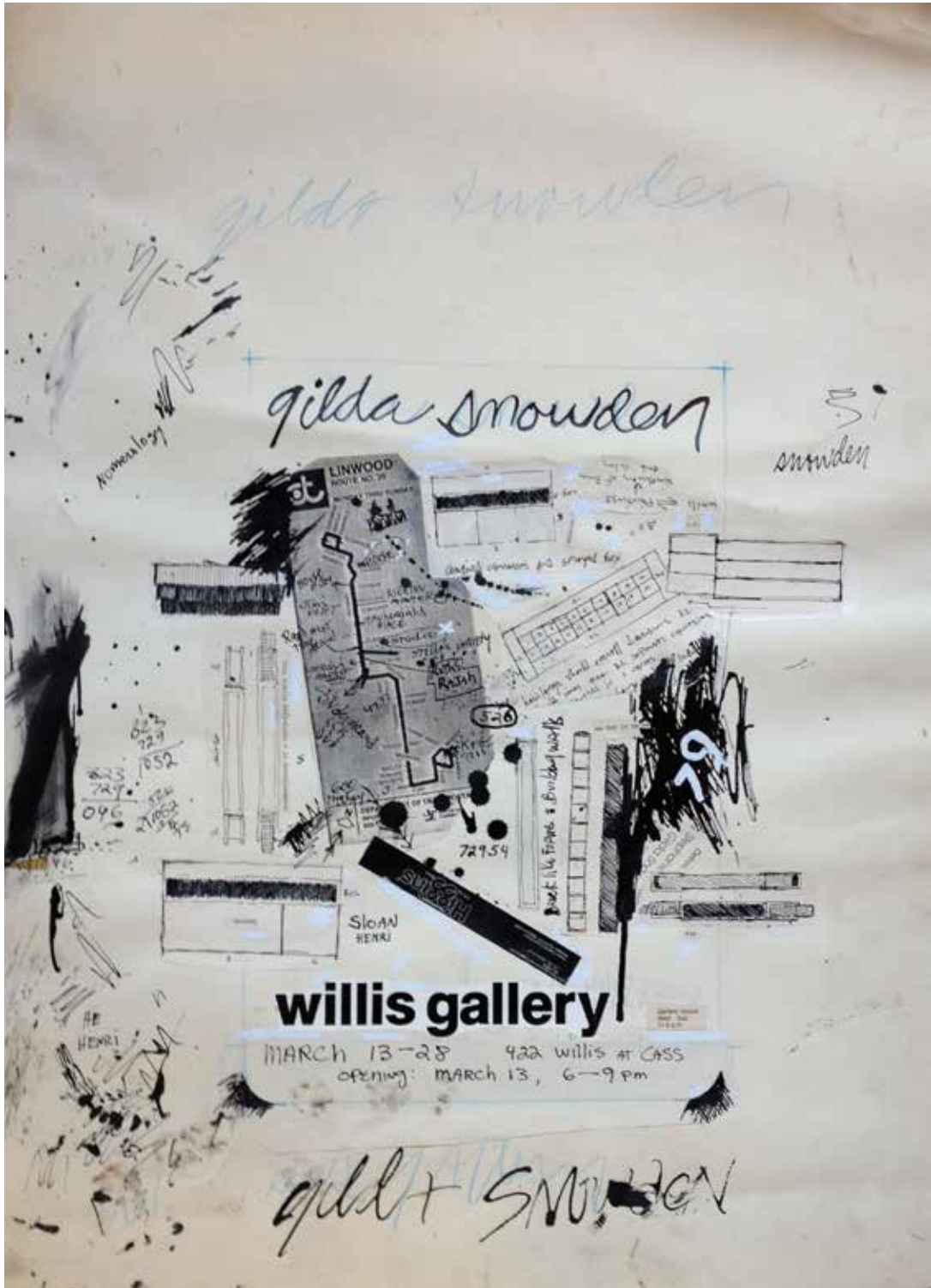
ISBN: 978-0-925859-60-0

Copyright 2013 Oakland University Art Gallery. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Oakland University Art Gallery.

Oakland University Art Gallery exhibitions are made possible through the generous contribution of individuals, companies and foundations.

This exhibition was made possible in part by The Kresge Foundation, the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, National Endowment for the Arts and the College of Arts and Sciences, Oakland University.





Solo exhibition: *Recent Work*, Willis Gallery, Detroit; Patricia Soderberg, director, 1981

(on back cover, detail) *Album*, 1985, encaustic construction with photographs, 34 ½ x 60 ½ x 6 inches

