

NEWCITY

Full Force: A Review of Judy Ledgerwood at Rhona Hoffman Gallery

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Judy Ledgerwood, "Jaywalking," 2022, oil on canvas, 84" x 92" | Photo: Rhona Hoffman Gallery

There are some artists who, after sustaining a successful practice for over forty years, are inclined to rest on their laurels. Judy Ledgerwood is not one of them. In "Sunny Redux," a small exhibition of new works now on view at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Ledgerwood returns to the formal language she has built, this time using it to imbue a new tension into a suite of six oil paintings. Saturated in hues that largely adhere to the primary color palette, these works rework the artist's signature quatrefoil motif in fresh and at times almost aggressive ways.



Judy Ledgerwood, "Skylarking," 2022, oil on canvas, 84" x 92" | Photo: Rhona Hoffman Gallery

"Jaywalking," the largest work in the show at eighty-four inches by ninety-two inches, consumes the predominant wall of the gallery, a powerful opening salvo in high-contrast that breaks down and contorts individual forms, and seems to handily dismantle the entire conceit of pattern-making in the process. Nearby, "Sunday" uses the force of visual compression to produce a devastating sense of weight that draws down from a swag at the top of the painting and terminates in the bleeding lines that creep out from the impasto marks in its lower right-hand corner. Conversely, there is a sense of great levity in the metallic marks that seem to float on the surface of "Footsteps," which radiates with a sense of active transformation, as though Ledgerwood has peeled back a surface layer to expose the raw nerves and mechanics of how her paintings work on a functional level. "Common Time," while the most diminutive of the exhibition's works at a mere sixteen by sixteen inches, is no less impactful than its monumentally scaled counterparts. Its quartered form splices itself in spirals down to an exposed core with an exhilaratingly authoritative complexity that could only have been produced by an unhesitating hand.



Judy Ledgerwood, "Sunday," 2022, oil on canvas, 60" x 50" | Photo: Rhona Hoffman Gallery

If the four aforementioned works are an exercise in ratcheting up anxious tension in the viewer, the remaining two works in the exhibition, "Saturday" and "Skylarking" are its release. In the former one finds a quieter, slower sense of dissolution that slacks and melts softly, and in the latter a defiant buoyancy conveyed through marks that feel deliberately like a hopeful gesture.

The works on view in "Sunny Redux" are not as lush or immediately pleasing as much of the painting in Ledgerwood's oeuvre has traditionally been. Rather, they offer a deep investigation of the artist's visual vocabulary, using only the sparest toolkit to plumb its greatest depths. So considered are the motifs that Ledgerwood has spent decades honing, there is a strange gratification to be found in seeing her manipulate them anew, bifurcate their forms and mottle their surfaces with impunity. "Sunny Redux" is filled with work that could only have been made by an artist who has devoted their life to the studio. It is a hard-won exhibition that contains the full force of a career behind it.

"Judy Ledgerwood: Sunny Redux" is on view at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, 1711 West Chicago, through June 1.