



## Judith Murray: Tempest

by Barbara A. MacAdam

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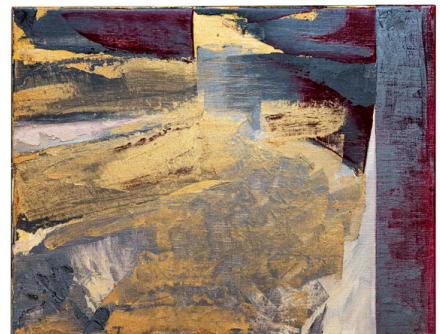
Judith Murray's *Tempest*, at Sundaram Tagore's New York gallery, features a whirlwind of mosaic-like compositions. They overflow with rich-colored energetic gestures, all kept in check by a solid vertical bar that sits at the right edge of each painting (Murray's signature since the early 1970s), offering a formal counter balance to the paintings' frenetic motion. Murray deploys her own set of primary colors: pink, gold, silver, blue (all diminutives of red, yellow, black, and white), and lets them rush in short strokes, like swarms of bees or schools of fish, across the picture plane in occasionally interrupted or contradictory motions. These are action paintings, that is to say, they are talkative and effusive, emotional and articulate, argumentative and constrained. Murray bridges East and West in her seductive colors and references, with the deep reds of Rajput paintings and the tapestry effects of Persian textiles and carpets.



Judith Murray, *Panorama*, 2014. Oil on linen, 72 × 151 inches. Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

The centerpiece of the exhibition, commandeering the gallery's back wall, is *Panorama* (2014), a 72 by 151-inch diptych, forming a dazzling blanket of gold dabs that stretch out like an El Anatsui curtain of bottle caps woven together, or a Klimt interior. Opulent and more internally spacious than many of Murray's other oil on linens in the show, this one hints at perspective, leaving room for reading and reflection.

*Junction* (2018), one of the stunning smaller pieces here, is charged with striking, story-telling potential, where gestures vary and change, and perspectives intersect. Nature casts its spell in the blues and whites of different densities, evoking wind and water currents, the massing of insects, vegetation, and impending storms in the background. Murray travels extensively in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States, and has homes in the Florida Keys and New York. It shows in the work.



Gaggle (2017), for example, is composed of a conglomeration of gestures, all seeming to interrupt one another, as if conversing or even arguing and then taking a break for reconsideration. There is an inescapable emotional component in these concentrated works where dialogue gives way to silence.

Judith Murray, Junction, 2018. Oil and metallic oil paint on linen, 11 × 14 inches. Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

Her pictures are always layered. She begins with a stable base of acrylic paint and then tops that with layers of oil paint—thick, thin, translucent, opaque—forming a tonal tapestry that unites the complexity of form and content, allowing the material to show the effects of history, of time, place, and accident.

Murray has assumed a daring position in recent years, steadfastly sticking to abstract gestural work despite the genre being repeatedly debunked, with beauty critically dismissed as decorative, and gesture as fussy. But this work responds by demonstrating that it is deeply thoughtful and tinged with the language of the spiritual—of nature, temple art, and meditation. One very rich, and strikingly elegant work, SK5 (2018), is a faded madras-red oil-and-acrylic on fiberglass paper—one of five such paintings in the show—patterned like an Indian prayer rug or tapestry. It has an architectural bearing with a square-ish form in the center, like a courtyard—an anomalous hint of vague representation with a welcoming warmth and the offer of respite from the maelstrom of life.



Judith Murray, Gaggle, 2017. Oil on linen, 11 × 14 inches. Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

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#### CONTRIBUTOR

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