

A brief biography

I have been focused on the arts throughout my life as a visual artist, writer, curator and educator. As a child growing up in the Chicago suburbs my whole world revolved around drawing and painting -- I learned classic oil painting technique by the time I was ten years old and by eleven I had turned my bedroom closet into a gallery. I actually believed that my drawings had the power to create an alternate reality. I taught myself to write mirror script so that I could be like Leonardo and dreamed of one day living in a completely white room so I could paint without distraction.

I lived in Germany through much of high school and living outside of the U.S. deepened my appreciation of history and opened my eyes to the possibilities in life. In the mid-70s I moved to California to study painting at the San Francisco Art Institute where I received both my BFA and MFA. For me, studying art full time was total bliss. Like many of the painters there, my mentor was Sam Tchakalian, who showed a generation of artists that art was everywhere if you had the will to see/be it. There were many other fantastic people there -- Bob Hudson, Ursula Schneider, Julius Hatofsky and Fred Martin; visiting faculty the likes of Peter Plagens and Bruce Nauman. They all had a profound impact on me.

I entered art school a painter and left a conceptualist. In the 1970s, the advent of earth art, video and performance art, politics and feminism all had a tremendous impact on painting, basically turning it on its ear. I grappled with the logic and the viability of a 2-D surface and approaching the issue analytically moved me further away from the conventions of painting.

I began to dissect the logistics of the canvas; its geometry, its perimeters and the potential for its field of vision. Eventually, I started working in 3-dimensions creating site-specific installations that were extremely satisfying to me. The geometry of the square led to works such as *Twenty-Five Boxes*, 1976.



Twenty-Five Boxes, 1976

Extrapolating on the rectangle, I migrated to spirals, circles and diamonds and eventually developed linear structures which I used to build flexible organic shapes that were hung mid-air. The idea of hovering is one that remains in my work to this day, tied, perhaps, to my belief as a child that I could, in fact, fly. My technique evolved into elastic geometric shapes made from wire armatures, pigment and latex rubber. The idea of a floppy geometry appealed to me. The installation *Many Lemming*, 1979 reflects these ideas, as well as a body of work based on elastic, geometric shapes.



Detail: *Many Lemming*, 1979



C's Me, 1979

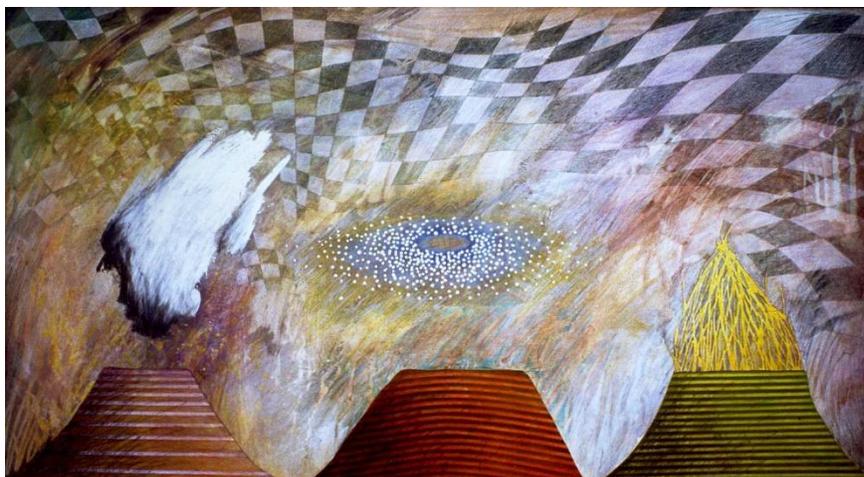
I got married in graduate school and moved to Reno, Nevada where I taught studio arts at the University of Nevada and eventually became the Artist in Residence at the Sierra Nevada Museum of Art. Living in the desert had an impact on my work, and the ubiquitous horizon line that so dominated the desert landscape began to affect my imagery.



Broken Spiral, 1981

In *Broken Spiral*, a 1981 installation, I continued to explore aspects of geometry but the environment in which I executed them was now planted firmly on the ground.

Likewise, in *Moons Over Time*, 1981, metaphors of movement and cyclical time were linked to an eternal horizon line. My drawings and paintings from that period reflected similar ideas.



Cloud, Cloud, Twigs, 1980; mixed media on panel

In 1983 I moved to New York, and the minute I stepped out of the car on East 10th Street I felt completely at home. The reduced size of my workspace drove me back to the 2-D surface, and I returned to painting and all my unanswered questions about it.



Broken Landscape, 1983-84



Untitled Nest and Orbs, 1985, diptych, oil on canvas

I felt I had to make a personal case for abstraction and embarked on a mission to figure out what to paint. I'm still trying to figure that out.



Pink Agathe, 1987, oil on canvas

In New York I moved from aspects of figuration and landscape to organic knots and hovering gnarls of paint. For several years I worked in a cavernous basement studio and no matter how many flood lights I hooked to the ceiling pipes it was always dark. I became fascinated with German and Dutch painting -- Grunewald, Altdorfer and Rembrandt in particular -- and my paintings became rather brooding, as if lit by candles.

I found myself constantly struggling to make an authentic abstract form that was robust enough to function within the things I loved about painting, like figure/ground relationships, depth and form, expressionism. The fragile peace between figuration and abstraction in my work is something that still occupies my thinking



Limb to Limb, 1992, oil on canvas



Night Buffalo, Study, 1992, mixed media

The films from a CT scan of my head provided a link to the figure through an alternative venue. I was fascinated with the mirror forms of the human body and began to employ the concept in a series of paintings based on Rorschachs.



My studio walls were covered with ink blots and X-rays. I loved pushing paint around the perimeters of these strange shapes. Ironically, as my focus on these works began to move away from the Rorschach, I entered into a period of intense psychotherapy and my concentration on the human brain took an interesting detour.

Examining my own psychology opened up a visual rationale that was extremely liberating for me. My paintings became more elastic and more purely abstract. Buoyancy and color returned along with a touch of *joie de vivre*.



In my paintings of Color Bars and Collage, I utilized my thinking about the way the mind – my mind – works. It seemed to me synapses and memory were vulnerable to innumerable things and while a micro-second of thought could encompass an entire world of imagery it could also -- in a fraction of a second -- be eclipsed by a new image or sound or detail. I began to think of psychology and vision like a filmstrip in which snippets were cut away, spliced together as if in random segments.

This schism in perception fascinated me, and in an attempt to address it in my paintings, I introduced bars of color among abstract fields, interrupting the field of communication at unlikely and irregular intervals.

Playing with the image field in this way satisfied a craving I had to attempt to marry viscera and thoughtfulness – intellect and instinct.



Crackle Pool, 2001, oil on canvas

In the 20 years I spent slogging through art-making anxiety, I guess finally I came out on the other side. For better or worse, I just don't worry as much about it as I used to. Today, my work is a combination of all of these interests, insights and fascinations.



Deer Belly Blue, 2009



Balmy Drops, 2009



Untitled Bag of Air, 2010

I suppose the Holy Grail, for me, was really just a tube of paint and a flat surface.

Janet Goleas
East Hampton, 2010