

# Janet Slom: the Spiritual to the Abstract

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In recent years, there has been a growing interest in eastern philosophy. Few artists, however, have managed to translate esoteric ideas into aesthetic terms as effectively as Janet Slom, whose exceptional solo show, “Shambhala,” is on view at Kohn Pederson Fox, 111 West 57 Street, from May 3 through 31.

One suspects the aura of authenticity that envelops Janet Slom’s mixed media paintings has a good deal to do with the fact that she is a person deeply committed to a spiritual practice from a very early age. Indeed, the title of the this show, “Shambhala,” was also the name of the family farm in south Africa where the father played host to Tibetan followers of a religion that embraces universal dignity. She is also the co-founder of the Shambhala Project, a holiday hospice for people terminally ill with cancer and AIDS.

Much of the success of the paintings rests on her ability to express spiritual notions in material terms. They meet harmoniously in her mixed media canvases, with their dark, earthy colors and encrusted textures, created with oil paints, oil stick, acrylic pigments, and sand.

Some of the paintings suggest ancient wall or tablets, while others shimmer incandescently, their surfaces glowing with metallic pigments that create a sense of spiritual light. Slom moves easily between geometric and biomorphic formats, employing diverse compositional strategies as the spirit moves her. She also calls upon freely drawn calligraphic elements, as well as a variety of surface lacerations, scratches, and other marks to imbue her canvases with an intriguing tactile variety, particularly in her less geometric compositions.

Central rectangles lend her compositions an emblematic quality, yet even in these canvases there is a sense of movement in the paint handling that can be traced to Slom’s training as a classical ballet dancer. Invariably, she paints with her entire body, activating the thickly pigmented surface with a lively gesturalism that makes her paintings appear to swell and pulse with internal energy. An actual physical energy appears to radiate from her best paintings, transmitted to the viewer almost telepathically through her intuitive painting process.

“I look upon my paintings as message of love to the world,” Janet Slom has stated, and her pictures do indeed project a warmth and glow that is immediately discernible to the receptive viewer.