

# Hans Goodrich

Joanne Greenbaum

*Lucky 13*

April 19 - May 31, 2025

Hans Goodrich is elated to present *Lucky 13*, a solo exhibition of New York based artist Joanne Greenbaum.

*Lucky 13* encompasses a suite of six paintings, all belonging to the same series, dated 2005 - 2007.

The following interview is a conversation between friends.

**Veronica Gonzalez Peña:** I'd like to talk about the idea of play in your work. I know that people have referred to your work as child-like and you and I have spoken about the notion of play in the work, but I'd like to talk in a more formal way about the idea of play that stems from the psychoanalyst DW Winnicott's writing on the transitional space and of play as a creative act. For Winnicott, play always occurs in the magical place between things. This is what he terms the transitional space, a space first inhabited by the breast (or bottle), and later by transitional objects (a blanket, a toy) which aid the child in the maneuvering from the internal world of "I," to the external world of "you/we." These transitional spaces, and the objects which represent them, are spaces of paradox as they are neither fully in nor out; they are, rather, related to both, but different from each and help us to move from the "in" to the "out," and back and forth. They are imaginative places of non-closure, places which allow for the paradox "it is me and not me," a paradox which in his book, *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott asks not be resolved but rather "accepted and tolerated and respected" in its state as paradox. These in-between spaces, these spaces of paradox, of play, are the places which an artwork, say a painting, inhabits, as the painting is a place which from the first is a part of you, but outside of you, and also allows the viewer to come to it and have their own experience with it.

But there is also the idea of the play you are involved in with the painting itself as you are making it. The painting is like another body with which you are involved in the play that is the creative act.

**Joanne Greenbaum:** I really like that description of the state of play as an in between space and a transitional one within one's own experience. I don't think of the word "play" as childlike and I used to bristle when my work was described that way. But in your definition above it is a negotiation between states of experiences.

I do enjoy myself when working but also it's a constant battle between wanting to make something meaningful and something that makes no sense at the same time. That's the fun part. Also, the not knowing and feeling that I have no idea what is happening is the part of play that feels dangerous.

**VGP:** Your work seems to embody this idea of play in a very active manner, in that the painting itself seems to operate almost like a diagram of your own play in the making of it. We can see your motions there, your regard for the mark you have previously made, and what that initial mark calls upon you to do next.

**JG:** Yes, exactly because that is the subject matter of every painting—the thinking that went into it. The thought actually diagrammed on the canvas as I go along. It's like building something gradually and not hiding the flaws and how it came about. Playing with the mistakes and trying to disrupt the things that are making too much sense is a part of it. And at the same time trying to make it beautiful.

VGP: We can also see the regard for the different materials and the way they play on the painting almost like a mapping of your relationship with the painting. We can see the play of your understanding of your materials, your experience with them, what this or that material will do to the painting, and how that leads to the following motions. But we also understand that sometimes the material must surprise you, that it must present new “problems” for you to work through or at least consider. There is a real respect for the capabilities of the painting itself and what it has to offer, what you can ask of it. All of this interplay is there, for the viewer to take in.

JG: I love all the different materials I use and I find the mixing of different types of materials necessary for me in solving how to construct the work. I usually use a range of things and the mixing of them together does really challenge me to think differently about the outcomes. It’s really an easy thing to work with materials that we were told not to use like markers on canvas. This is common now but I have always liked to mix high and low materials. Really good oil paint and some cheap acrylic. Ultimately the mixtures of high and low make the work have an element of surprise. I’m trying to shock myself with the discrepancies.

One of the most enjoyable things used to be shopping for art materials in an actual store, looking at the different brands and deciding what to buy and getting ideas from the store displays, looking for colors I’d never used before. Then buying that color and getting back to the studio only to see I already had three of them.

VGP: I am interested in this body of paintings, these number paintings, and how they came to be.

JG: Originally someone ( at a gallery I was showing at) made a comment to me about my work not having any “content” as it is abstract and non-representational. I was offended because of course my work has content this was also in the mid 2000’s when “content” was supposedly being used as the only basis for understanding painting.

VGP: Can you speak about the content of your work? Is it to do with the motions of the painting itself being created, your relationship with it? This play we are talking about? Did this gallerist’s reductionist idea of “content” spur you on to something new? Almost as if to say, Let me show you content?

JG: Because I was mad I absentmindedly began numbering areas of my work to stress and prove what the content was. I was numbering starting with 1 and decided to draw or paint as I went along with the sequential numbers. I was also calling attention to the fact that people don’t tend to look at paintings for more than a few seconds and the numbers were drawing attention to the areas to look at. After a while I realized that something else was actually happening when using numbers in the paintings. I was documenting my process as I went along with the painting. In addition, I was calling attention to the structure and skeleton of the painting. I realized that as I started with the number 1 it became a game for me to see how far I could go in numbering a painting. Should I work on this painting until I got to 100? Or 300? I made some big ones that got to those numbers. In some way it brought a kind of performative aspect to the paintings.

VGP: Yes, for Winnicott, play is always a state of doing, a state of being. And this is the area which process-oriented art inhabits: It is always in this in-between space, in this space of creating and becoming. It seems that you heard these comments (“there is no content”), and you took that as a challenge for a new game – and that new game directly underlined the process-oriented aspect of your practice, which I believe had always been there. It’s almost as if you felt you had to delineate it, but in the process created this new sense of structure to play with, which then foregrounded the process itself more directly.

JG: Also, it brought my own handwriting into the work as notation—kind of like taking notes on my process as I went along. I enjoyed using different colors and materials on the numbering as well. Markers and other materials as well as paint. Interestingly, when I exhibited these works I noticed that people actually did look at the works for longer periods of time because they were trying to figure out what the numbers meant or what they were doing there. They were trying to connect the dots. It brought them into the paintings in a more active way and gave them a way in, in which they could actually look at them.

VGP: So, in a way the paintings were inviting the viewer in, in a more legible way. This created a stronger position for the viewer to feel that they were in communication with the work.

JG: I also feel that I was marking the time and duration of painting. I was putting a physical aspect to the thinking process.

VGP: This is one of my favorite aspects of your work, the way that we can see the mapping of a mind thinking, of regarding, as it builds the work.

JG: After a while I stopped using numbers in my painting but the act of doing so really changed the work. I understood that structure and scaffolding were aspects of their content and I didn’t need the numbers anymore to show that.

VGP: Almost as if in trying to explicate something to that gallerist, and then the viewer, you in fact learned something yourself? It deepened your relationship to structure and scaffolding, almost as if you had to make it visible in order to understand the depth of its existence?

JG: The energy has really changed in the years since I made those number paintings. And I’ve really changed too. I think I have learned to slow down the pace a lot and get into structure a lot more to connect better with what I actually want visually. I’ve gotten less performative. Maybe I’ve slowed the action down to a crawl, and in so doing I am learning a lot more about myself in the process. That painting is really a waiting game. In building paintings, I’ve come to realize how much one small action can change the whole thing, and the waiting to do that action sometimes can take days. In these anxious times, I’ve learned to be less concerned about making a good painting, and instead have it clearly be more about looking and sitting with the anxiety instead of fixing it. I think I’ve also stopped worrying about what other people think too.

**Joanne Greenbaum** is an artist based between New York City and Greenport, NY.

Her work has been exhibited in institutions such as MOMA PS1, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; The Flag Art Foundation, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI; Saatchi Gallery, London, UK; Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT; Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich, CH; Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf, CH; The American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY; Museum Abteiberg, Monchengladbach, DE; Parrish Art Museum, Watermill, NY; and The Milton Resnick and Pat Passlof Foundation, New York, NY; among others.

**Veronica Gonzalez Peña** is a Mexican-born writer and filmmaker.

Gonzalez Peña is the author of *twin time: or how death befell me*, winner of the Aztlán Literary Prize, the novel *The Sad Passion*, and a book on the Mexican drug war, *So Far From God*, all published by semiotext(e). Her feature length documentary film *Pat Steir: Artist* was released in 2021.

Hans Goodrich

Her book *Notes on Disappearing: a Life in Fragments* is forthcoming from semiotext(e) next year.