

## Max Gimblett

GARY SNYDER GALLERY

This was New Zealand-born, New York-based Max Gimblett's first solo show in several years, and his first at this gallery. It included thirty-three paintings produced in the past nine years, canvases dense with associations that spanned the globe. They revealed, among other interests, the artist's familiarity with Japanese calligraphy, Jungian psychology, and the practice of Buddhism.

Gimblett's palette is one reason the works resonate so widely. Fluorescent, explosive colors, such as fuchsia and acid green, call to mind Warhol's screenprints. Incandescent gold and red suggest Tibetan Buddhist paintings. And saturated, primary hues applied in broad brushstrokes evoke Barnett Newman and Willem de Kooning. Throughout, zigzags and twisted, centrifugal ellipses coalesce—dissonant spatial forms juxtaposed with one another.

A different set of associations is conjured by the shape of Gimblett's canvases. Since the early 1980s, the artist has favored the quatrefoil—a format that breaks with the notion of the canvas as a picture window. Suggesting a four-petaled flower, it also evokes the four cardinal points, the four dimensions, or the arms of the Eastern Orthodox cross. It is inspired by the Venus of Willendorf, primeval symbol of female fecundity, as well as by the completely male, quadrilobate design of the *tsuba*, the Japanese sword guard. Finally, the form alludes to Carl Jung's four fundamental human activities—sensing, feeling, thinking, and intuiting—pointing toward the center of being, like a mandala of wholeness.

With each work, Gimblett creates new relationships among surface, color, and gesture. These variations constitute steps along the path of consciousness, to which the show's title, "The Holy Grail," also referred: the quest of the hero walking the Zen road. The artist's method is based in the practice of meditation. First, Gimblett centers himself, emptying and silencing his mind. Then he rapidly moves his arm, often his entire body, hurling a brush (or mop) at the canvas. The exuberant energy of these gestures leads one to think that Gimblett is having the time of his life.

This spontaneity is combined with the laborious construction of layers. In *Exodus Kimono*, 2011, and *Heaped Gold Piled-Up Jade*, 2012, for instance, there are coats of white gesso, a background color, a brushstroke, a coat of epoxy, another brushstroke, and an application of precious metals—gold, silver, or copper foils. The eye moves among the complex, superimposed planes, tracing the artist's oscillation between diagonal shifts and twisted perspectives and free-floating brushstrokes.

By contrast, six sumi-ink-on-paper works and a black-and-white painting maintained an economy of means. Featuring single-stroke circles (inspired by the Zen *enso*), they emphasize the synchronicity between movement and a state of being, whether on a small or large scale. Like Gimblett's quatrefoils with their exhilarating colors, these seemingly reductive black-and-white works are also votive objects through which one can access transcendence.



*Exodus Kimono*, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 60 x 60"

—Ida Panicelli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.