



Written by JC Agid
Posted on May 7, 2022 — Leave a comment

POST-COVID SPRING BEAUTY

[The More You Look The More You See](#)

A solo exhibition of new work by **Judith Seligson** on view at **Galerie Mourlot** through **June 26, 2022**

Galerie Mourlot
16 East 79th Street, Suite 21
Between 5th and Madison Avenue
New York City

When I entered Galerie Mourlot on E. 79th Street two days ahead of **Judith Seligson's** new solo exhibition, the more I looked around, the more I saw boxes everywhere, each containing either a painting, a pigment print, or a sculpture Seligson, a geometric abstract artist, created during the pandemic. On one wall, John—the installer—was carefully calculating the distance between two frames: on top, a series of photographs of flowers painted over—snapshots of nature blooming and blossoming despite the pandemic, aptly titled "Covid Spring"—and below a selection of bold striped paintings, or intervals paintings, as Seligson described them to me.

In the center of the room, the artist was busy unpacking and deciding how she wanted the body of work to come together at her second solo exhibition of Galerie Mourlot, a name more associated with the print making for the likes of Picasso and Miro, but which also has a strong contemporary art program. Her daughter—journalist and author **Hannah Seligson**—was dispensing advice. She became her mother's unofficial "art agent," or manager, five years ago.

Hannah marveled at the exhibition slowly taking shape, the new series of what she describes as "hard-edged, geometric abstract paintings" in which her mother, Judith, explores "her interest in the interactions of colors, patterns, and space that all push the boundaries of the pictorial plane and create a sense of spatial tension." "The Washington Post once decided it was reminiscent of **Stella and Albers**," Hannah explained.

As I found my way to gallery owner **Eric Mourlot's** desk by the tall windows overlooking 79th street, to sit down and take my recorder out of my bag, I marveled at the artistic poetry of the pieces. "It is a musical composition, almost a rhythmic movement," the 72-year-old artist and author who studied with **Flora Natapoff, Philip Guston, Leo Manso, and Victor Candell** explained to me. Some of the paintings are small, discreet, miniature even, "a feminist statement," Hanna said, quoting her mother.

I have always been told people are born artists, so I asked **Judith Seligson** when she first realized she was an artist and no one else. Before she could utter a word, **Hannah** interjected: "Mom, tell the story of when you were drawing..."



Judith Seligson (c) JC Agid | 2022

So, here it starts, I said looking straight into the eyes of the painter. This is the first question. And your journalist-agent-daughter already wants to answer for you.

Judith Seligson: She is my manager!

Hannah: no, no, no

See, your daughter is interrupting you again.

Judith: We have really developed a fantastic interaction. She is a manager and an artist agent.

When did you feel you were an artist?

Judith: I was 25, and I was graduating from college. I had started premed courses in San Diego, and I discovered that I was much more interested in the drawings in the margins than I was in the biology in the main section. So, I've been working steadily as a studio artist since.



Judith Seligson (c) JC Agid | 2022

Hannah Seligson (c) JC Agid | 2022

How have you gone about studying your craft?

Judith: I went to Harvard Radcliffe and studied with my most important painting teacher, the Canadian American Philip Guston. He looked at my work and said, "Well, what's the most interesting thing here you would like to paint," and it turned out to be the door; and so, the next question was, "Why don't you just paint the door?"

What about your biology studies?

Judith: I did both. I use a lot of scientific references in my book [Gaps and The Creation of Ideas](#)

Have you ever worked as a biologist?

Judith: No, I say I have a fake medical license!

It means that you, Hannah, were raised by an artist instead of growing up with a scientist mother!

Hannah: I always said I would call a memoir, which I have no intention of writing, "My rebellion to be normal", which is a bit of statement about growing up with creative, free-spirited parents. My mom was committed to what she was doing that was wonderful and inspiring, at least later on, but it also meant that I was sharing my mom with another child: art. Now the mother of two, I totally understand why only one child gives someone their creative space.

How did your mom be an artist influence who you are?

Hannah: Just for the record, I would much prefer being the one asking the questions. These are tough questions!

Sorry, Hannah, not this time... Back to you as a writer.

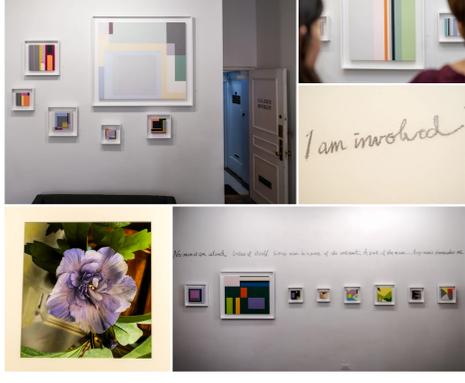
Hannah: I think the idea of doing what you want to do, and I know it sounds so cliché and privileged, but I think a lot about something my mom has said: "You don't choose to be a painter, painting chooses you." The same could be said about being a writer. You certainly don't do either for money or for fame, but it's something that you would have to do even if you don't always want to do it. It's a real discipline and a practice.

You practiced the art of miniature paintings.

Judith: A lot of paintings have been judged according to scale. The abstract expressionists went very big, but quality shouldn't always be equated with size. I started working small in 1978 and had works that are much smaller than those exhibited today. Every painter must ask what the painting is, where is the line between not painting and painting, between design and artwork. I wanted to ask how small a painting can be and still be a great painting. At that time, smallness was almost disqualifying.

Walking on unknown paths! That makes you a feminist Judith, doesn't it? And feminism is a topic you wrote about on many occasions, Hannah. Do you think that it is harder for women artists?

Hannah: Absolutely. Just look at the numbers of women in major institutions and museums. I think it's something like 10%. So, with my mom, you have the double wearing of ageism and sexism in the arts.



“ I try to paint melodies, whether they are stripes or flowers. I want to keep the viewer interested and playful in a dynamic symmetry.”

Judith Seligson

Was it part of the reason for your engagement to work alongside our mother?

Hannah: I decided to get involved with my mom's career right after Donald Trump won the election. It was not a great moment for women. I wanted to help my mom, who I saw as coming up against sexism and ageism, succeed in her. This was my very minimal way of taking some action, on a very personal level, to further the empowerment of the woman who is most important in my life: my mother. At her last show, which opened in November 2016, we sold 50 paintings.

Has it been harder just because you are a woman?

Judith: In the sense of financial remuneration? Yes, I do think so. When I started in New York and had my loft in Tribeca—before anyone else did—on Leonard St, only 10% of artists represented by galleries were women. It is easy to discount more minor things and things that are female. Artists and women artists want to sell and make a living. People put money where they think there's value, and if they don't think there's value, they won't.

Hannah: We need to give a shout out to Eric Mourlot because he shows a lot of women artists in his gallery.

Eric Mourlot: I'm not doing it for political reasons. It just turns out that I've been responding lately to more women artists because I think that male artists are not really exploring enough. It might be a vast generalization, but I've found more lately that female artists' vision is much broader.

Did you make a living from your art?

Judith: No. I made ends meet when I was an administrative assistant at Yale just after I decided to become a painter. Then I also became a graphic designer in 1983. When Hannah decided to put her enormous talents in my direction, she felt for me; she saw some of the indignities, the people who stood me up.

Hannah: I remember the day one of the top art consultants in the United States made an appointment and just didn't show up. No phone call—this person couldn't even give that courtesy. It says something very profound about how artists who haven't entirely "made it" are treated because that certainly wasn't an isolated incident.

“ Music is a fundamental language for every art, and I use it in painting.”

Judith Seligson

Tell us about this show. There are two different kinds of works. First, the flowers.

Judith: Photographs drawn over with pastel and pencil and then photographed again and a few little magic tricks. I love flowers and I get a lot of inspiration from looking at nature. This series is called COVID Spring. I did them in the spring of 2020, which needs no further introduction; they were photographed on my daily walk.

The stripes are more traditional. Your work on spatial dimensions?

Judith: I would say intervals are really the central theme; it is an essential word in my own vocabulary; intervals are a visual musical. They become short notes; they compose a melody, a visual melody, something coherent and beautiful that you can't define. I try to paint melodies, whether they are stripes or flowers. I want to keep the viewer interested and playful in a dynamic symphony.

Do you listen to music while painting?

Judith: It is not synesthesia. I studied music theory when I was young and played the piano for several years. My work is a different kind of musical translation and has nothing to do with sound—music is a universal language for everything; it's a fundamental language for every art, and I use it in painting.



Speaking of what is essential, I think I should go. There are still so many paintings to install on the walls.

Judith: I never fail to enjoy this exact moment when we hang a show. It really brings the work into another dimension.

Eric: This is going to look amazing. This is a sort of a middle process for the artist, post-studio and before the viewer comes in and interprets the artwork; before he emotionally or intellectually responds to it. This is an exciting part of the process that people don't ever see, which is when the work is displayed in the studio, when the artist and the curator work together to present the paintings to create a narrative.

And the narrative would be?

Hannah: Beauty. Simply, post-Covid Spring beauty.



Pauline Vranken and Eric Mourlot attend Judith Seligson art opening at Galerie Mourlot May 4, 2022 (c) JC Agid

28 / 36

Share this: [X](#), [Post](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Share](#), [Facebook](#), [Share 3](#), [WhatsApp](#), [Print](#), [Email](#)

Like this: [Like](#) Be the first to like this.

Posted in [Amazing Women](#), [ART](#), [Byline JC Agid](#), [Culture](#), [Fire Chat With](#)

About the Author:
JC Agid
JC Agid is the founder of 37EAST, a brand strategy and business development agency based in the United States. He is also a trustee on the advisory boards of the American Friends of the Paris Opera and of LeaderXXchange.
[View all posts by JC Agid](#) →

← Previous Entry: [The Silent Odessa Symphony](#) | Next Entry →: [Art Could be a Sustainable Luxury \(but it Has a Long Way to Go\)](#)

Leave a Reply

