

HOPE GELFAND ALCORN: THE ART OF JOYFUL NOISE

Through October 30, 2026

Artist Reception: Thursday, September 10 ▪ 6-8 PM

For more than three decades, Pittsburgh-based artist Hope Gelfand Alcorn has worked in abstraction, exploring color, pattern, movement and material. *The Art of Joyful Noise* brings together a small selection from this much larger body of her work. Alcorn paints on canvas and industrial wool felt, layers color through stencils and transfers, and cuts painted canvases into strips that she weaves together. Throughout these works, color and pattern establish order, test its limits, and keep the eye moving.

Alcorn calls what she creates “joyful noise.” What might constitute noise in a painting? What does joy look like?

Noise suggests interference, simultaneity, even disorder. Alcorn creates a visual equivalent through the accumulation of color, pattern and movement. Grids, repeated marks and interlocking forms give the eye something to follow, while competing colors and shifting patterns continually pull our attention elsewhere. In the woven works, one painted image literally interrupts another as strips pass over and under each other. The eye cannot take everything in at once. It moves across the surface, following one rhythm before another takes over.

Alcorn writes of the “raucous sound of color,” imagining color that can swirl, fly and shout. Her language moves easily between seeing and hearing, and the paintings encourage the same exchange. Repetition establishes rhythm. Contrasting colors push against one another. Dense accumulations of marks seem to vibrate. Nothing is actually making a sound, of course, but these are hardly quiet paintings.

Alcorn pushes this interplay of pattern and disruption further in her woven paintings. She begins with two separately painted canvases, removes one from its support, and cuts it into strips. She cuts into the second canvas and progressively weaves the two together. In her hands, canvas becomes more than a surface for paint; it becomes the substance of the construction. Cutting interrupts each original composition. Weaving creates new relationships among its fragments. Traces of two paintings remain, now joined in a third.



Photo by Maggie Sullivan

There is another woven object in Alcorn’s life. Her family has preserved two wicker suitcases that her maternal grandmother and mother brought with them when they emigrated from Vienna to the United States in 1924, entering through Ellis Island. Alcorn has not described the suitcases as a source for her woven paintings, but when the two are placed in conversation, the visual resonance is hard to miss. Wicker passes over and under wicker; painted canvas passes over and under painted canvas. Individual strands disappear beneath the surface and emerge again. Made to carry a family’s possessions, the suitcases have become something the family carries forward. The woven surfaces hold another kind of pattern: one shaped by migration, memory and the stories that attach themselves to objects over time.

Alcorn’s weaving also belongs to histories of abstraction that reach far beyond twentieth-century modernism. For centuries and across cultures, textile makers have built complex visual languages through the crossing of threads, repetition of forms, and organization of color. Modern artists have drawn upon this expansive history as well. Anni Albers made the structure of weaving integral to the image itself. Miriam Schapiro brought fabric, pattern, decoration and techniques associated with women’s work directly into the realm of painting, challenging hierarchies that had long separated fine art from craft. Paul Klee organized color and repeated forms with a keen sense of rhythm and musicality. Alcorn came to her practice independently, yet her work enters into conversation with questions these artists also pursued: how color acquires rhythm, how pattern shapes perception and how materials determine what an image can become.

This exhibition remains on view throughout the Jewish High Holiday season, weeks that carry us through awakening, reflection, atonement, and eventually toward Sukkot, *z’mán simchateinu*, “the season of our rejoicing.” During Rosh Hashanah, the sound of the shofar calls us to attention and awakens us. Alcorn also describes “joyful noise” as a force of “stimulation and awakening.” Visitors who encounter her work during this season may hear an unexpected echo between those ideas.

Joy takes on a different meaning as the holidays unfold. Sukkot asks us to celebrate while dwelling in a temporary structure, open to the elements and conscious of its fragility. Here, joy exists alongside uncertainty and vulnerability. Alcorn’s paintings hold some of that complexity. Patterns shift and colors collide. In the woven works, she cuts apart what she has already painted and begins again, weaving the pieces into something new. Joy emerges amid change, and perhaps even because of it.

What, then, might joy look like? Alcorn leaves that question open. An unexpected color, a pattern changing course, the rhythm of one mark following another, two paintings woven into a new whole: each offers a different encounter. Across these works, joy emerges through movement, attention, abundance and surprise.

Perhaps that is Alcorn’s joyful noise—the possibility of encountering joy.

—Melissa Hiller, American Jewish Museum Director

