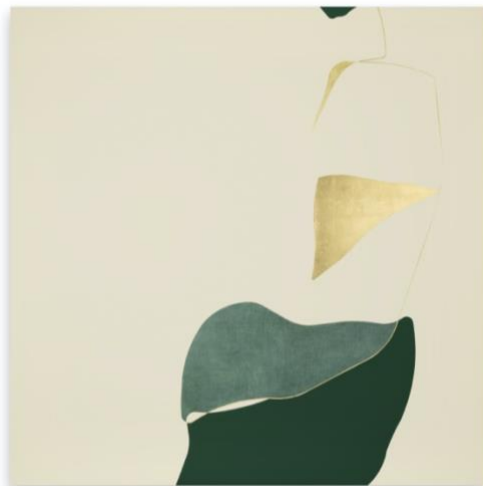


**BROOKLYN RAIL**

*Gabriel Orozco*

by Jonathan Goodman (October 2020)



Gabriel Orozco, *Ochiba*, 2020. Tempera and gold leaf on linen canvas, 78 3/4 x 78 3/4 x 11/4 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo credit: Gerardo Landa.

Gabriel Orozco, now close to 60, is a permanent part of the contemporary art landscape. Coming out of conceptualism, often working with photography (but also with other mediums), Orozco is offering at Marian Goodman paintings large and small made in Tokyo. The large paintings are tempera works with gold leaf, while the small ones are watercolor-based collages; these efforts were created as part of the “Suisai” series, started in 2016. Usually, the work begins in notebook drawings, which the artist then projects onto canvas. These beautiful abstract works successfully evade the conventions of current nonobjective painting, likely because they are linked to natural forms. They are genuinely original, in part because they silently reflect the decorative influence of Japan. One can only wonder at the unusual facility of the artist: somehow, he has turned these paintings into innovative, exploratory statements, even while working within the by-now-established history of abstract art.

The presence of nature hovers over this current body of work. In *Ochiba* (2020), we see, at the bottom of the painting and a bit toward the right, two dark green, leaf-like forms hovering very closely together. Above them is another triangular, leaf-shaped form, this time composed of gold leaf. The word “ochiba,” meaning fallen leaves on water, refers to the koi, a decorative fish from Japan. In this painting and in the others, Orozco moves through the decorative into artistic statements of genuine independence and beauty. In *Zugaikotsu* (2020), the forms are somewhat more involved: a large, rounded green form, with a white, organic horizontal shape in its center right, occupies the middle of the painting. Around this central image occurs a group of organic shapes that are deep mauve, black, and tan in color. The title is a word indicating the skull, meant to show respect for those who have died. One might, or might not,

## MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

read the large green shape as the suggestion of a skull; it is hard to tell. The point is that in both these paintings, Orozco is picking up ubiquitous images and practices—the skull and the collecting of the koi—in Japanese culture and making out of them abstract themes.

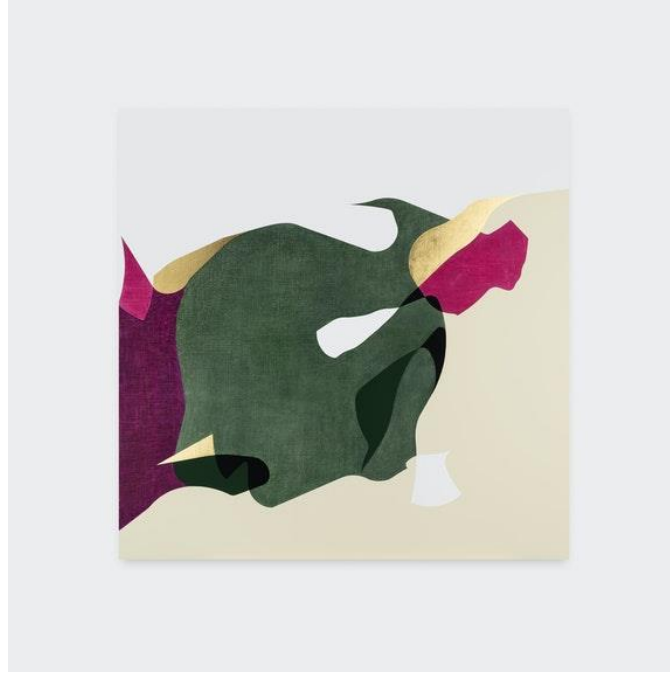


Gabriel Orozco, *Rakugaki*, 2020. Tempera and gold leaf on linen canvas, 47 1/4 x 47 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo credit: Gerardo Landa.

*Rakugaki* (2020)—the title may be translated as “scribble” or “doodle”—occurs on a dark green ground, unusual among the works in the show, though similar greens feature as figures throughout. Gold and black leaves rest on the lower part of the painting, while above, deep mauve, black, and white organic forms sprout from elegant tendrils in the upper right, along with a few forms in black and in white. Like the works in the rest of the show, *Rakugaki* is improvised, the shapes making their way across the compositional field in a highly intuitive manner. *Garabato* (2020), also meaning “scribble” or “scrawl” in Spanish, makes use of a white field, with a large purple splotch seen in the right center, above which is a thin triangle of gold leaf. The purple shape is echoed beneath it by two small purple smudges.



Gabriel Orozco, *Garabato*, 2020. Tempera and gold leaf on linen canvas, 47 1/4 x 47 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo credit: Gerardo Landa



Gabriel Orozco, *Zugaikotsu*, 2020. Tempera and gold leaf on linen canvas, 47 1/4 x 47 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo credit: Gerardo Landa.

One has the sense that this painting, along with the others, exists as a commentary on improvisation—there is a faint resemblance to the work of Joan Miró, as well as, in the use of plant forms, a similarity to Matisse and especially Ellsworth Kelly. Orozco both isolates and embellishes organic forms, making use of vivid color to highlight the shapes and their irrational eloquence. Working between media and open to experience, Orozco is an exploratory artist. These paintings present him in a more traditional manner, but his original cast of mind, along with a highly skilled hand, make the work stand out—free of obvious influence. The collages, smaller, framed, and displayed in rows in the back rooms of the Marian Goodman space, are outstanding examples of mixed-media work. If anything, their intensity of color is greater than the big paintings, perhaps because the intensities of hue are crowded into a smaller space. They are jewels, exquisitely fashioned. This is a show notable for its vivid inventiveness, decorative intensity, and creative freedom, moving toward a statement compelling both for its awareness of painting's history and the need to make something new.