

The Moody Blues

Stack's rich paintings, at Moody Gallery now, echo the unsaid

| By Tim Moloney |

"I'm losing my nouns," says Houston-based artist Gael Stack, a fixture on the city's art scene and the John and Rebecca Moores Professor of Art at the University of Houston. "I'm forgetting the names of things, so there's a gap in my communication."

It's these proverbial gaps—the unsaid and unheard in human language, explains the Chicago native—which she explores in her new series, *Recent Paintings*, at Moody Gallery (2815 Colquitt St., 713.526.9911) Dec. 6-Jan. 10. "It's a show that's interested in the limits of memory and the hold that the present has on the past and future," says Stack of the very personal collection. "My own work is my own voice."

The large canvases, clad in rich, deeply hued backgrounds, are overlaid with calligraphy-like bits of Japanese poetry, meandering lines and sketchy forms. The resulting layers of open-ended narratives crowding the surface are at once whizzy and still, energetic and contemplative—a formidable balance that strikes the tone of Stack's method. Though, after a lengthy gaze, many of the random scribbles begin to take shape as actual characters and drawings.

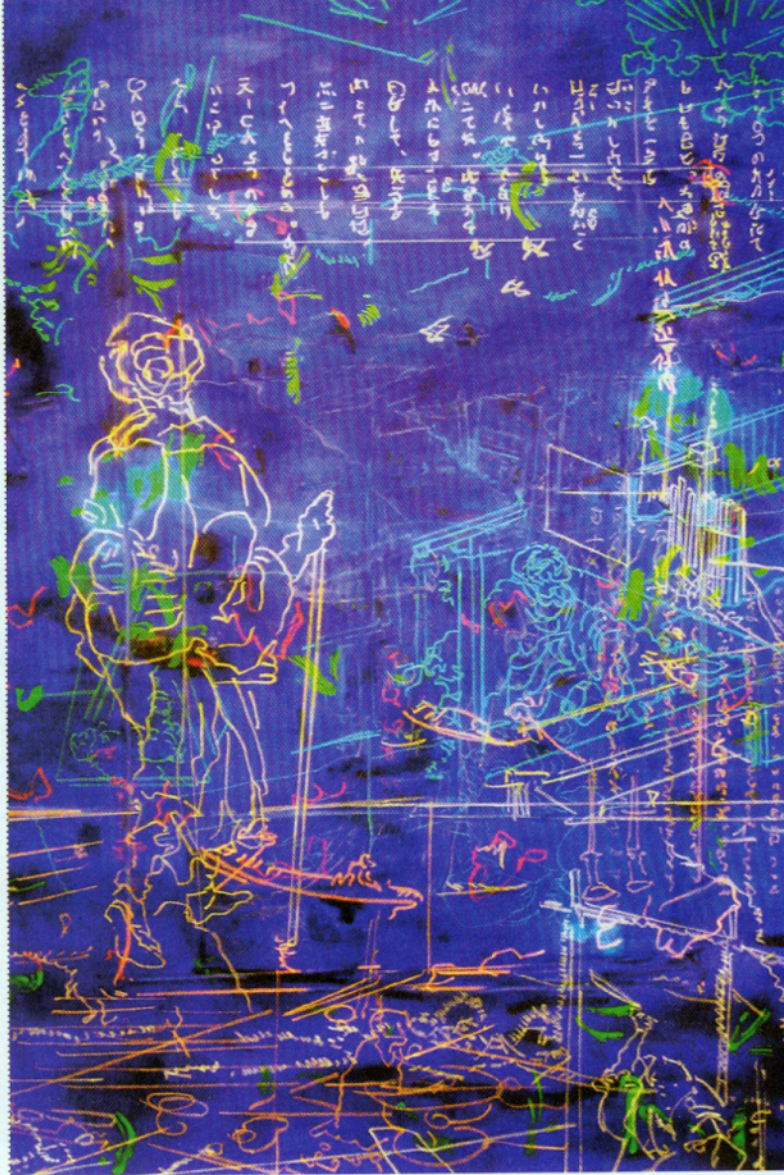
Armed with a BFA from the University of Illinois in Urbana and a MFA from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Stack moved from Chicago to H-Town in 1974 for a part-time job at U of H. "I actually had two other part-time jobs at the time," she says. "I had two small children to support."

Houston proved to be an attractive place to the upper-Midwesterner, with its "critical mass of museums and working artists, which I think any artist needs around them," says Stack. "Oh, and there was no snow."

Within a year, she was full-time at the school and has now been teaching for more than three decades. Over the years most of her students have gone on to achieve success, "however one defines 'success,'" says Stack. "They get accepted to good graduate schools, get teaching jobs, become working artists. It's all very satisfying."

During the same period, her artistic career took off, eventually earning her two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Tiffany Foundation Grant and the Art League of Houston's 1997 Texas Artist of the Year award. Stack's work also appears in permanent collections worldwide, including the Beaux Art Museum in France, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, The Dallas Museum of Art, the Yale University Art Gallery (where she's been a visiting distinguished professor), The Menil Collection and the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, among others.

At a stage in her career at which many of her contemporaries are slowing down, Stack is full-steam ahead. Is there a chance of retirement in her future? "Well, not today," she grins. "Too many stories left to tell. ■"



THE SPOKESWOMAN 'My own work in my own voice' is how artist and teacher Gael Stack describes pieces from her new 'Recent Paintings' series.