

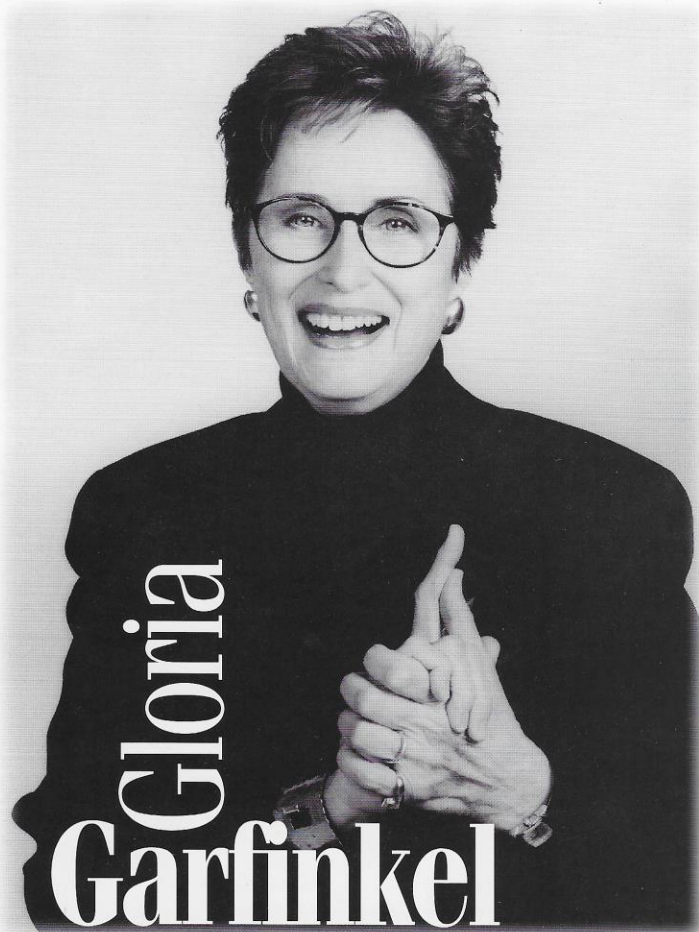


Photo by Gilman Levin

by Aliza Davidovitch

artist Behind

*On a cold morning
When I go to my studio
Colors warm my heart.*

March 1992

ehind nine-foot steel doors in "Hell-Chel," as the artist calls the area where her studio is located—below New York City's Hell's Kitchen and above Chelsea—the magical and exciting sounds of Phillip Glass' "Glass Pieces" fill the spacious large-windowed art studio. The large, bright green plants seem nurtured by the musical splendor. But when Gloria Garfinkel pulls out her paints, chisels and drills, this tranquil hub is transformed into the creative hub-bub that has earned her several awards and up to \$45,000 for select pieces of her work.

With the enthusiasm and energy of a teenager, Garfinkel is constantly recreating herself and demonstrating her ability to blend ancient themes with the avant-garde, and the abstract with bold form.



Photo by Eva Cohn

With her drill in hand Garfinkel fights back against a world and trade once dominated by men. In the early 1950s, when Garfinkel graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology, she had set out with hopes of finding a job as a fashion designer. She was hired immediately as a model—the designing jobs for the most part were for men. After doing some modeling, she finally began as a designer for a sportswear company that promptly went out of business, “by no fault of mine,” Garfinkel says with a laugh. With job options for women very grim and their salaries even grimmer, the admonishments of her parents were ubiquitous: “There is no money in the arts,” they cautioned her. “Become a secretary or a nurse.” But Garfinkel, who admits to being a poor speller, thought that becoming a designer would grant her financial security.

Since the age of 14, she dreamt of being an artist. It was that dream which sustained Garfinkel’s ambition, even after divorce and the tragic death of a son. Garfinkel reared two sons, did freelance designing, taught art in the public schools and worked almost every night until 2 a.m., painting. “I had to do it,” Garfinkel says. “I’m not happy unless I’m creating, planning and painting.”

Garfinkel’s artistic forms have changed many times throughout the years: “It’s a constantly evolving process.” She studied and engaged in still life painting, printmaking (etching, woodcuts, monoprints and collages) and sculpting in marble. Garfinkel broke away from still life and broadened her artistic horizons. She experimented with multi-layered prints and paintings, emulating Japanese kimono prints. She also did a series of very large outdoor paintings (three-dimensional painted aluminum) and abstract art. “Art has to evoke something in you,” Garfinkel claims. “The imagery of a lot of artists today is less interesting because they seem to be copying each other rather than looking and working to develop their own voice.” As an elementary school instructor, Garfinkel encouraged her younger students to use their imagination. “I wanted them to be different, to be creative and innovative.”

Garfinkel’s own creativity becomes most apparent when she attempts to describe what one should be seeing in the preliminary drafts of a current project. With the finished version keenly engraved only in her own mind, the

viewer has only Garfinkel’s word and the magnificent “evidence” exhibited on her studio walls to be assured that the project will meet its mark.

Garfinkel continues to make her own mark in the artistic realm. Unlike many artists who are inspired solely by nature and who attempt to recapture its grandeur on the microcosm of a canvas, Garfinkel’s most recent works were inspired by a mere postcard of a 19th-century Ando Hiroshige wood block print, “Japanese Chrysanthemums,” that she saw at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Garfinkel was impressed by the juxtaposition of the traditional Japanese textured patterns and the bold, modern blue-and-white-striped accents. This small postcard inspired some of her greatest works, some of which are six feet in diameter. Greatly influenced by Japanese culture and Henry Matisse’s colors, Garfinkel’s works possess a mysteriousness that leaves viewers wondering whether they are being ushered into the future or being tossed back in time. It is that very tension between the ornate past and futuristic structure, that gives the semblance of constant motion in her works. As Dore



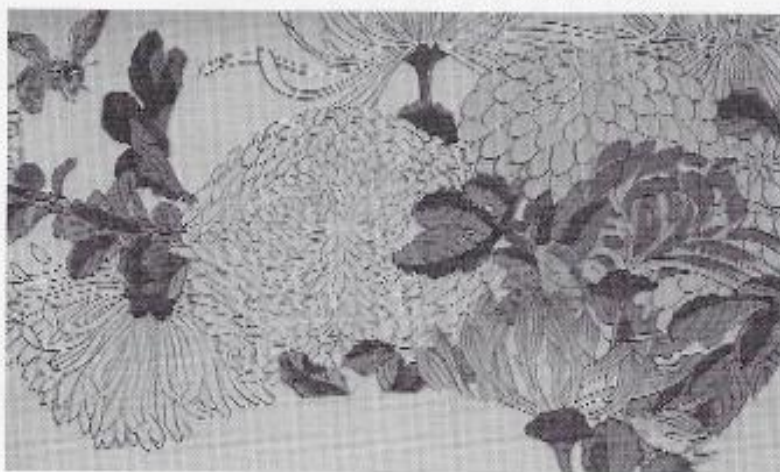
Gloria Garfinkel (1987).

Photo by Eva Cohen



Gloria Garfinkel 1988. "Kiku" oil on canvas/diameter 6'.

Photo by Eva Cohen



"Japanese Chrysanthemums" by Ando Hiroshige
Postcard which inspired Garfinkel's work.

Ashton, a noted art critic, commented recently of an exhibition: "Garfinkel, in balancing caprice and the rule of the painted picture plane, has found the appropriate means of expressing the range of her bountiful response to the seeing world."

It was not only Garfinkel's art that evolved throughout the years, but also her religious convictions. Garfinkel, who was born Catholic in New York in 1929, was searching for a deeper meaning in her life. After taking several courses at university, she became enraptured by the warmth of Judaism.

"Judaism was one of the few religions that cultivated a stronger sense of family and companionship, with an ethos of warmth and understanding as well as self-evaluation and control. Judaism offered me honesty and fulfillment," Garfinkel says. In 1968, she underwent a Reform conversion to Judaism. She found peace of mind, a peace that permeates her published Haiku poetry book, *Thailand Haiku* (illustrated with six of her etchings).

After 30 years of marriage, Garfinkel has found a profoundly exciting, challenging and supportive husband, attorney Barry Garfinkel, who adjudges her work as the finest he has ever seen. There are two other people she says she could not live without, besides her sons, their wives and children. They are Mohammad O. Khalil, artist, teacher, master printer and Son Han, her assistant, also an artist and print-maker perfectionist.

With over 30 exhibitions including two museum retrospectives in 1995 gracing her resume, some of the choicest gallery walls in the United States and not less importantly, many *Fortune* 500 walls, Garfinkel's art work is finally being appreciated by discerning and knowledgeable people in the art world. Yet despite years of struggle, Garfinkel says that she hates to think of art in terms of money. "Money has never been the important part of art for me. What is important to me is to be proud of and respect the work that one has done." (Brent Jones)