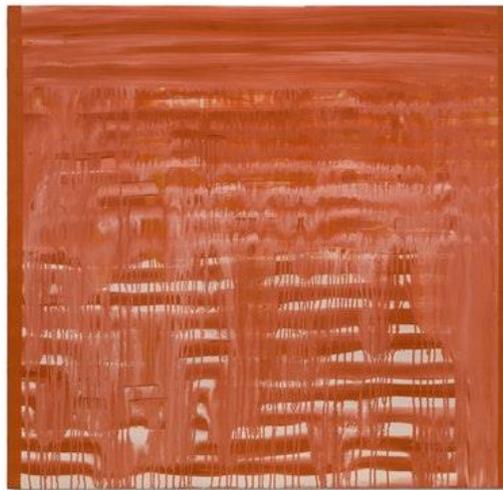


ArtSeen

Moira Dryer: Paintings & Works on Paper

by David Rhodes | May 2019



Moira Dryer, *Untitled*, 1988, Casein on Wood, 48 x 46 inches. Courtesy of Van Doren Waxter.

Moira Dryer's third exhibition with this gallery—two previous exhibitions organized by gallery partner Augusto Arbizo took place in 2014 and 2016—comprises twelve paintings and nine works on paper. The exhibition represents Dryer's all too brief but wonderful output extremely well. (The artist died in 1992, at the age of 35.) Her concise and sensuous touch, and succinct yet expansive use of color, is everywhere evident. In the paintings, acrylic casein or oil is applied in an almost frugal way in thin and resonant color across wood panels. *FF (Fast Forward)* (1991) is monochrome yellow, casein on wood panel, 24 by 25 inches. Because the brush moves horizontally in alternating directions, bands appear as the light catches the brush strokes differently. Consequently, this use of bands to structure a composition is similar to those in other paintings here where more obvious bands are used. *Pop* (1989) consists of two parts, an acrylic on wood panel with a separate steel plate angled toward the viewer below. The painting is vertically striped, grey, black, blue and cream. The stripes are irregular and blur into each other, with a flurry of dark drips descending just left of center. Thoughts are provoked: How are we to read the sequence of colored stripes, like bars or as movement? And, is the steel plate below a form of mute instruction or explanation, as at a panoramic view or museum exhibit? The meaning is left open, and the pleasure is in the looking at, as well as the thinking about, this always visually compelling work.



Moira Dryer, *Pop*, 1989, 2 parts: acrylic and wood, and steel. Acrylic/wood: 48 x 61 inches. Steel Plate: 31 x 13 inches. Courtesy of Van Doren Waxter.

The object-like qualities of much of Dryer's work bring to mind Harvey Quaytman's work from the 1970s, whose painterly gestures across shaped canvas, sometimes in two parts, has much in common with Dryer's. Take *Untitled* (1988-90), for example—in that they are not spontaneous and wild strokes but considered and, whilst still gestural, very deliberately placed in relation to the area that they occupy—not at all aleatory or provisional. In being both gesture-based and object-like, Dryer's work also recalls David Reed's paintings from the 1970s (the tall narrow striped ones, in which the paint runs from one band into another because of gravity), or any of Elizabeth Murray's pieces. (Murray was an important mentor to Dryer, and Dryer worked for a while as her studio assistant.)

The works on paper give clues as to Dryer's planning process, hinting toward potential works, as in the blue-and-orange harlequin-patterned and ornately configured *Untitled* (1988-89). They also exist as standalone works, such as the blue stacking eye motifs of *Untitled* (1989). Two undated acrylic and gouache on paper pieces appear to be the earliest works in the exhibition, and both display three upright ovate shapes. Dryer's later sensibility—lean, subtle rendering, and spare yet rich color combining—are already in place.

In an interview from 1941, Matisse said that, "The audience is the material in which you work," and in front of a Moira Dryer painting, it's easy to see what he meant. As with a Matisse, the audience is necessary to complete the circuit—artist, art object, viewer. Dryer went so far as to describe her works as actors, capable of interacting with each other and the audience, and in some installations of her work, a staging is very clear. (Here it is subtle as there are no free-standing paintings present.) Dryer produced some of the most affecting and formally exciting work seen in New York during the 1980s and '90s—how I, and many others, wish that she could have continued for so much longer.