MOIRA DRYER

Born 1957, Toronto, CA
Died 1993, New York, NY

Moria Dryer was an experimental abstract painter who achieved remarkable success during her relatively short career. One of a generation of female artists in New York in the late 1980s and early 1990s who bridged the gap between Conceptualism and contemporary painting, Dryer is known today for her playful and poetic approach to painting which defies easy categorization. Dryer attended SVA under the tutelage of Elizabeth Murray (‘79-’80), to whom she later became an assistant, and was a set designer for iconic avant-garde theater company Mabou Mines through the early 80s, both of whom profoundly influenced her painting practice as adjacent to sculpture and performance, while maintaining firm roots in Abstract Expressionism and American Modernism.

After her debut New York solo exhibition at John Good Gallery in 1983, Dryer went on to join the program of legendary gallerist Mary Boone, and held solo exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (1987), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA (1989), and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (1993). During her lifetime Dryer’s work was included in notable group exhibitions such as *White Room,* White Columns, New York, NY (1982); *New York, New Work,* The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY (1984); *The Other Painting,* Royal Canadian Academy of Arts Gallery, Toronto, ON (1988); *The Image of Abstraction,* The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (1988); and *Italia—America: L’astrazione ridefinita,* Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna, San Marino, IT (1992).

Moira Dryer’s work has been exhibited posthumously in solo exhibitions such as *Moira Dryer: Back in Business,* The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C (2020); a traveling exhibition titled *Moira Dryer,* curated by Gregory Salzman, Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, ON, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, The Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, MD (2001). Her work has also been included in group exhibitions such as *Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s,* Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2017); *NO MAN’S LAND: Women Artists from the Rubell Family Collection,* Rubell Museum Miami, FL (2015); *Night Begins the Day: Rethinking Space, Time, and Beauty,* Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, CA (2015); *I, YOU, WE,* Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2013); *The Indiscipline of Painting: International Abstraction from the 1960s to Now,* Tate St. Ives, Cornwall, UK, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK (2011); *The Painted World,* MoMA PS1, New York, NY (2005); and *As Painting: Division and Displacement,* curated by Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2001), among many others.

Dryer’s work has been reproduced and reviewed in several publications such as *The New York Times, The New York Review of Books, New York Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, The Boston Globe, Artforum, The Village Voice,* and many others. Her work is held in numerous public collections such as the Buffalo AKG, NY; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON; Birmingham Museum of Art, AL; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Newark Museum, NJ; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

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ARTFORUM

Moira Dryer

The Phillips Collection

By Molly Warnock

Moira Dryer, *The Signature Painting*, 1987, casein on wood; top: 48 × 63″, bottom: 10 × 60 × 9 1/2″.

“LIFE IS FRAGILE + TENUOUS / & so is the work / Delicacy + vulnerability are / things I explore.” So reads, in part, an undated handwritten note by Moira Dryer, an elusive and often poignant artist

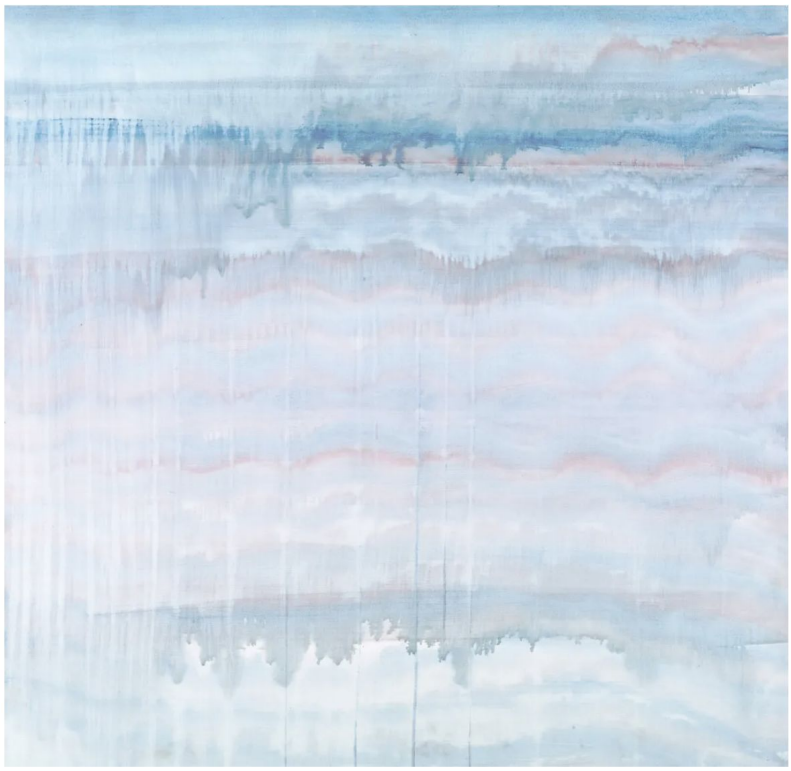
who certainly knew something of life's frangibility. Born in Toronto in 1957, Dryer studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York and then worked for a time as a freelance theater-set and prop designer before committing fully to her studio practice in 1985. Her first husband, a fellow painter, had died a few years earlier, of a congenital heart condition, at the age of twenty-nine; Dryer herself would succumb to breast cancer in 1992, at thirty-four. Her mature oeuvre barely spans a six-year period, one that was further shadowed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The current public-health crisis sharply curtailed access to these exhibitions. Thoughtfully selected by former Greater Reston Arts Center (GRACE) curator Lily Siegel, the two concurrent presentations jointly amounted to Dryer's first comprehensive survey in nearly twenty years, uniting thirty-four artworks in all: twenty-two paintings and sculptures at the Phillips Collection, twelve paintings and works on paper at GRACE. By the time I saw both shows, in late October, their respective titles—"Back in Business" and "Yours for the Asking"—came across as deeply ironic. The Phillips had only recently reopened to the public; the exhibition at GRACE remained accessible solely by appointment. Expertly installed in the nearly empty galleries, many of Dryer's artworks appeared as she once described them to Phillips curator Klaus Ottmann—as quasi-figural performers on an otherwise unoccupied stage. The theatrical analogy places Dryer's work firmly in the wake of American Minimalism, an affiliation confirmed by the at times emphatic physicality of her creations. And yet, true to the handwritten note with which I began this review—included, alongside others by the artist, in a vitrine at GRACE—Dryer consistently refuses the projection of impersonal objecthood. Expressive yet restrained, full of feeling yet everywhere conditioned by a profound reserve, her art speaks to the vagaries of embodied being.

Moira Dryer, *Fingerprint #2647*, 1988, casein on wood, 48 × 63 5/8″.

As these shows made clear, Dryer's work does this in part by renovating the deductive motifs characteristic of Color Field painting. Particularly telling in this regard are three paintings at the Phillips, each of which reveals a notionally impersonal structure that has been deformed by the incursion of "the personal." In the earliest and best-known instance, *The Signature Painting*, 1987, a nested structure of orange-brown stripes appears warped by the inclusion of the artist's outsize initials in the lower right. *Fingerprint #2647*, 1988, works similarly: The red and green stripes start out more or less parallel to the painting's left edge, only to become increasingly distended toward the right. *E.K.G.*, 1988, is the most complex case, the cardiogram-inspired motif—a sharp dip underscored by concentric half-rings—combining elements of a Kenneth Noland chevron, a target, and a horizontal-stripe painting all in one. The irregular waves in the upper register nonetheless upset the near symmetry of the whole, introducing a sense of left-to-right motion. As in *Fingerprint #2647*, the compositional structure mediates between the physicality of the support and the accidents and adventures of human embodiment. That Dryer's wood grounds are themselves highly differentiated by their inbuilt whorls and irregular grains further suggests an active interchange.

A similar anthropomorphism animates the more sculptural art, which Dryer described as most directly indebted to her work for the theater. The relation to the human body is most explicit in the wall-mounted *Short Story*, 1986, in which a bright-green, headlike circle appears perpendicular to an armlike extension terminating in a rough wooden semicircle. But that relationship can also be felt in the various works, all bilaterally symmetrical or nearly so, involving a rectangular painting with a separate, more sculptural element positioned centrally below it: a letterbox in *The Power of Suggestion*, 1991; a bit of machinery in an untitled painting, also from 1991, at GRACE; the horizontal structures—somewhere between a Renaissance predella and a museum's angled information panel—in *The Signature Painting* and *D.D. (Dangerous Days)*, 1990. In all of these instances, the weighting of the work in its lower register heightens the sense of a body pulled by gravity. Just as important, however, these projecting structures insist on a certain remove, pushing back as if physically against the beholder who would come too close. The uninscribed steel plate of the barrierlike form in *D.D. (Dangerous Days)* additionally insists on a certain silence, one that is all the more salient in the face of the painting's shimmering stripes and unconstrained streams of highly liquid medium.



Moira Dryer, *Picture This*, 1989, casein on wood, 46 × 48″.

Yet for all the ingenuity of her painting-objects, some of Dryer's most satisfying works remain her "unassisted" abstractions. One in particular, dated 1989 and displayed at the Phillips, fully exemplifies the artist's distillation of prior artistic languages into her own exquisitely subtle mode of restrained expressivity. At forty-six by forty-eight inches, the work relates to us bodily without overwhelming our visual field, while the near-square format imparts to it an air of neutrality. The surface, meanwhile, has a muffled, almost muted quality: Innumerable washes of white, pink, and blue casein have soaked into the wood support, each veiling the one before. The scalloped tiers of pale color recall the irregular stripes in a slab of agate or a particularly subtle piece of marbleized paper. *Picture This*, the title whispers. Stepping to one side, Dryer invites the beholder to dream along with her.

Molly Warnock is the author of Simon Hantaï and the Reserves of Painting *(Penn State University Press, 2020).*

The New York Review of Books
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The New York Review of Books

Playful & Philosophical: The Paintings of Moira Dryer

Barry Schwabsky

"Two images recur throughout [my] work," wrote Moira Dryer in 1991, "those of loss and desire." How, I keep wondering, can those two things be *images*? I'd like to ask her, but I can't; Dryer died of cancer the following year, at the age of thirty-four. She already knew more about loss than many people her age. In 1982, fresh out of New York's School of Visual Arts, the young Torontonian married a fellow student; fewer than eighteen months later, her husband was dead, of a congenital heart ailment. Later, most of her career, though prolific and highly successful, would be shadowed by her own illness.

Estate of Moira Dryer
Moira Dryer: Self Portrait, *1985*

Dryer's talent as a painter was to draw poignancy out of an almost generic pictorial vocabulary—stripes, blotches, drizzles of drippy color—and to put her formal reticence at the service of an intense playfulness, in paintings that emphasize their own three-dimensionality, playing on the edge of sculpture. Characteristic, as its name might imply, is *The Signature Painting* (1987)—like many of her paintings, a two-part invention: A small panel seems to offer a comment, a sort of "Yes, but…" on its larger companion, which prominently displays the artist's initials, MD, with beneath it a jaunty flourish that seems to have transmuted, in the smaller panel, into an infinity sign. Dryer seems to be joking with the idea of the signature as a sign of artistic authenticity and of a "signature style" as a prop for an artwork's economic value while suggesting that the common and easily duplicated elements out of which she has built her work can still be put to better (and more genuinely personal) use than merely certifying a sense of self.

Dryer's work has resurfaced periodically since her death—most notably in 2000, when a small retrospective organized by the Art Gallery of York University in Toronto opened in St. Louis and toured to Toronto, Waltham, Massachusetts, and Baltimore. But mostly, her art has lived in the memories of those who fell in love with it during the brief period when she was exhibiting regularly, beginning with her 1986 solo debut at New York's John Good Gallery up through a posthumous MoMA Projects room in 1993. I'm one of those

longtime admirers, as is *New Yorker* critic Peter Schjeldahl, who in 1998 wrote that her death six years earlier still hurt. So, also, is the painter Ross Bleckner, who called her "the Katharine Hepburn of abstract painting. She was beautiful and wind-swept and fierce and intelligent and she made things look very easy. There was a youthful mastery." Yet another keeper of the flame is the curator Valerie Smith—the first person to write about Dryer, in *Flash Art* in 1980—who recalls her as "singular in her commitment to art." In her early work, Smith writes, Dryer "continued to express atmospheric transformations of the land and sea irreverently and emotionally, as if they were her own" and later "took control of her acute sense of mortality by challenging herself to possess fate."

Estate of Moira Dryer/Collection of Susan Hort, New York
Moira Dryer: The Signature Painting*, 1987*

Perhaps more important than the way Dryer's paintings have continued to live in the memories of those who saw them in the Eighties and early Nineties is the way her name has lived on as a kind of password among certain younger abstract painters who may never, or only rarely, have had a chance to see her work in person. In an article published in the *Brooklyn Rail* in 2012, the English painter and critic David Rhodes recalled his impression, reading in London about Dryer's work years before, "that New York had done it again; a tradition was being recoined and revitalized," thanks to her "taking a long look at abstraction and quickly coming up with something fresh and new." Her reputation continued to circulate, *sub rosa*, among painters hoping to work with abstraction without bombast or the illusion of progress, to paint in ways that might be at once more intelligent and more full of feeling, more playful and yet more earnest.

Two recent shows of Dryer's work in the Washington, D.C., area—both cut short by closures required by the coronavirus pandemic—amounted to the best chance in twenty years to reconsider her work. The one that was more widely seen took place at the venerable Phillips Collection. Curated by Lily Siegel, it was titled "Back in Business" and encompassed twenty-two paintings—some of them quite sculptural and one of them freestanding rather than wall-mounted—made between 1985 and 1990. The second show, also curated by Siegel, was at the Greater Reston Arts Center. Getting there, if you're not a

car-owning local, means taking one of Washington's Metro lines all the way to its very last stop in a part of Virginia that seems choked by corporate development and then getting a taxi.

It was worth the effort. The show was described in the venue's press release as providing, in contrast to the Phillips show, "an intimate look at the artist's practice through works given as gifts to friends and family, many never previously shown publicly"—which might suggest a scrappy gathering of minor pieces, things of possibly more sentimental than aesthetic value. Nothing could be further from the truth. While the Reston show included several very early pieces, from before Dryer came into her own as an artist, most of the dozen works on view, from around 1980 through 1991, were just as impressive as those displayed at the Phillips. The show in Reston, by the way, was called "Yours for the Asking." Like the title of the show in Washington, it was taken from a newspaper headline clipped out and saved in Dryer's notebooks—saved, presumably, as a potential title for a painting she never got to make.

Greater Reston Arts Center/Loaned by Rachel Klein and Lyle Rexer
Moira Dryer: Untitled, *circa 1980; click to enlarge*

To understand what was so striking, to some of us, about Dryer's work in its time—what is still unusual about it today—it helps to know what she had learned from the art being made around her, and what she had learned to avoid. Her work was as far a cry from the theoretically overdetermined Neo-Geo—think of the cool synthesis of Pop and Minimalism, in Peter Halley's fluorescent "cells" or Jeff Koons's basketballs mysteriously floating in fish tanks—as it was from the emo-posturing of the Neo-Expressionism that had been fashionable a little earlier. Robert Ryman seems to have been a model, specifically his method of turning what were usually "secondary" aspects—the surface onto which the paint is brushed, the hardware that affixes the painting to the wall, even the artist's signature—into primary elements of painting. She must have had her eye, too, on Carroll Dunham, who through most of the Eighties (his art took a very different turn toward the end of that decade) made abstract paintings on wood or wood veneers, often using casein paint, among other materials, to create a sort of free-associative abstract graffiti that seemed to take the irregular grain patterns of the wood surfaces as inspiration for improvisations that could end up as bluntly corporeal metaphors.

Casein on wood were Dryer's preferred materials. Casein is a water-soluble paint derived from milk protein that has a matte, cloudy look to it. An ancient material, in recent times it has been used more by illustrators and scene painters than fine artists; perhaps the medium

caught Dryer's attention when she was supporting herself as a freelancer making theater sets during the lean years following her graduation from art school. (In the Phillips Collection catalog, Siegel repeats the story, mentioned often in other sources, that Dryer worked as a set designer for the celebrated theater company Mabou Mines. This seems to be an urban legend; she's not credited as a set designer on any of their work. She probably worked much lower down on the theatrical totem pole.) Dryer often used her casein in thin washes, and she never prepared her surfaces with a primer such as gesso, so the grain of the wood remains visible, becoming part of the image, with the applied color acting as a sort of veil.

In other words, the works always call attention to the fact that they never start with a neutral surface like a canvas but from something that was already pictorially active before the artist even touched it—and that sense of touch, of physical contact, is always part of the point: as rarefied and intellectual as Dryer's work can be, it is always anchored in its physicality. And I can't help wondering how much paint she had to use; surely a lot of it must have sunk into the wood itself rather than remaining visible on top. This could almost be an allegory for Dryer's whole art: more had to go into it than you can see on the surface, but you can sense the presence of something held in reserve.

Private Collection
Moira Dryer: The Power of Suggestion, *1991*

But if Dryer's work, as she herself put it, "emphasizes an emotive identity," it wasn't in the blatantly demonstrative manner of much of the fashionable painting of that moment—Julian Schnabel, Anselm Kiefer, Francesco Clemente, and so on. It wasn't even as outgoing as the rambunctious almost-abstraction of Elizabeth Murray, who was one of her teachers at SVA and subsequently hired her as a studio assistant. Murray was a legendary mentor to many young female artists, and commentary on Dryer's work often mentions the elder artist's influence. But Valerie Smith, in her essay for the catalog of the Phillips Collection show, shrewdly points out that there were two dominant poles of influence at the school in those days. Murray was one; the other was Joseph Kosuth, who was not only one of the pioneers

of conceptual art but also its strictest and most demanding inquisitor. In 1969, he had definitively excommunicated painting from the realm of serious art with the declaration that "Being an artist now means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art." Art was a purely cognitive, not an expressive practice, and painting, in Kosuth's eyes, was merely "the vanguard of decoration."

Dryer, you might say, found in Kosuth's dismissal of her chosen medium both a *jeu d'esprit* and a job description. She liked to employ ornamental figures structurally, fancifully re-marking the edges of her paintings, with, for example, the almost folk art-like dabs of red around the perimeter of the larger section of *The Power of Suggestion* (1991), or the scalloped borders she often gave her works. She would sometimes turn a decorative motif into the painting's main subject, like the wreath that substitutes for the head promised by the title of *Portrait #124* (1989). Or she might take utilitarian hardware and use it ornamentally, like the garage door handle affixed almost unnoticeably to the bottom of *Suburbia* (1989). The significant and the seductive alternate playfully in Dryer's work. One of her preferred motifs was that abstractionist warhorse, a pattern of stripes—structural or decorative, take your pick. A favorite trick was to twist those stripes into whorls like those of a fingerprint: a mark of identity, but in this case, no one's in particular.

Collection of Michael Straus
Moira Dryer: Suburbia, *1989*

Kosuth, or the atmosphere he fostered, had sown a seed of doubt about the very activity of painting—a suspicion Dryer could neither confirm nor escape. And so—in contrast to someone like Murray—she practiced a chastened, self-questioning form of painting. Was it too much or next to nothing? Her doubt did not undermine the work but became part of its material, even of its energy, a source of those feelings of loss and desire, or even just those less exalted experiences of "irritation, tension, a little anxiety and conflict" that she once told Schjeldahl paintings needed to allow for. She took to heart the idea that whatever art might be—painting or not—it had to be something more than a venting of emotion. Holding it in was the stronger gesture.

As Dryer wrote in an undated studio note included in a vitrine:

Paintings have a conceptual resemblance

– visible manifestation of the visible

– addressing the psyche

– painting: a realm to know and understand what might otherwise be mysterious

– avoiding heroic & erotic stimulants

– acknowledging a kind of world.—ruin or promise

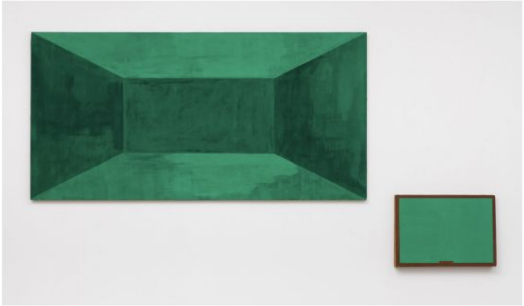
More than conceptual, in fact, Dryer's work was discreetly philosophical. Hovering somewhere in its background is Jacques Derrida's 1978 book *La Vérité en peinture*, which was translated into English in 1987 as *The Truth in Painting*. In it, he explored the idea of the *parergon*, a Greek word meaning "supplement" or "embellishment"—something secondary to a work, *ergon*. Immanuel Kant had cited as an example the frame of a painting. But wait, said Derrida: in mediating between the work and its surrounding, the frame undertakes its own work, and shows that what's supposed to be the work itself is something less fixed, less autonomous than it claims to be.

Well before Derrida's book was translated, Dryer had come to a similar realization, and made it a theme of her work. Many of her paintings are diptychs in which a much smaller panel appears to be a complement to or commentary on a larger one—examples at the Phillips include an untitled green painting from 1985; *The Signature Painting*; and *D.D. (Dangerous Days)* (1990), in which a blank steel plate seems like a placeholder for a text panel yet to be written.

Estate of Moira Dryer/Collection of Michael and Ilene Salcman
Moira Dryer: D.D. (Dangerous Days)*, 1990*

For Dryer, the *parergon* was never an abstract philosophical issue. It had to do with the rather anxious doubt as to whether and how a painting could justify its presence: Could highlighting it by adding another element, a sort of diacritical emphasis, ever do the trick? I suspect there were also deeper questions involved, in which the painting-object tended to work as a stand-in for a human actor: Could one alone ever be in itself a whole? And if not, would a pairing achieve completion, or merely redouble the insufficiency of the one? Dryer never got to arrive at a final answer. Even a much longer lifetime probably wouldn't have sufficed for that. Her art lives because the quandaries that produced and bedeviled it still touch us.

"Moira Dryer: Back in Business," temporarily closed, was on view at the Phillips Collection and will be there through December 13. "Moira Dryer: Yours for the Asking" was at the Greater Reston Arts Center.



Estate of Moira Dryer/Collection of James Keith Brown and Eric Diefenbach
Moira Dryer: Untitled*, 1985*

The New York Review of Books
March 7 2020

Two Coats of Paint

SOLO SHOWS

Moira Dryer: Satisfyingly complete

Contributed by Laurie Fendrich / Moira Dryer (b. 1957; d. 1992) was among the first painters in the 1980s and ‘90s to reject minimalism and conceptualism and open things up for painting after what had seemed, to many critics and theorists, to be its endgame. These artists reintroduced references to life and experience, proudly showed off their painting skills, embraced such openly decorative themes as flowers and patterns, and freely mixed together elements of abstraction and figuration in the same painting. Although Dryer’s otherwise abstract pictures often include decorative motifs and references to other art and ‘real life’’that is, mix together abstraction with references to portraiture and the theater in which she worked before she became a full-time painter’her abstraction feels sincere and fresh rather than borrowed. As the Phillips’s press release puts it, ‘Dryer used abstraction as a language to express her everyday experiences to elicit emotion in her viewers.’

Today, Dryer is an underrecognized artist (why she doesn’t appear on WikiArt is beyond me). If there were justice in the art world (mostly, there isn’t), this concisely curated exhibition at The Phillips Collection, the first survey exhibition of Dryer’s work in two decades, would go a long way toward rectifying this neglect.

With 22 works from 1985 to 1990, the exhibition includes several paintings that protrude just a little from the wall; one has a drawer handle attached to it, another has a little painting hanging next to it, and two have a predella-like shelf under them. One painting has a notch at the bottom end. There's one free-standing sculpture and a couple of wall pieces that might as well be sculptures. A vitrine includes a selection of Dryer's notes, drawings, clippings and photographs drawn from her archive; the exhibition title, which gently nudges us not to dismiss the artist, comes from one of the newspaper clippings on display.

Born in Toronto, Canada, Dryer moved to New York to attend the School of Visual Arts. There she was a student of Elizabeth Murray, who became her mentor and friend. She was her studio assistant and, for a short while, the studio assistant for Julian Schnabel. Supporting herself for many years by working as a prop maker and set designer for the avant-garde theater company **Mabou Mines**, her first one-person commercial gallery exhibition wasn't until 1986, at John Good Gallery in New York. Subsequently, she had two shows at Mary Boone (1990 and 1992), as well as solo exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and, posthumously, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1993). Her work is in the collections of the Guggenheim, MoMA and the Met. While the artist died young (in 1992, at the age of 34, of cancer), her brief career was intense and brilliant. Why, then, isn't she more well-known?

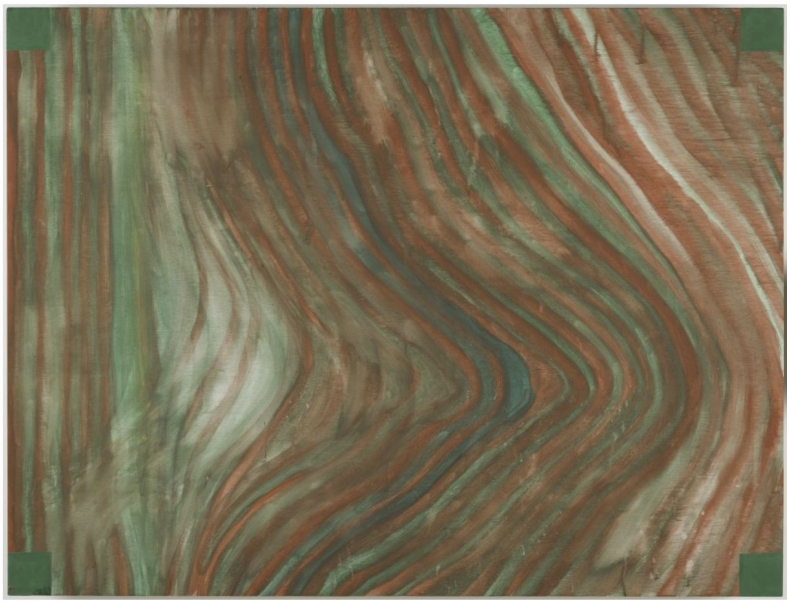
The reason, I suspect, derives less from the brevity of her career (out of sight, out of mind is the operative phrase that comes to mind) than from having a poetic sensibility that reaches outward instead of inward—something she perhaps learned from working in the theater, where art succeeds or fails depending on whether or not it appeals to an audience. Dryer's art is not didactic, polemical or ironic. Nor is it "about self-expression" (although self-expression is obviously there). And though it's easy to miss, given how light and humorous she can be, she does not deconstruct anything—least of all abstract painting. Her sensibility is spare and it doesn't appear that she fusses too much with her pictures, but unlike a lot of art made nowadays that's always at the ready to be revised, Dryer's work seems satisfyingly complete.

Almost all the works in the show are casein on wood. Even in pieces that include lacquer, metal, steel, rubber, or fabric stretched over wood, casein is part of the recipe. The milk-based medium, which has been around for centuries, yields a silky smooth, matte surface that looks a lot like gouache, and is far more difficult to handle than acrylic. Dryer often uses it to make thin, wispy veils of undulating stripes (along with drips), but also to make thicker applications that are smooth and opaque.

In a 1987 *Art in America* interview, Dryer says, "I have utilized the tradition of reductive geometric painting, but I've never been interested in it as a pure form of abstraction. Instead, I thought of it as a language to combine with other painting languages in order to empty my work of some associations built into the whole enterprise." [*Art in America*, December 1987]. She then adds, "" I was able to use minimal means to convey, I hope, real feeling." She doesn't say, "express real feeling""a phrase that would imply she's focused on her own feelings"but rather "convey real feeling," a phrase that focuses on the effect her art has on its audience. Her titles often help in this regard.

Take, for example, *E.K.G.* and *Fingerprint #2647*, two casein on wood paintings from 1988. Like the witty and wonderful duck/rabbit image where the brain switches at will from perceiving a rabbit to perceiving a duck, and then back again, each of these paintings can be perceived either as an abstraction (where deft touch and rich, muted colors in and of themselves draw you in), or alternatively, with the titles in mind, as images of what the titles say they are.

In *Close Up* (1989), the playful back-and-forth between abstraction and figuration is again at work. Two vertical green forms located on either side of a wide horizontal painting form decorative motifs suggesting the curtains on a stage. Once you think of the title, these same green forms take on the look of long, curling hair on either side of the "face" in an up-close portrait.



Moira Dryer, Fingerprint #2647, 1988, casein on wood, 48 x 63 5/8 x 3 inches

In *Portrait #119* (1987), we see vertical stripes alternating between saturated and transparent reds, with four small, slightly darker shapes in the four corners. Given the title, album photo tabs come to mind. That these shapes look decidedly like the heads of cats peering in from above the painting lends the work a charm not usually found in abstract painting.

Not all of Dryer's works are, however, as playful as these. Some are left untitled, and in many instances, the titles bear no clear connection to their paintings. Dryer isn't in the business of dictating interpretations; she says, "the paintings are the performers. It's really up to the audience at that point to say what the specific production is." [PR]

According to the ancient Greek proverb, "Those die young whom the gods love best." Well, maybe. What's true is that memorable artists who die young, as did Dryer, are those who, for whatever reason, felt an urgency to making art during their twenties—a decade many of us squander by meandering from one style to another. It breaks our hearts to think of Seurat, whose drawings are beyond exquisite, dying at 31. There are others who died in their thirties—Raphael, G—ricault, Van Gogh, and Eva Hesse among them. And there's also Dryer, whose husband, Victor Alzamoro, also an artist, died from a congenital heart defect at only 29, nine years before her death and less than two years into their marriage. Dryer's brief life was marked by tragedy, but she managed to make oddly beautiful and trenchant art for which many of us are grateful.

"**Moira Dryer: Back in Business**," The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., Feb. 8-Apr. 19, 2020. Guest curated by Lili Siegel, Executive Director and Curator of the Greater Reston Arts Center (GRACE) in Reston, VA.

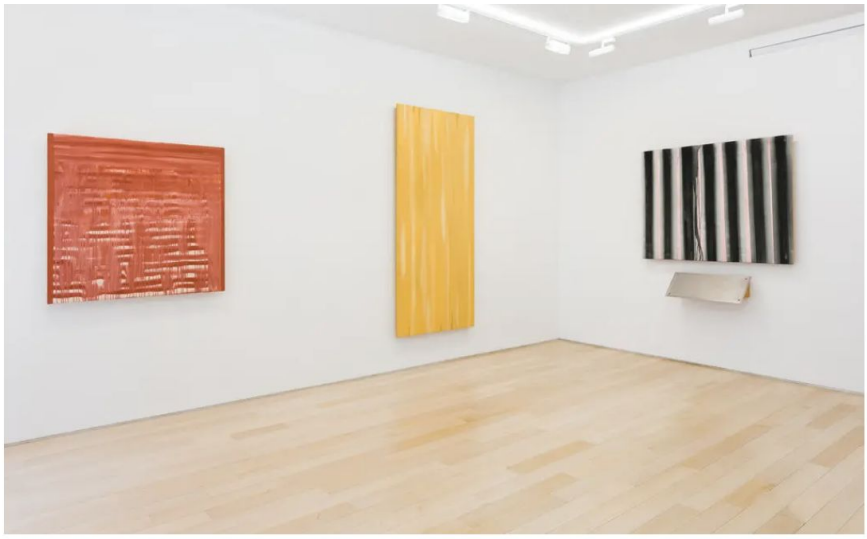
Moira Dryer, Portrait #119, 1987, casein on canvas on wood, artist's frame, 21.25 x 24 inches

The New York Times
April 26 2019

The New York Times

Spring Gallery Guide: Upper East Side

By Jason Farago



An installation view of Moira Dryer's untitled works from the late 1980s at Van Doren Waxter. via Van Doren Waxter, New York; Charles Benton

2. Van Doren Waxter, 'Moira Dryer: Paintings & Works on Paper'

Here is a show of an abstract painter ahead of her time, and whose stylistic promiscuity belied a deep rigor. Moira Dryer, a Canadian artist who came to New York in the 1970s, made her most successful works by applying wavy stripes of black, teal, jonquil, and oxblood red to wood supports; the thin application of pigment, which in places spills top to bottom in trickles or floods, emphasizes the objecthood of the wooden paintings and the artist's careful balancing act between design and chance. This show also includes a few lovely gouaches, alive with the Mediterranean colors of Matisse, that testify to Dryer's artistic omnivorousness and ability to surprise. Her death in 1992, at 34, deprived art history of what was already a superb career, but her example saturates the studios of New York's contemporary painters. **Through May 24 at 23 East 73rd Street, second floor; 212-445-0444, vandorenwaxter.com.**

The New York Times
May 4 2017

The New York Times

Art and Museums in NYC This Week

'FAST FORWARD: PAINTING FROM THE 1980s' at the Whitney Museum of American Art (through May 14). This exhibition takes a first shot at the long-overlooked history of '80s American painting and mostly misses its mark. The heady, poly-style energy of the moment is intermittently present, often in works long in storage by Julian Schnabel, Kathe Burkhart, Moira Dryer and several others. But the show, which is limited to the museum's collection and its smallest floor of galleries, is confused and timid. Still, don't miss it. So far it's all we have. (Roberta Smith)
212-570-3600, whitney.org

The New York Times
February 9 2017

The New York Times

Painting From the 1980s, When Brash Met Flash

By Roberta Smith

In New York at the end of the 1970s, many people thought painting was all washed up. And if not washed up, it had to be abstract — the more austere, unemotional and geometric, the better.

Then came the 1980s and a generation of young painters, like Julian Schnabel, David Salle, Eric Fischl, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, and everything changed. With "Fast Forward: Painting From the 1980s," an irresistible if flawed exhibition, the Whitney Museum tries to sort out how that happened.

The final gallery brings a welcome calmness with work tending toward a more anchored, inward feeling. It is reigned over by Terry Winters's "Good Government" (1984), a large and beautiful painting of molecular forms adrift in a cream-colored space, whose title has suddenly gained new resonance. Mary Heilmann's "Big Bill" (1987), a wide white band angling through a field of blue, gives abstraction an insouciant nonchalance, while the wavy green and red lines of Moira Dryer's "Portrait of a Fingerprint" are hypnotically oceanic. The least-known artist here is Carlos Alfonzo, whose "Told," from 1990, is a big burly form in dark colors. Its power is lessened by the sketchy figure at its center that may represent Mr. Alfonzo's knowledge that he had AIDS. (He would die in 1991.) But the work brims with talent and ambition.

The New York Times
January 14 2016

The New York Times

Galleries to Mount Joint Carolee Schneemann Exhibition

By Robin Pogrebin

Moira Dryer's "Captain Courageous" (1987-88). Moira Dryer, Charles Benton/11R

Honoring a Short Career

As a student at Cooper Union some years ago, Augusto Arbizo saw the work of Moira Dryer at the Mary Boone Gallery and it made a lasting impression.

So Mr. Arbizo, director of the gallery 11R (formerly Eleven Rivington), decided to inaugurate his 195 Chrystie Street location with his second solo exhibition of that artist, who died of cancer in 1992 at the age of 34.

“Her work always stayed with me,” he said. “I had a personal connection to it.”

The show, which runs through Feb. 7, features Ms. Dryer’s paintings and works on paper from throughout her short career, including watercolors, and collages that have not been on view before.

Mr. Arbizo also includes printed matter to provide context for those unfamiliar with Ms. Dryer, who was born in Toronto.

She was a former studio assistant to Elizabeth Murray and Julian Schnabel and also worked as a prop and set maker for New York theaters. Her work is in the permanent collections of the MoMA, the Whitney and the Guggenheim.

“I would go on studio visits and bring up her name,” Mr. Arbizo said. “None of these young artists knew her.”

The exhibition seems well timed, given that Lily Siegel, an independent curator, is working on a comprehensive Dryer exhibition and catalog that has yet to find a home.

“She was so gifted,” Mr. Arbizo said of Ms. Dryer. “There’s no knowing what work she might have made.”

Artforum
April 2014

ARTFORUM

Moira Dryer

Eleven Rivington

By David Frankel

Moira Dryer, *The Signature Painting*, 1987, casein on wood; top: 48 × 63″, bottom: 10 × 60 × 9 1/2″.

When a cherished artist dies young—and Moira Dryer died at the age of thirty-four, in 1992, after a five-year struggle with cancer—it is unsurprising if the writing on her verges on hagiography. Everyone who met Dryer seems to have admired both her painting and the artist herself,

and if there was anyone who didn't, he apparently kept his opinions to himself. This recent exhibition, then—the first New York show of Dryer's art in nearly twenty years—seemed to me something to be approached both eagerly and a little warily. The sadness of her early death could not but add its own color to the work, making the warmth of the response to the show predictable to the point of inevitability; I myself went in wanting to like it, remembering how the work had impressed me in the late 1980s. The desire to be delighted often misleads, but in this case, my only problem with the show was that it was too small.

Dryer was an abstract painter who studied with Elizabeth Murray, then became her studio assistant, and you can see traces of the older artist in her work—perhaps incidentally in her allowance of a sense of humor into her pictures, more crucially in her sense of the painting as a physical object. If Murray made shaped canvases and eventually three-dimensional wall pieces built up out of layers of plywood, Dryer, too, liked carpentry, designing carefully crafted structures on which to paint. She usually worked not on canvas but on wooden panels, which she often fitted out with accoutrements of different kinds: the doorknob-like balls that ornament the sides of *Not titled*, 1989, for example, subtly tucked under the edges of the work's curved wooden frontal plane, or the painted shelf that slants out from the wall in the two-part *Signature Painting*, 1987. Only one piece in this show, *Part II of the Tourist*, 1990, uses cloth as a support, and that cloth isn't canvas but brocade, perhaps salvaged from a curtain or a yard of furniture upholstery, and embroidered with a Rorschach-like floral pattern that Dryer selectively embellished and filled in. And here, too, there is an accessory: a metal handle at top center, winkingly turning the painting into a suitcase—a portmanteau of meaning to be picked up and taken away.

Understanding the painting as a solid, physical thing, Dryer also knew that it was socially conditioned, as the shelf in *The Signature Painting* implies in suggesting the didactic displays occasionally used in museums. The literal signature in this work's main panel—the letters *MD*, which the lines of its Frank Stella–like nest of orthogonal boxes at one point divert themselves to form, throwing in a couple of decorative loops—also overtly inserts the social and the personal into an already somewhat woozy geometric abstraction, wittily sabotaging any purity or idealism it might have. (Surely Dryer noticed that she shared her initials with Marcel Duchamp.) Moves like these undercut the role of the painting as illusion, its camouflage as a transparent window whose substance must recede so as to allow us to see through it. Yet Dryer was interested in illusion, and tipped us to off to that interest through her occasional use of trompe l'oeil —the sleight that may make us imagine, for example, that one of the two panels in *The Mathematicians*, 1990, is painted on softly rippled fabric when, in fact, being painted on wood, it is absolutely flat.

Nor does Dryer's intellectual insubordinacy prepare us for the emotionality of her painting, conveyed mainly through its color and through its sense of embedded history. While *The Mathematicians* shows how polished Dryer's color could be—it actually shines—*Not titled, Captain Courageous* and *The Vanishing Portrait*, both 1990, seem more typical of her, with their mottled, sparse, weepy monochrome surfaces whose color seems on the point of washing away. *The Vanishing Portrait* is particularly poignant, the border marked around its edges seeming to want to frame an image—a face or figure, presumably, given the work's title—that the thin, attenuated paint is unable to sustain.

—David Frankel

The Village Voice
February 19 2014

Eleven Rivington Focuses on the Late Moira Dryer

By Emily Warner *Wednesday, Feb 19 2014*

Courtesy Eleven Rivington, NY/Charles Benton

Captain Courageous, 1990

Moira Dryer's *Not Titled* (1989) is a looming, 7-foot-tall board of plywood that, despite its height, feels intimate, charming, and almost fragile. Curving over at the top, like the tip of a sled, the bark-thin wood is painted blue and dotted with yellow orbs that stream downward into thinning tails, like floaters or bobbing dandelions.

The show of Dryer's (1957–1992) paintings at Eleven Rivington is magnificent — although that's slightly too grand a word for these down-to-earth painting-objects, full of wit and personality. The artist, who died young of cancer, is presented as forging a promising but never completed path in abstract painting: A pendant show, installed in the gallery's second space around the corner, gathers contemporary artists working in ways departing from Dryer's practice.

Not Titled captures the particular tensions that structure Dryer's best works: There is the feeling of expansive, almost landscape-like breadth (are we looking into a sky? A watery reflection?) but

also of a dumber, opaque material (here, the knotty plywood that shows its horizontal grain beneath the casein). Elsewhere, Dryer uses fabric brocade or metal hardware (grommets, handles) to similar effect, punctuating and interrupting the faces and edges of her paintings. These works never take themselves, or the fictive depths they open onto, too seriously.

Dryer's work owes a debt to big-name painters from mid-century and after; to Morris Louis's color fields, to Agnes Martin's rectangular, etherealizing grids (though Dryer builds her foggy expanses up from a far looser grid of washed-in paint), to Frank Stella's shaped canvases. But Dryer's art is both more quotidian and more poised. *The Vanishing Portrait* (1990), a large painting resting on a tree stump and leaning against the wall, is quiet, restful, but never precious. Its surface is like a mirror washed with a sponge and left to dry. Blue swashes, mostly horizontal, overlap one another, while faint drips and splashes stir the surface like passages of local weather. For all its ravishing serenity, it is humorous, characterful: One long, insouciant drip, thin as a flame, extends nearly the entire length of the painting before ending in a perfect teardrop.

Dryer often occasions comparisons with other '80s-era abstract painters who let the world, and its jazzy, incongruous forms, run riot among the formal play of the canvas — artists like Mary Heilmann, Ross Bleckner, Elizabeth Murray. There's also a hint of the Chicago Imagists in her blurry, trompe-l'oeil squiggles and wobbles.

Details

'Moira Dryer Project'
Eleven Rivington11 Rivington Street212-982-1930, elevenrivington.comThrough February 22

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But Dryer's paintings stand out for their economy (spare in means if rich in effect) and their brimming personalities. *The Mathematicians* (1990), two framed plywood pieces, hang beside one another like fraternal twins; the jungle-green *Captain Courageous* (1990) seduces with its giant, raining splotches, while the drawer-like indentation at bottom winks, irreverently. Throughout, Dryer eschews the universal. Her paintings are adamantly particular, evoking familiar and domestic things (valise, vanity table, empty mirror) from the world of people.

Dryer's relative lack of accessibility (she's not on view in many major collections) nearly allows her to steal the show from the younger painters she's paired with. But many here are compelling. Several, like Dryer, experiment with portrait formats or conventions (Mika Tajima, Jackie Saccoccio); Dryer's play with frames (actual wooden ones, as well as the scalloped edges and perimeters she paints on) are echoed in the constructed canvases and door-like frames of Noam Rappaport and Jeffrey Tranchell. Julia Dault's oil on pleather work is a flatter but still sculptural investigation of painting's objectness, while Mary Weatherford comes closest to matching Dryer's flair for color in a painting of layered washes and neon tubes. If Dryer's death robbed the art world of a great talent, her brief career nevertheless helped to reorient the terms of abstraction in ways that are still reverberating today.

New York Magazine
January 30 2014

NEW YORK

Seeing Out Loud: Jerry Saltz on the Brief, Great Career of Moira Dryer

By Jerry Saltz, New York's senior art critic

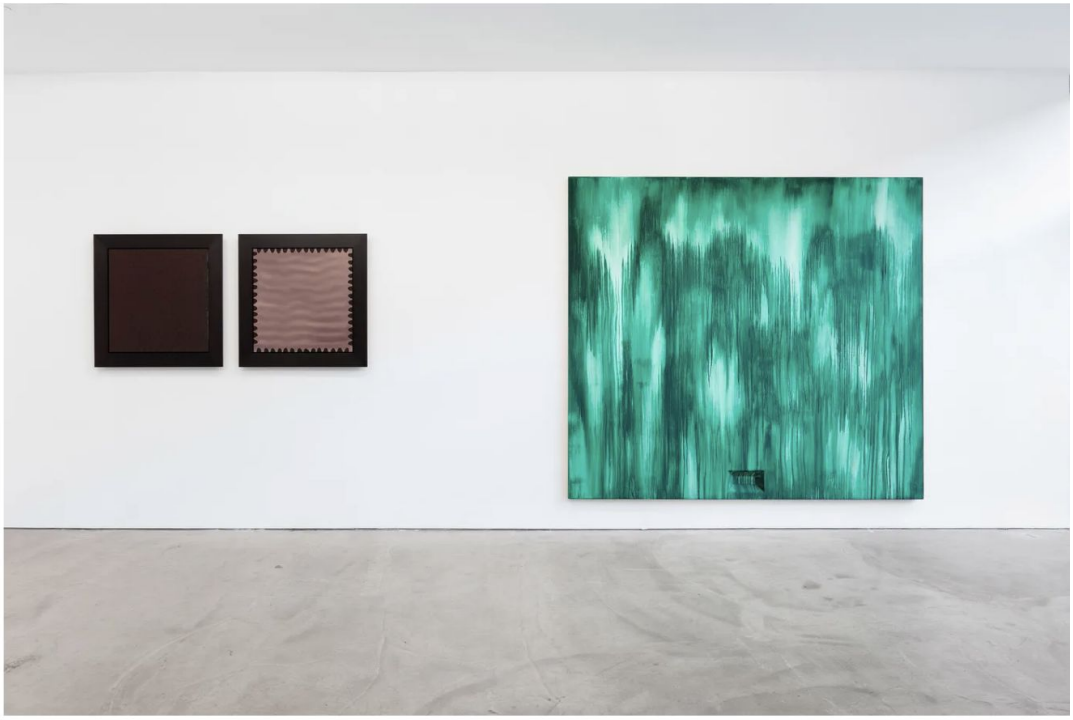

Photo: Charles Benton/Courtesy of Eleven Rivington

As a noxious cloud of anemic abstract painting and sculpture continues to blanket the art world — and junior postmodernists churn out handsome harmless knockoffs, all involving scraping, scribbling, silkscreened images, spray paint, stenciling, staining, and some drips — a small survey of the late Moira Dryer is a quickening pick-me-up. The day Dryer died from cancer in 1992, at just 34, the art world lost a great gritty painter. Starting in 1986, her work startled the art world, then stuck in a similar rut of cool formalist abstraction. This eight-painting show couldn't be better timed.

Dryer used stripes, drips, dots, and squiggles, tropes and motifs that even then were a half-century old. (And are the configurations painters today are still using.) Yet her shaped, strange paintings, sometimes with wavy edges, indentations, bumps, drilled holes, and panels propped against walls or set on logs, have an energy that doesn't just piggyback on older abstraction. Her casein-on-plywood brushwork has a dry, friction-filled fluidity to it. Skewed and skittering marks are set just so, auroras of iridescent color pulsate or go rogue, surfaces feel invented but also recovered from patterns already there. All this gives Dryer's work visual juice — something that makes it feel flaunting, present, and not false.

That flaunting not-falseness is evinced at Eleven Rivington. For viewers unfamiliar with Dryer's art, note the visual and literal physicality of her work – how things are built, made, manipulated, textured. Dryer said she wanted her paintings to be "constantly transmuting into a new identity." That means she didn't see painting as a noun — a thing just to be contemplated — but as a verb, something that does something, that *happens, to us*. She's anti-Platonic this way; nothing cool and conceptual here. Embrace this insatiable satyrlike impishness, and you're halfway there. Her color, light, and touch will take you the rest of the distance.

As seen at Eleven Rivington, Dryer's constructed shapes, pieced-together diptychs, and propped panels are antecedents to much of the better literalized, concrete, physical abstract painting being made well now by artists like Hayley Tompkins, Lisa Beck, Wendy White, Keltie Ferris, Katherine Bernhardt, Ulrike Muller, and Sarah Crowner. All these artists are pushing and expanding the form in ways that almost makes the word *painting* feel inadequate. *The Signature Painting,* from 1987, has a *faux* wood surface of concentric rectangles and the artist's initials rendered in elaborate looping letters. The initials are a place from which to make forays and return, something like text melding into doodle, decoration, nest, and autobiography. Beneath this is an angled shelf painted in the same *faux*-wood pattern. This turns into a perch or lectern that draws on much older latent pictorial energy, transforming into a predella — a painting beneath a painting that comments on both. It's wild to have a quasi-formalist painting get this wonky and break free of formalist discourse. Are you listening, all you locked-in postmodernists?

A casein-on-wood piece from 1989, *Not titled,* is an almost-monochrome stained plywood, like a bed mounted on the wall that curls outward at the top. The whole object becomes like a body, board, or semi-geometric hide — maybe an animal-like piece of geometry. *Captain Courageous,* from 1990 and seen above right, a stained drippy monochrome, has a drawerlike indentation or divot in it. The thing is like one of Donald Judd's "specific objects." Not quite a painting, not a sculpture or piece of furniture, it's something different and specifically itself, something that can be taken in at one glance. This is painting breaking free, maybe even escaping the word.

Dryer's painterly path was cut very short. This makes it all the sweeter that in the gallery's nearby annex at 195 Chrystie Street, you can see work by a number of artists like Mary Weatherford, Mika Tajima, Julia Dault, and Jackie Saccoccio, all of whom are making good on ideas that Dwyer put so masterfully into play twenty years ago. Vita brevis, ars longa, indeed.

"Moira Dryer Project" is at Eleven Rivington through February 22.

The New Yorker
January 17 2014

THE NEW YORKER

"MOIRA DRYER PROJECT"

"She was the Katherine Hepburn of abstract painting . . . beautiful and wind-swept and fierce and intelligent," Ross Bleckner has said of Dryer, whose death, from cancer, in 1992, at the age of thirty-two, cost the world a likely major artist. Her laconically soulful and witty paintings are part color-field abstraction, part conceptual art, and wholly poetic. Eight works by her—too few!—complement a group show, on Chrystie Street, of six appealing young artists (Julia Dault, Noam Rappaport, Jackie Saccoccio, Mika Tajima, Jeffrey Tranchell, and Mary Weatherford) who evince her influence. Call it Dryerism: a one-woman movement with a long fuse, detonating now. Through Feb. 22.*(Jan. 10-Feb. 22.)*

The New York Times
January 16 2014

The New York Times

Moira Dryer Project

By Roberta Smith
Jan. 16, 2014

Eleven Rivington

11 Rivington Street, near Chrystie Street, and 195 Chrystie Street, near Stanton Street, Lower East Side

Through Feb. 22

This excellent exhibition is the first in New York in 20 years for the obdurate yet romantic wood-panel paintings of Moira Dryer (1957-1992). It arrives at a time when younger painters, many of them women, are exploring new ways of getting physical with their medium. Examples in the immediate vicinity of this show include Sarah Crowner's abstractions in painted and sewn canvas, at the Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, and Ulrike Müller's plaquelike works in baked enamel on steel at Callicoon Fine Arts.

Besides making her panels big, Dryer tweaked and supplemented them to stress their physicality. She then contradicted this literalness with thin, sometimes streaky applications of close shades of one color. The results are both bold and restrained, with the paint application seeming more related to early American painted furniture or sign painting than to the frequent machismo of Modernist abstraction.

“Captain Courageous” is a field of sloshed greens with splashes of white — a wall of wild water. Toward the bottom, there is a niche, like a mail slot or a place for a plaque, that makes the painting seem small and intimate.

In “The Signature Painting,” a two-part work, a series of concentric rectangles in shades of terra cotta suggest an old-fashioned rag rug, as do the brushy, almost fringed edges of the color field. Dryer’s initials, large and curlicued, are a quaint, witty touch, and so is the jutting, slanting box just below the painting’s bottom edge. It suggests an old school desk and is painted in more terra-cotta tones, with a freewheeling figure eight, such as a restless student might have made.

Dryer did something different with support, paint and suggestion each time out in these works. The timeliness of her art is underscored by a group show at Eleven Rivington’s second gallery that brings together the contrasting physicalities of paintings and paintinglike works by Mika Tajima, Jeffrey Tranchell, Julia Dault, Noam Rappaport, Mary Weatherford and Jackie Saccoccio, which are variously pertinent.

The New York Times
November 11 2005

The New York Times

Agitprop to Arcadian: Gently Turning a Kaleidoscope of Visions

The Painted World
Through Jan. 30

Three painters from the past preside over this appealing but ultimately anodyne sampler of contemporary abstraction: Myron Stout, Paul Feeley and Moira Dryer. Their inclusion by the exhibition's curator, Bob Nickas, encourages a view of abstraction as an expression of individual sensibility rather than an attempt to meet impersonal standards of formal excellence or art-historical significance.

Three salient directions emerge among the 20 other artists. There are the materialists, like Olivier Mosset and Alan Uglow, who emphasize the painting's physical structure; there are postmodernists like Mary Heilmann, Philip Taaffe and Mark Grotjahn, who playfully update Modernist conventions like Cubism, the monochrome, stripe painting and Op Art; and there are transcendentalists, who either create quasi-mystical emblematic compositions - Chris Martin and Chuck Webster - or dissolve the surface of the canvas into visionary spaces - Bill Komoski and John Tremblay. (Paintings by Wayne Gonzales and Cannon Hudson veer more toward Pop and Expressionist representation, and belong in a different show.) KEN JOHNSON

The New York Times
January 25 2002

The New York Times

ART GUIDE

JUDIE BAMBER, DAVID DEUTSCH, MOIRA DRYER, MARIELE NEUDECKER, Gorney Bravin and Lee, 534 West 26th Street, (212) 352-8372 (through Feb. 2). Ms. Bamber's watercolor cycle of becalmed seascapes, Mr. Deutsch's big painting of scores of tiny portraits filling a great dome and Ms. Dryer's washy and sumptuous abstractions are all good. But Ms. Neudecker's amazing miniature underwater mountainscape in a glass tank steals this show (Johnson).

Artforum
March 2001

ARTFORUM

Moira Dryer

Art Gallery of York University (AGYU)

By Barry Schwabsky

IN ONE OF HER FEW PUBLISHED STATEMENTS, reprinted in the catalogue accompanying this survey of her work from the last three years of her life, Moira Dryer (1957-92) claimed "an emotive identity" for her work. This may seem surprising in the face of her cool, witty, and often whimsical paintings, but it shouldn't. Dryer was just as distant from the theory-besotted neo-geo that emerged around the same time as her own work as she was from the chest-thumping demonstrativeness of the neoexpressionism that preceded it. Besides, "emotive" is different from "emotional"; it evokes the actor's task. And good actors know how to project a feeling by playing against its grain: to portray someone in love, for instance, by performing the effort not to betray one's emotion.

Dryer herself named the feelings animating her work as loss and desire. Both are manifest in a painting like *Demon Pleasure*, 1989, whose wavy horizontal lines, primarily green and white but with varied, mostly pinkish undertones, were apparently wiped down while the paint was drying, so that the whole looks blurred, as if seen through a misty pane of glass—except that there are a few streaks that were left alone, and there the wavy pattern appears with crystal clarity. Curiously, in these gaps the undulations seem to be at a definite distance from the painting's surface; it is the predominant blur that seems to define the picture plane, which is in turn surmounted by two cambered passages of hot pink at the top and bottom of the rectangle as well as a single band of the same color that meanders in from the top right and heads toward the center. There is an

aching desire at the heart of this painting—the desire to touch the simple clarity that hovers, lost yet not entirely absent, somewhere off in the distance.

During the period covered by this show (which premiered at the Forum for Contemporary Art in Saint Louis but was organized by the Art Gallery of York University and constitutes the artist's first significant exposure in her hometown), Dryer's work became less overtly playful. At the time I wondered if her illness was sapping her energy. Now I see it differently: as though she were pressing forward to give form to the "midcareer" she was afraid she'd never have. In some of the earlier paintings here, like *Part II of the Tourist*, 1990, or the extraordinary *My Eyes*, 1989, the supplementary hardware (mostly handles) that had always been part of Dryer's vocabulary was still there to anchor the object in real space. By 1991, when she was making paintings of intransigent yet out-of-focus vertical stripes, such as *Having a Hate Wave* and *Front Line*, the hardware (in these works, grommets and an iron shoe-shine footrest, respectively) seems to do the opposite—the objects function like *repoussoirs* that put the paintings at a distance. That they never quite stay there is their proof of life.

The New York Times
March 24 2000

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW; 'Collected (in Mind): Bob Nickas'

Sandra Gering

476 Broome Street, SoHo

Through April 8

What do the Outsider genius Henry Darger and the beautiful transvestite Candy Darling have in common? Or the American Modernist Arthur Dove and Moira Dryer, who breathed new life into abstract painting in the late 1980's and early 90's? All their names begin with D.

As Bob Nickas, the curator of this entertaining 15-artist show, explains in a written statement, rather than force selected artworks to fit some predetermined theme, why not take a section -- the D section, say -- from his alphabetical list of favorite artists and let it speak for itself? The strategy may seem flip, but its eclectic, high-low inclusiveness runs pretty close to the norm of today's semihip taste.

The show can be enjoyed case by case. Ms. Dryer's painting of blurry red stripes on a jagged-edged panel and Mr. Darger's vision of naked girls threatened by black cobras in an idyllic forest would be beautiful in any context. It is interesting to bounce from one radically different thing to another: from a vivid photograph of children in the grass by Philip-Lorca Di Corcia to a purple ottoman by Nick Dine to a suspended crownlike form of tinfoil by Lucky De Bellevue to a small painting of a bear by Verne Dawson.

The greatest leap may be from the early 20th-century photographer F. Holland Day's hyperromantic staged photograph of St. Sebastian to Sam Durant's slackerish, upside-down penciled copy of the song list from a Rolling Stones album -- from saint, you might say, to sinners. KEN JOHNSON

The New York Times
January 15 1999

The New York Times

ART GUIDE

MOIRA DRYER/ SHIRLEY WIITASALO, Greene Naftali, 526 West 26th Street, (212) 463-7770 (through Jan. 23). Dryer was just 34 when she died in 1992, but she had established herself as one of the most interesting abstract painters of her generation. It's good to revisit the several works here, which display her antic yet refined formal sensibility and her witty way with the semiotics of painting. Ms. Wiitasalo, a Canadian, makes wan, Alex Katzesque paintings of unhealthy-looking trees, flowers and corporate architecture (Johnson).

The New York Times
May 13 1994

The New York Times

Art in Review

'Greatest Hits' Mary Heilmann Pat Hearn Gallery 39 Wooster Street SoHo Through May 21

The title of this little survey of Mary Heilmann's work is nicely attuned to her wry balance of modernist geometric abstraction and pop content. She has handled the combination so deftly for so long that her paintings seem to float above fashion. They look as good right now as they did in the early 1970's, the starting point for this show.

Even the early pieces show an interestingly combative approach toward painting itself, an equivalent perhaps of the rebellion-through-relaxation stance of 1950's heroes like James Dean. (Ms. Heilmann has cited the pop culture of California when she was a teen-ager in the 50's as important to her images.) "Nine by Nine" (1972) translates the portentous Minimalist grid into a finger-painting exercise, while the towering panels of the diptych titled "Chinatown" (1976), painted a lacquer-red that suggests firecracker wrappers and nail polish, has the loose gestural elegance that underlines much of her work.

Ms. Heilmann's palette of pink and black in the early 80's was in line with the 50's retro-chic of punk, but her most complex work came a bit later, when she started using layers of opaque white paint to frame off areas of underlying color. The process, in which covering up and revealing are the same thing, clearly demonstrate how this artist's upfront formal means are the basis of her expressive ends.

Those ends have become increasingly personal over time (one notes Ms. Heilmann's influence on so deeply personal an artist as Moira Dryer), and the most recent work is unusually tense and worked-out, as if she were trying to push it ahead to places still unknown. Yet even here she preserves the amused nonchalance of beginner's luck: the amateur's swing that just happens to hit a home run, the glazed pot in which the patterns fall just right. It is this effort at effortlessness that has made her one of the most engaging abstract painters of her generation. HOLLAND COTTER

Artforum
April 1994

ARTFORUM

Moira Dryer

Jay Gorney Modern Art

By Barry Schwabsky

These first two posthumous shows reveal that Moira Dryer was an artist who combined pragmatic experimentalism with a deep concentration of feeling. Dryer promised to be a central painter of her generation thanks to her completely persuasive (because deeply intuitive) synthesis of two apparently incompatible strains of post–Abstract Expressionism: on the one hand, the literalism of Robert Ryman's "investment" of the entirety of the painting-object (edges, hardware, and so on, along with the painted surface), and on the other, the allusive, quasi-literary nature of Ross Bleckner's historicism. To do so, of course, she had to jettison central aspects of those artists' works as well: the "minimalism" of Ryman, his fundamentally dandyish preference for the least-marked means to achieve a particular effect, or Bleckner's sanction of conventional representation with its concomitant potential for flat-out sentiment. She more than made up for this by what she added of her own: an eccentric theatricality, a whimsical fantastication of the quotidian, a piercing coloristic gravity.

Though she was an unemphatically masterful painter, Dryer's work began well before the application of paint. Within the support itself, devices like holes (*Random Fire*, 1991), grommets (*The Wall of Fear*, 1990–91), and scalloped edges (*Untitled*, 1992) affirm the object by attacking it. They irritate certain lovers of abstract painting the way my teenage niece's nose ring irritates her grandmother: "Why must you do that to such a pretty face?" The fact is that Dryer could never reconcile

herself to the criteria of wholeness and unity, so dear to formalist esthetics, that would cast an aura of false naturalness around the formal radiance she so resolutely pursued. For her, it seems, the ostension of artifice was the true hinge between beauty and truth—or at least between beauty and wit.

Occasionally that wit could become scathing, as in *Random Fire*, a work produced during the Gulf War. It's a kind of diptych whose larger half is a white-and-green field full of glary hotspots pierced by a multitude of bullet-sized holes. To the left of this, displayed on a music stand, lies the "score" for this performance, a green-and-white target motif. The contempt for violence expressed here takes on an even sadder undertone if you let the music stand remind you of how central metaphors of music, of speech, of sound always were to her work (a concern evident in titles like *Short Story*, 1987; *NBC Nightly News*, 1987, *Country and Western*, 1991). All of Dryer's best paintings possess a resonance, a vibratory amplification of some small motif, some private awareness of her own, that is projected and then internalized by the whole body, as sound more easily than sight can be.

Two days after Dryer died I came across her card in my Rolodex. I had to —even while telling myself it was crazy—call her number one more time. Strangely, the answering machine in her studio was still working. I heard her voice one last time. But it's the richly-timbred, strangely cool-warm voice of her paintings that's still with me.

The New York Times
October 15 1993

The New York Times

Art in Review

Moira Dryer Mary Boone Gallery 417 Broadway (near Spring Street) SoHo Through Feb. 29

By Roberta Smith

'Projects 42' 'Moira Dryer' Museum of Modern Art 11 West 53d Street Manhattan Through Nov. 16

This poignant exhibition surveys the brief career of Moira Dryer, a talented painter adept at deploying waves of saturated color across wood panels, who died last year at 34. It includes little-known early works that suggest that the artist's interest in adding objects to her panels was constant, not an aberration of her last two exhibitions (at the Mary Boone Gallery in SoHo). It also makes one appreciate more fully Ms. Dryer's sense of humor and her penchant for abstract narrative.

"Short Story" of 1986, for example, consists of a truncated circle of weathered wood attached, almost like a rear view mirror, to a larger complete circle painted bright green, the contrast creating a possible before and after, a sense of fulfillment and happy ending. Especially strong is "Perpetual Painting," in which a field of gently undulating red and orange seems set in motion by two wheels connected by a fan belt. "NBC Nightly News" is supported by a small piece of tree trunk, its fathomless brushy grays skeptically simulating a big television screen communicating nothing but static.

Ms. Dryer was attuned to abstract painting's beauty but also to its ability to be stretched by playful hints of the real world. It's a pity she didn't have more time to test that elasticity. ROBERTA SMITH

The New York Times
May 21 1992

The New York Times

Moira Dryer, 34, An Abstract Artist; Painted on Wood

By Roberta Smith

Moira Dryer, an abstract artist known for working in glowing colors on sheets of plywood, died yesterday at her home in Manhattan. She was 34 years old.

She died of cancer, said James McKinley, a friend.

Ms. Dryer's distinctive painting method involved applying diaphanous washes of either casein or acrylic paint to big squares of wood, creating veiled, undulating patterns that could suggest an open landscape, the sea or a soft freehand tapestry. This process was inspired by the thin paint surfaces of the Italian Renaissance frescoes she saw on a trip to Florence in 1978. But her paintings rested firmly within the tradition of American postwar abstraction and related in particular to the work of Milton Avery, Morris Louis and the young Frank Stella.

Ms. Dryer was born in Toronto, a daughter of Pegeen Synge, an architect, and Douglas Dryer, a professor of philosophy at the University of Toronto. She attended Sir George Williams University in Montreal and then transferred to the School of Visual Arts in New York City. There she studied with the painter Elizabeth Murray and graduated with honors in 1981. In January 1982 she married Victor Alzamora, a fellow student at the School of Visual Arts, who died in June 1983.

Since the early 1980's, Ms. Dryer's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions in museums and galleries around the country. Her first solo exhibition was held in 1986 at the John Good Gallery in Manhattan, and there were subsequent solo shows at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, the Fred Hoffman Gallery in Santa Monica, Calif., and the Mario Diacono Gallery in Boston.

The New York Times
February 14 1992

The New York Times

Art in Review

Moira Dryer Mary Boone Gallery 417 Broadway (near Spring Street) SoHo Through Feb. 29

By Roberta Smith

Moira Dryer's big new paintings on wood are of two types, premeditated or spontaneous, and neither seems quite self-sufficient. In works like "Revenge" and "Captain Courageous," Ms. Dryer's diaphanous veils and blots of color seem overly programmed. Furthermore, their surfaces are punctuated with arbitrary physical details -- a pair of violin sound holes in the first case, four rubber grommets in the second -- that announce with Magrittean overtones "this is not a painting."

When such jokes give way to more expansive dabs and pours, things improve. In "Mr. Mirage," "Deep Sleep" and "More Random Fire," soft, feathery dots of black or red are interrupted by thin washes of color or bordered by rows of tight scallops or fingerprints. The artist's ability to coax elegant effects from the slimmest means is far more apparent.These works still have a problem of being not quite paintings; they recall gorgeous handpainted silk scarves or hand-decorated 19th-century furniture. But by evoking such lowly painting techniques, outside traditional painting, they also indicate possibilities that may ultimately help Ms. Dryer strengthen her art.

Artforum
April 1994

ARTFORUM

Moira Dryer

Mary Boone Gallery | Chelsea

By David Rimanelli

Moira Dryer's fuzzy abstract paintings look like wallpaper or bedraggled scaps of moiré or tie-dyed fabric. In spite of this seeming inconsequence, the work proceeds, albeit tenuously, from a metaphor of abstraction as consciousness—a metaphor that has persisted with intermittent strength since the advent of Abstract Expressionism. Dryer shirks the often embarrassing rhetoric of torment that characterizes much of that movement's constitutive discourse, but she retains a vague emotivity as the subdued referential content of her art. An absence of readily discernible subject matter points towards an interiorized psychological experience as abstraction's meaning, although in Dryer's work this experience is potentially vitiated by the nagging persistence of ornamental excrescences. As Dryer explicitly disavows purist or "religious" abstraction, the nature of the work's interiority becomes its interpretive crux.

Dryer's intimist effects depend on an interplay of preconceived design and randomness. The paintings often seem to be in a state of barely suspended dissolution. In both *Untitled*, 1988, and *Picture Perfect II*, 1989, the artist exploits contrasts between the implied stability of a latticelike structure of horizontal stripes, and the gradual deliquescence of accidental vertical rivulets of paint seeping downward. Schematic design falters, losing itself in an amorphous fluidity; form and being give way to formlessness and nonbeing. Purely decorative efflorescences, such as the latter work's scalloped border, further foreground a putatively "feminine" quality as the painting's primary content.

Inevitably, and regardless of the potentially invidious implications, Dryer's work is about femininity, as the language brought to bear upon it is inextricably allied to conventional sexual stereotypes. Ideas of the masculine and the feminine precondition almost all the language used to talk about art. Dryer's paintings are pretty, but their implied, possibly inadvertent sexual dynamic remains the most compelling thing about them. Her work takes its place with respect to the "heroic," absurdly phallicized past of Abstract Expressionism. This sexual pantomime continues to inflect Dryer's position in regard to her contemporaries. Her work is closest, both formally and thematically, to that of Sherrie Levine and Philip Taaffe, although her apparent earnestness precludes the mordant disequilibrium of the former and the dandified perversity of the latter. Like the best recent abstract painting, it is interesting not for formal innovation or virtuosity, but rather for the way in which it forces abstraction's repressed or latent psychosexual involutions to register as manifest content.

—David Rimanelli

The New York Times
January 19 1990

The New York Times

Review/Art; Soviet Artist as a Storyteller Of Not-Always-Pretty Tales

Moira Dryer

Mary Boone Gallery

By Michael Kimmelman

Modesty may be Moira Dryer's principal virtue. Her abstractions on wood consist of rows of thinly painted horizontal or vertical lines, never completely straight, but rendered casually in two or three colors. Works by Agnes Martin and Morris Louis come to mind. Sometimes Ms. Dryer allows her paint to drip, and often the grain of the wood shows through, creating a kind of counter rhythm to the stripes.

That's pretty much it, although in ''Headline'' Ms. Dryer adds a few arabesques, and with ''Old Vanity'' she places below the work a steel plate that seems to refer to the explanatory labels in a museum, as if the artist wanted to make the contrast between her self-effacing paintings and the sort of object that becomes institutionalized all the more obvious. Quietude has its certain appeal, but too often here the effect is closer to preciousness.

Artforum
September 1988

ARTFORUM

Moira Dryer

John Good Gallery

By Matthew A. Weinstein

Because of a certain duality of intent, Moira Dryer's work has always exhibited conceptual fluctuations. She is too intent on playing with format to be a "painter's painter," but at the same time she is intimately connected to the emotive and esthetic concerns of Modernist abstraction. Her practice alternates between a timely critique of the medium and a will to render a pictorial space devoid of reference. Several of her paintings encompass this duality in the most thorough manifestation of her own sensibility to date.

Several of the paintings in this show—such as *Fingerprint #2647*, *Portrait of a Fingerprint*, *E.K.G.*, and *Pink*, all 1988—feature a thin panel of wood mounted a few inches in front of the wall. This levitation of the picture plane causes Dryer's washy images to float in front of a border of cast shadow. Pushing the flat surface out in this way, Dryer lends her work a sculptural physicality and a theatricality which act as counterpoints to her delicate surfaces. Her imagery is composed primarily of stripes and borders. Unlike Sherrie Levine, who appropriates the stripe directly, Dryer bends it into formations which she calls fingerprints, but which also remind one of topographically mapped landscapes. She often immerses her stripes in a visual haze, as in *Parenthesis* and *The Rumor*, both 1988, lending them a romantic quality. Dryer uses borders as incessantly as she uses stripes, putting all of her imagery, as it were, in parentheses. Using crisp lines and flat colors in her two- or four-sided borders, she makes her striped "content" hover like trapped mist.

In these paintings, Dryer's wit merges gracefully with her casein washes, which seem to be borne along by the pattern of the wood grain.The tone of these paintings is one of bemused emotionality, as if Dryer were partially distant from her own practice and partially immersed in it. *The Perpetual Painting*, 1988, seemed the least successful piece in the show. In it, a red oscillating shape stretches across the surface, bordered on top and bottom by orange. Two wheels, connected by a fan belt, are attached to the far-left-hand side of the painting, as if they were endlessly generating the image. Dryer's paintings in this vein—those incorporating assemblage—barely explore their central conceit, while betraying an essentially painterly approach.

Dryer's partially appropriated stripes, her interest in where the image ends and the edge begins, her constant framing and quoting of her own practice as it develops, and her mixture of a three-dimensional format with flat Modernist patterns never overshadow her talent for and interest in developing her own abstract vocabulary.

—Matthew A. Weinstein

The New York Times
April 29 1988

The New York Times

Review/Art; George Ault's Sad, Everyday Beauty in Stillness

Moira Dryer John Good Gallery 39 Great Jones Street

By Roberta Smith

This is the most impressive work that Moira Dryer, a young abstract painter, has shown, although it suffers from a kind of esthetic amnesia that is all too common these days. Ms. Dryer paints in thin layers of casein, usually two or three colors to a work, on sheets of plywood. The motif that suits her best is an orchestration of wavering, bleeding stripes that warps surface and space. As demonstrated by the two strongest paintings here - which both alternately blend and contrast stripes of red and green - this device can be as successful on the vertical as on the horizontal.

Looking at these paintings and at others, one is reminded of the early work of Frank Stella, Agnes Martin, Harriet Korman and Mary Heilmann, to name but a few. In other words, Ms. Dryer's point of departure is not exactly new, but it has often served its travelers well.

Journal of Contemporary Art
1988

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART

moira dryer

New York City, 1988

Klaus Ottmann: What are you working on right now?

Moira Dryer: Well, I'm still occupied with what I was working on before. I tend to do a lot of things concurrently, a lot of different bodies of work. What I'm doing now is a little hard to talk about because it's unfinished work, but it's no quantum leap from what I was doing earlier. I'm carrying on a series of things that I pursued before, and I'm only now starting to recognize that they fall into a pattern. I like to make a lot of different work at the same time and I don't really premeditate the format. I'm doing more diptychs with signature boxes and more fingerprint paintings, which are constantly transmuting into a new identity. They started out as something quite specific, the use of the finger print; it was a joke on artistic identity and authorship, and I didn't think I was going to take it this far. It was also a way of being able to make a lot of different kinds of paintings. It was an image I could group the work around. It developed away from that really, on its own will. It's been exciting.

A lot of new information has come in the work that I didn't anticipate, of a personal, emotional nature. I'm doing those and I'm doing free-standing sculptures. I don't see any big change. Some things have gotten a little larger; certain things have shifted. I've started a new body of work, "props," more work with the signature boxes. I recognize them now more as props to the paintings and how they make the whole piece a prop. They give it a quality, not of artificiality but of a theatrical situation. I'm beginning to see those paintings as performers. It is a theater, and the pieces are performing.

I see them as animated entities, alive and performing.

Ottmann: You mentioned the theatrical quality of your work in your statement in Art in America recently. Is that related to your interest in sculpture?

Dryer: Oh definitely, very much so. I liked Rebecca Horn's show at Marian Goodman, those circus metaphors. I never thought of the circus in relation to my own work, but I see an exhibition as a stage and my pieces are performing together, depending on the kind of

installation. That's something I'm developing, definitely with the sculptures, particularly the freestanding ones. They are becoming, just by virtue of their physicality, figurative. It's almost a criteria for me to feel that a painting is somehow alive and animate. I don't know how else to describe that. Even in the case of a flat, straightforward painting, for it to feel finished, to be successful, I have to feel that it's alive. If it doesn't feel alive, then I know it's not working, and I need to work on it some more.

Ottmann: So if the paintings are the props, what's the play?

Dryer: The play is put on by the paintings. The paintings are the performers. It's really up to the audience at that point to say what the specific production is. The pieces evolve from a very personal, emotional point, but then they become entities in themselves. I give them life and then they become their own. Once an installation is together, then the contrast of one piece to another brings in another element. I don't like to control that too much. I find it exciting how that evolves.

Ottmann: Can you talk more about your idea of the theater?

Dryer: When I say theatrical or theater, I'm not necessarily referring to classical theater. I'm referring to an activated kind of viewing space. A painting that is just on the wall has one relationship to someone who looks at it. A painting that becomes more sculptural enters into its own physical arena. It establishes an arena. It draws the viewer into a more intimate relationship. I see the pieces performing, and that's what I mean by theatrical.

I used to work in the theater, on props and sets, and I was always very transfixed by the play before the actors came on or after they left the stage. That was my job and that was what I was focused on. The lighting would be there, and the tension and the audience would be there, but not the actors. Those props had an incredibly provocative effect. I've been recalling and using that lately. So the pieces are the performers themselves, and that's what I mean about them being animated. I see them as alive. I see them as walking away from the wall. It's a feeling I have that the work is active, active in our own world, not separate — that it has a sort of living quality of its own. I feel as if they have a figurative scale, a figurative quality. In some cases, it's less obvious, but there's a fake quality to it, and that's also why I use the word "prop." The box underneath, the signature or title box, evolved from looking at a lot of art in museums, where there's an explanation of the piece underneath or next to it.

Ottmann: When you hang an exhibition, are you consciously thinking about that idea of it being a theatrical performance?

Dryer: Oh definitely. Even if they're paintings that don't have boxes. I see them very much as characters. I make the choice of how the work goes up, and that's definitely a part of the work, that certain pieces be placed next to others. There's resonance, one piece challenges another. It doesn't reaffirm the other piece. It has more of an anxious kind of relationship. It's quite charged.

Ottmann: Is it a comedy or a tragedy?

Dryer: It's both. My paintings are about a lot of different emotions. They're as much about joy as they are about grief. Those are both combined. It's the electricity from experiencing one and experiencing the other that makes them become stronger, just through the contrast.

Ottmann: What happens to the pieces when they're hung by themselves? Are they better as a group?

Dryer: I don't think they're necessarily better. They can stand on their own. It will be a different reading of the work but it won't be a lesser reading of the work, or I would sell my work in groups. In the final analysis, the final moment, they're individual pieces. A show, an installation, is a forum where I have an opportunity to present my work, and that's the part that I get involved with. After the show is over, the pieces go off and live with another group of work, and the same thing will happen in a different way. I can't anticipate what painting might go next to it. I hear of a painting that went into somebody's home and it's next to such and such, and people would comment about those connections.

Ottmann: The theater continues.

Dryer: Yes. It goes on, on its own. That's something I've not been aware of. But now that I've started to do more shows, patterns are starting to reveal themselves.

Ottmann: Then you would not be interested in working in the theater, doing stage design, for instance?

Dryer: No. I'm taking the metaphor of theater and using it for my own ends, in gallery situations. You have to challenge people when you do a show. There are so many shows people see. I want it to be exciting.

Ottmann: Do you do any works on paper?

Dryer: I do, but I don't show them. I do small gouaches. I have always done that, but I hide them. And I don't do them all the time. I tend to do them when I'm away from New York.

Ottmann: Do you feel they're private?

Dryer: Yes, but eventually I may show them. At some time I'll get them all out. I showed some once a long time ago, but not lately. I'd like to, in the future.

Ottmann: Which artists do you feel closest to and which have had the greatest impact on your work?

Dryer: I feel very close to what Elizabeth Murray does. I also feel very close to what Ross Bleckner does.

I love a lot of the Spanish painters. I adore Goya and Velazquez. I have incredible respect for them. I like a lot of fourteenth-century painting, pre- or very early Renaissance. I adore that work. It's incredibly seductive. I find it very moving — you sort of feel genuine religious feeling in them. I travelled to that part of Italy about six years ago. I was just so astonished. I'd like to go back and see it again. It's fantastic to see the work and where these people lived, like Piero della Francesco doing a fresco for his mother on her graveside, and the piece stays there, in some little barn. So part of liking that work is the work itself, and part is seeing it remain in the world that it evolved out of. I have great admiration for those painters.

I think Robert Smithson is a great artist. I find him incredibly exciting still. He seems so ahead of his time. And I like the fact that he wrote so well and that the writing was so creative. He's very special. Then there's René Magritte, and Paul Klee. I really like a lot of Klee's work, though I've sort of grown out of it. Let's see, a lot of Italian painters, Giotto, Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesco.

Ottmann: When you do sculptural works, do you look specifically for these mechanical parts, or do you collect a lot of things in advance and then think about what to do with them?

Dryer: I do both. Sometimes I have a need for something really specific, and sometimes I will find an object that interests me and a work will come out of it. I like to have a bunch of things around, just like I have paint around. The objects are usually quite specific. They come from somewhere specific, from somebody specific, and that becomes part of the piece. I don't just collect stuff. I find something or something falls into my hands from someone and a lot of who that person is will enter in that piece.

I'm really interested in wheels, in old industrial objects that are dysfunctional. I find that very provocative.

Ottmann: Is that a form of nostalgia?

Dryer: No, it's not nostalgia. They're objects that don't operate, like a lamp that doesn't go on or a wheel that doesn't work. It's not about the past or nostalgia because the objects are placed in a context, and I paint and change them. I don't want them to look old. I want them to be part of the painting. I want the pieces to look modern, to use such a loaded word, meaning alive, of the moment. I usually do quite a bit to transform them. The fact that they have their own personal history interests me, but that's not nostalgia. I feel like I'm taking an old thing and bringing it back to life. I'm reassessing it. I take the pieces and I reassemble them.

When I was building props I had to do go around and find things and transform them into a new object. That got me into the oddest places, meeting the strangest people looking for things. I enjoyed that. And now I do it for myself, which is more fun because the objects aren't functioning for somebody's play, they're functioning for my own production.