

MOIRA DRYER PROJECT  
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By David Rhodes

The abstract paintings of Moira Dryer (1957 – 1992) are due for critical reevaluation. Hopefully the two-part exhibition at Eleven Rivington, *Moira Dryer Project*, was just a beginning. It was split between a solo exhibition that included eight works by Dryer and a group exhibition of contemporary practitioners (at 195 Chrystie) whose efforts at abstraction share something in common with Dryer's practice.



Moira Dryer: Photo: Jeannette Montgomery Barron

In Dryer's work there is a desire to bring illusion and reality together in a vernacular abstract painting. The artists in the group show, which includes Jeffrey Trancell, Jackie Saccoccio, Mary Weatherford, Noam Rappaport, and Mika Tajim, continue in the direction of Dryer's work. Take Mary Weatherford's "Mermaid Avenue" (2013), in which two vertical neon tubes that exist as real objects and sources of color and light are attached onto the surface of a paint stained canvas. Jeffrey Trancell's "Textures and Patterns" (2014), in using, for example, roofing tar and cane webbing, presents quotidian elements to formal ends.

Dryer's eight paintings appear as forerunners or progenitors in this context. The paintings on view incorporate indentations, a shelf like element, handles, and wooden balls. There is clearly something deliberately prop-like about her work. Consider "The Vanishing Portrait" (1990), which at 78 × 86 inches is a sensuous

field of faded blue, rigorously painted in horizontal sweeps like the action of a car's window wiper. It is so matter of fact and yet full on with mystery and association. The ephemeral white/pale blue recalls snow or cloud or lime washed walls—for it to sit squarely on a section of log, or is it a trimmed tree stump, not only produces a conjunction of beautiful color, perfectly pitched, but sends us directly to memories of forest and sky—so



Moira Dryer, "The Vanishing Portrait," 1990. Acrylic on wood, tree stump. Photo: Charles Benton. Courtesy Eleven Rivington, New York.

intensely as to leave us sprawling. The outer few inches of the wooden panel act as a frame, emphasizing transparency as the color overlaps, like seeing through to a painting's stretcher bars. The darker blue line that descends like a drip goes against the dynamic of the horizontal energy and further animates it through contrast, looking up and down at it the striations and modulations of tone are exquisite, as delicate and strong as a Schubert sonata.

Other paintings play on perception. "Captain Courageous" (1990), again acrylic on wooden panel, is the same size as "Vanishing Portrait" and hangs on the wall at approximately the same height. Here, the veiled streaking of greens has a nuanced darkness and gothic menace that dissipates and billows and then gets grounded by the narrow slot of an indented rectangle near the lower edge of the painting. It keeps us attentive whilst not letting us see this as a formal exercise, but rather an event.

All Dryer's work succeeds in accentuating the decorative whilst remaining sculptural, ambiguous, and pleasurable. In this regard "The Signature Painting" (1987), stands out. It is an untraditional diptych. Underneath a two-tone wood panel that features a warped and repeated line continuing concentrically to its

center, there is another ledge-like panel tilting down and toward us. The line and color motif unites the two panels. Her initials "MD" appear in the upper panel, while the lower extends the arabesque and exuberant red-brown line. Here Dryer achieves a playful cartoon like register that is both restrained and out of kilter.



Moira Dryer: Moira Dryer, "The Vanishing Portrait," 1990. Acrylic on wood, tree stump. Photo: Charles Benton. Courtesy Eleven Rivington, New York.

As the exhibition at 195 Chrystie Street makes apparent, Dryer's painting practice is becoming more central to a particular approach to painting that willingly incorporates sculptural elements. As this current strand in abstraction gains wider appreciation, perhaps Dryer will get recognition as the innovator she truly was.