

HYPERALLERGIC

The Experimental Eclecticism of Ed Moses

His daring embrace of an anti-style approach opened up new potential for abstract painting.



Installation view, 'Ed Moses: Painting as Process' at Albertz Benda (all images courtesy the artist and Albertz Benda) (click to enlarge)

Ed Moses has, over the years, become a painter extraordinaire. Throughout his impassioned, prolific, and prestigious career, he has retained his role as a significant West Coast painter, a legacy that began six decades earlier. His daring embrace of an anti-style approach in the early 1960s opened up new potential for abstract painting. Instead of aspiring to create one consistent style, Moses has let his work carry him in many directions, giving emphasis to the manipulation of material in contrast to a preconceived "look." Yet, despite the eclectic nature of his paintings, there is always a recurrent feeling of recognition about his work.

Morgan, Robert C. "The Experimental Eclecticism of Ed Moses," *Hyperallergic*. October 9, 2016.

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For example, in the current exhibition of Moses's work [at Albertz Benda](#), "Double-Trac aka NY Trac" (1974), a forceful diagonal composition, appears to have come from a vastly different place than a later diagonal work, "Green Man" (1989–2004). Even so, the visual impact of each remains similar. The paintings hold forceful, interrelated energies, contained in the way Moses vigorously applies paint and related elements, including graphite, India ink, masking tape, mylar, and polyester resin. "Wall Layuca" (1989) looks like he scumbled together vertical slices of black, white, and ochre in both oil and acrylic pigments. Although the application processes Moses employs are difficult to quantify, he develops his surfaces layer by layer. In an early example, the *Hegeman Series* (1970–72), the alternating build-up of acrylic and polyester resin with masking tape produces a density of light that's spread evenly across each painting. One of the most striking is "Pulled Wedge 1" (1972), for which the artist chose translucent parchment instead of canvas as his base.



Ed Moses, "Untitled" (c. 1971), resin and powdered pigment on canvas, 96 x 108 inches

In a 2013 interview with the American art historian and curator Barbara Rose, included in the Albertz Benda exhibition catalogue, Moses, then in his late 80s, came out with a somewhat unusual remark:

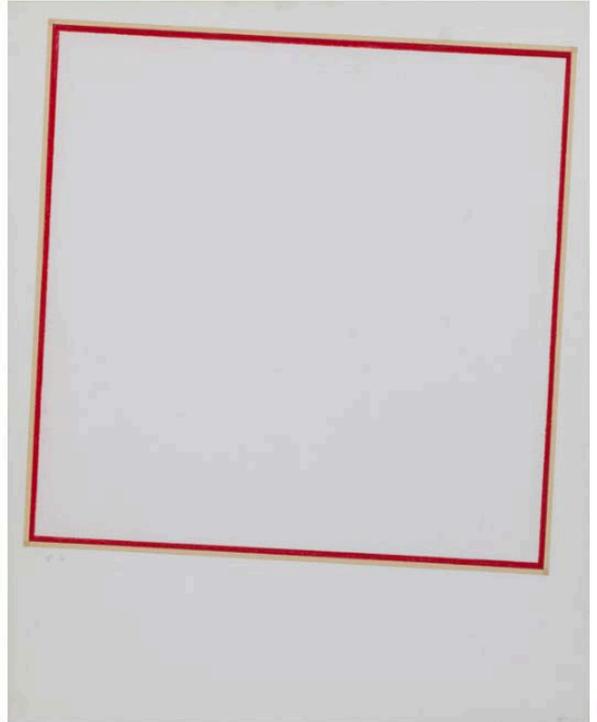
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Actually I love to paint. I'm the Hungry Ghost. There's a glow as if the painting is imbued with some energy field, something primordial that is responsive to my obsession – the obsession of the Hungry Ghost.

As a persona or alter ego, the Hungry Ghost does not exactly hold the elegance of Duchamp's [Rose Sélavy](#). It does, however, offer a curious insight into how Moses perceives himself in the act of painting. The ghostly presence of the artist suggests something more rugged and deconstructed, uncertain that what he's done is the right way. He makes it clear that he wants his paintings to contain a sense of the primordial, of being on the edge of painting, not refined.



Ed Moses, "Untitled" (1979), ink on handmade paper, 17 1/4 x 12 3/4 inches



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Moses's first important show in Los Angeles was his MFA thesis show, held at the Ferus Gallery in 1958. It was the second exhibition to be mounted (after Sonia Gechtoff's) at the now-legendary gallery, which had been inaugurated the previous year by the assemblage artist Ed Keinholz and the curator Walter Hopps (later to be joined by the collector Irving Blum). While other members of the gallery went on to create the Light and Space movement or hermetic forms of collage and assemblage (Wallace Berman, George Herms, Ed Keinholz), Moses persisted as an abstract painter, constantly shifting his emphasis from geometry to organic forms, created by the flow or

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resistance of oil and water-based pigments. Such experiments include the Rorschach blots in “Gimbutas” (1989) and the *Jabberwocky* series of the 1990s. In both cases, the paintings travel far from the geometric diagonals of the 1970s.

This admirable breadth of experimentation is currently on display at Albertz Benda, in what’s being touted as the first comprehensive survey of Moses’s work on the East Coast. Indeed, I was taken by several paintings I had never seen before, including the “Untitled” diagonals from the mid-1970s as well as the heroically poured and squeegeed paintings “Oh Ed #2” and “Montirr Aix” (both 1999). When seen together, these seemingly contrary paintings suggest a rare holistic, earthly fecundity. They don’t disguise the visible influences of earlier artists — ranging from the Paleolithic cave painters, whom Moses often cites, to Malevich and Moholy-Nagy — yet even as one finds such traces, Moses’s canvases are less about the appropriation of style than the endurance of an ongoing dialogue with the material process of painting.



Installation view, 'Ed Moses: Painting as Process' at Albertz Benda (click to enlarge)

This is a remarkable exhibition of work that has managed to stay clear of trends for well over half a century, focusing instead on the realities of the artist’s presence. It convinces us of painting as an ongoing inquiry and process of

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experimentation, rather than painting as a singular style or predetermined statement. Moses's sensory, layered surfaces reveal the essence of works of art being created by an emotionally involved human being.

[Ed Moses: Painting as Process](#) continues at *Albertz Benda* (515 W 26th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through October 15.

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