

Touch and Tone

“In Jill Moser’s new work vividly colored surfaces hover, flicker and swell on fields of wooden panels to form unlikely relations and strange bodies. An unexpected departure from the gestural idioms the artist has been investigating for decades, the new series expands on *Nude Palette*, her recent painted collage work.

In spring 2020, Moser began her “daily meditations,” small collages made from the fragments of her prints and drawings that she painted with gouache and ink. Brightly colored and richly textured, these cut-and-paste works exalted tactility, and thus defied the limits and restrictions of life during the early months of the pandemic. Moser’s new paintings came about by transposing chromatic relations from paper to panel.

Made from fragmented, colorful volumes of varying dimensions and degrees of opacity, the paintings’ vivid and compact shapes touch and hug, echo and cancel each other. The chromatic ensembles suggest broken and vessel-like objects, pseudo-geometric topographies, or details of surrogate bodies. As if they were enlarged fragments of larger forms, the paintings are marked by a sense of monumentality. Their contrasting size and scale and their extended play on part-whole relations makes them similar to imaginary mathematical sets and mereological studies.

In her new paintings, Moser abandons the looping, sinuous lines and broken scriptural notations that, along with the velocity of mark making, characterized her earlier work without relinquishing the sensuous aggression of her practice. The color forms of the paintings are endowed with sensations of stillness and containment as well as with a pronounced presence of tactility and carnality.

Moser always approached the decorative with restraint. In this work, she modulates lush and loud colors with blinding richness and exuberance. Like Matisse who “came to consider colors as forces to be assembled,” Moser also handles colors as connected forces and often includes their names in the titles of paintings. Color names such as verdigris, rosso, carmine and acqua are located at the intersection of visual perception and language, and thus they have a particular resonance for Moser who has long engaged with linguistic operations, narratives and poetry in her work.

Other titles in the sequence contain the names of women—Simone, Hilma, Meret, Sonia, Annie and LP are hints at women artists who sang, wove, and painted. By referring to long-dead fellow artists, Moser evokes shared affinities and influences, and renders homage to the imaginary company of female practitioners.

The formal novelties of the panel paintings are closely connected to Moser’s adoption of new media and materials. Working on small- and medium-format wood supports, she builds lush surfaces of color using thin layers of acrylic paint. By layering planes on top of planes and allowing the underlying tones to bleed and emerge, she modifies, tints and shades them by not only adjacency but stratification. Flat and matte yet luminous and highly saturated, Moser’s paintings intimate corporeal and volumetric space without spatial illusions.

Last winter, Moser began adding pieces of painted wood to the panels turning them into low-reliefs. The thin strips of wooden cut-outs both connect and disrupt the painted shapes and by further complicating the relations between surface and volume, assert the haptic qualities of the work more emphatically. A work about the tactility of vision, Moser’s new series is an invitation to slow viewing and a testimony to the joy and resilience of abstract painting.”

(Ágnes Berecz, New York City, March 2022)