

MAGENTA

PLAINS

MOIRA DRYER

Photo: Jeannette Montgomery Barron

Moira Dryer: *Perpetual Painting*
March 13–April 26, 2025

Magenta Plains
149 Canal Street, New York, NY

Opening Reception:
Thursday, March 13 from 6–8 PM

Artist Biography

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).

Moria Dryer's work has been exhibited posthumously in solo exhibitions such as *Moria Dryer: Back in Business*, The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C (2020); a traveling exhibition titled *Moria 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.

“There is the sense of the overt illusory nature of the world around me. Very little is concrete or tangible. It is such that I feel the liberty to make things that are involved with what is inexplicable in any other terms. It is this stuff that seduces my amazement; the chaos we survive through.

It is an act of faith to try and transcend the heroic tradition in art and to instead immobilize this strange and chaotic world. So it is at the level of provocative innuendo that my attention is held. This is a primitive but strong position to look out from, as it is finally a capacity for instinct that controls my decisions.

The necessity is to find something beyond the existing mediocrity that can rekindle an honest and compulsive capacity for desire.”

–Moirra Dryer, “Artist Statement,” *NEW WORK: NEW YORK /OUTSIDE NEW YORK*, 1984



The Ghost and The Machine, 1987

Casein on wood

96 x 49 1/2 x 6 in.

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two panels, blue-green, wavy, 1987-88

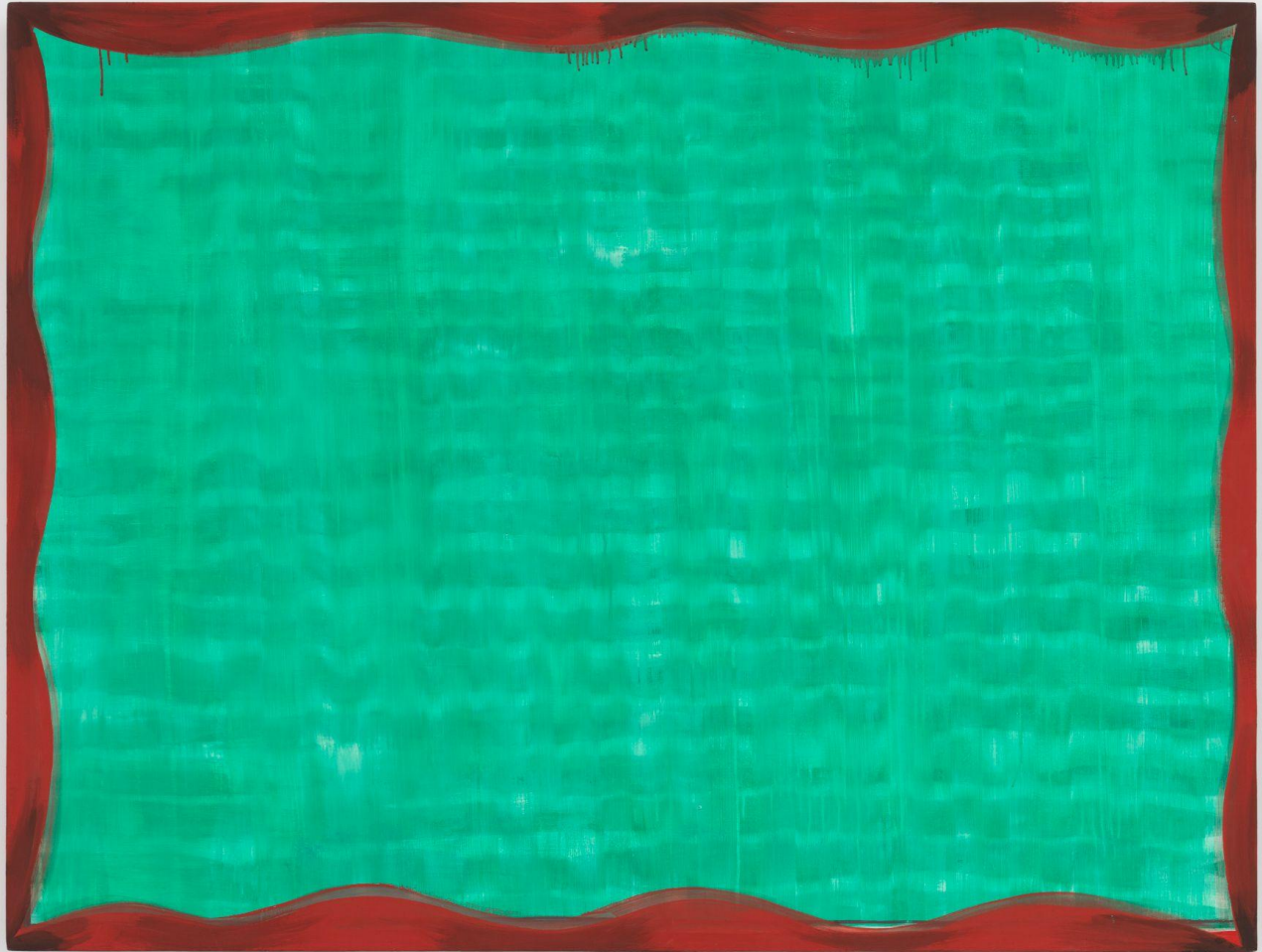
Casein on wood

Each panel: 79 1/4 x 51 x 2 1/2 in.



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The Rumor, 1988

Casein on wood

48 x 63 x 3 in.

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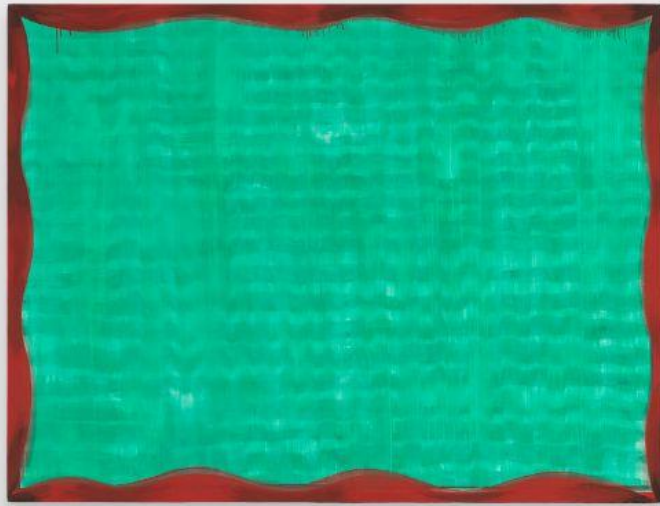
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Culture Shock, 1990

Casein on wood

46 x 48 in.

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Big Mother, 1988
Casein on wood and grommet
99 x 48 in.

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The Perpetual Painting, 1988
Casein and lacquer on auto parts and wood
36 x 83 3/4 x 4 1/2 in.

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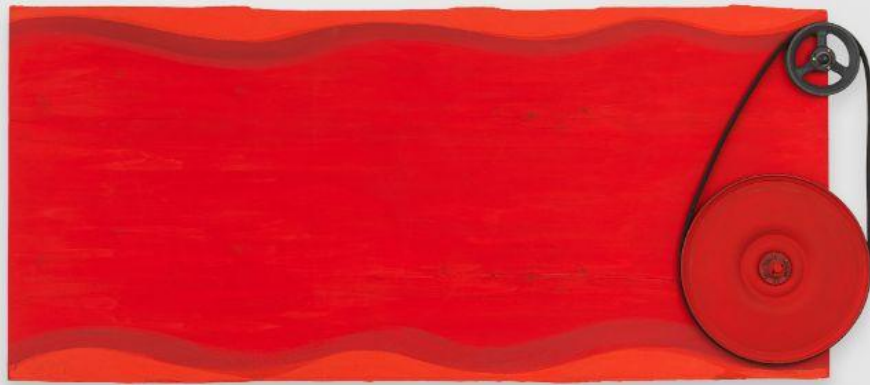
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The Fingerprint, 1987
Casein and acrylic on wood
48 x 63 1/8 x 3 in.

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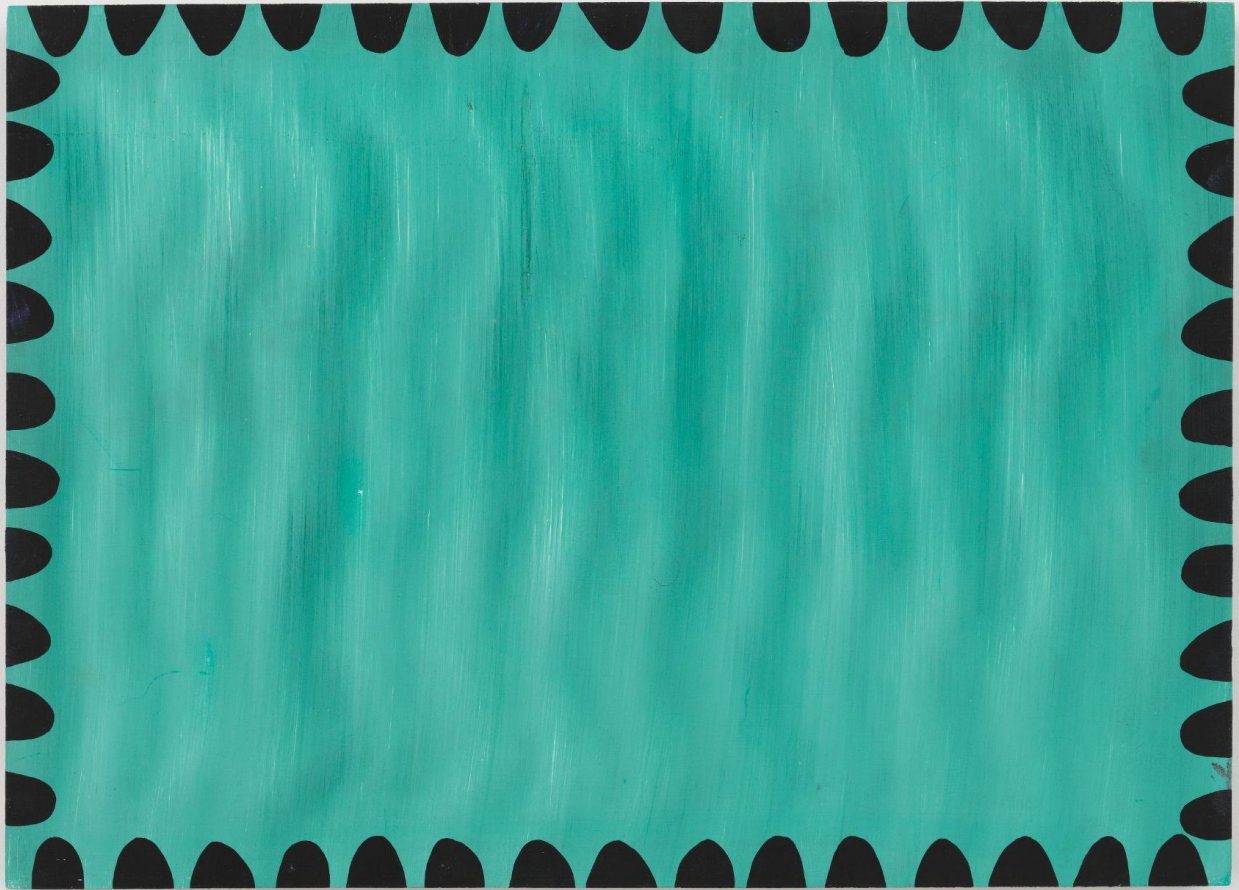
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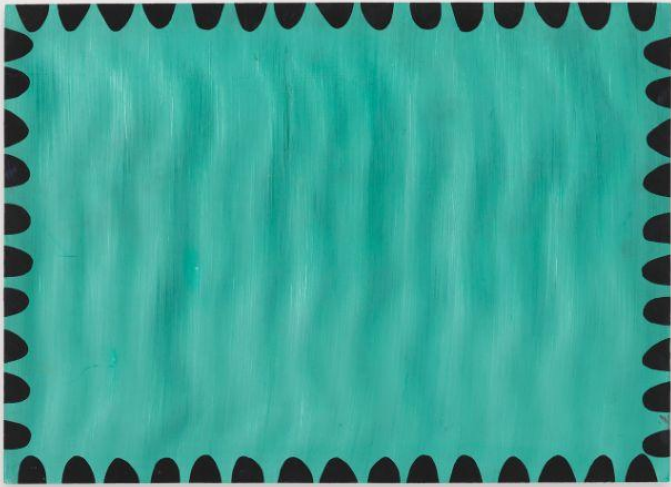
Untitled, 1990
Acrylic on wood
19 1/2 x 26 1/2 in.

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“These images are in a state of flux long after the paint has dried. They have a life of their own. In a perpetual state of transformation, they are potential images moving in and out of focus. They belong to a primal state, next door to dream and memory.”

–Moira Dryer (1991), “An Emotive Identity” *Moira Dryer: Paintings, 1989–1992*



Untitled, 1986–88
Casein on paper
Unframed: 6 x 9 1/2 in.
Framed: 10 1/8 x 13 1/2



Untitled, 1986–88
Casein on paper
Unframed: 8 x 6 in.
Framed: 12 x 10 in.



Untitled, 1986–88
Casein on paper
Unframed: 6 x 8 in.
Framed: 10 x 12 in.



Untitled, 1986–88
Watercolor on paper
6 x 9 in.



Untitled, 1986–88
Watercolor on paper
Unframed: 6 x 9 3/8 in.
Framed: 10 1/8 x 13 1/2 in.



Untitled, 1986–88
Acrylic on paper
Unframed: 8 x 5 1/4 in.
Framed: 12 1/4 x 9 1/4 in.



Untitled, 1986–88
Watercolor on paper
Unframed: 5 x 8 1/4 in.
Framed: 9 1/4 x 12 1/4

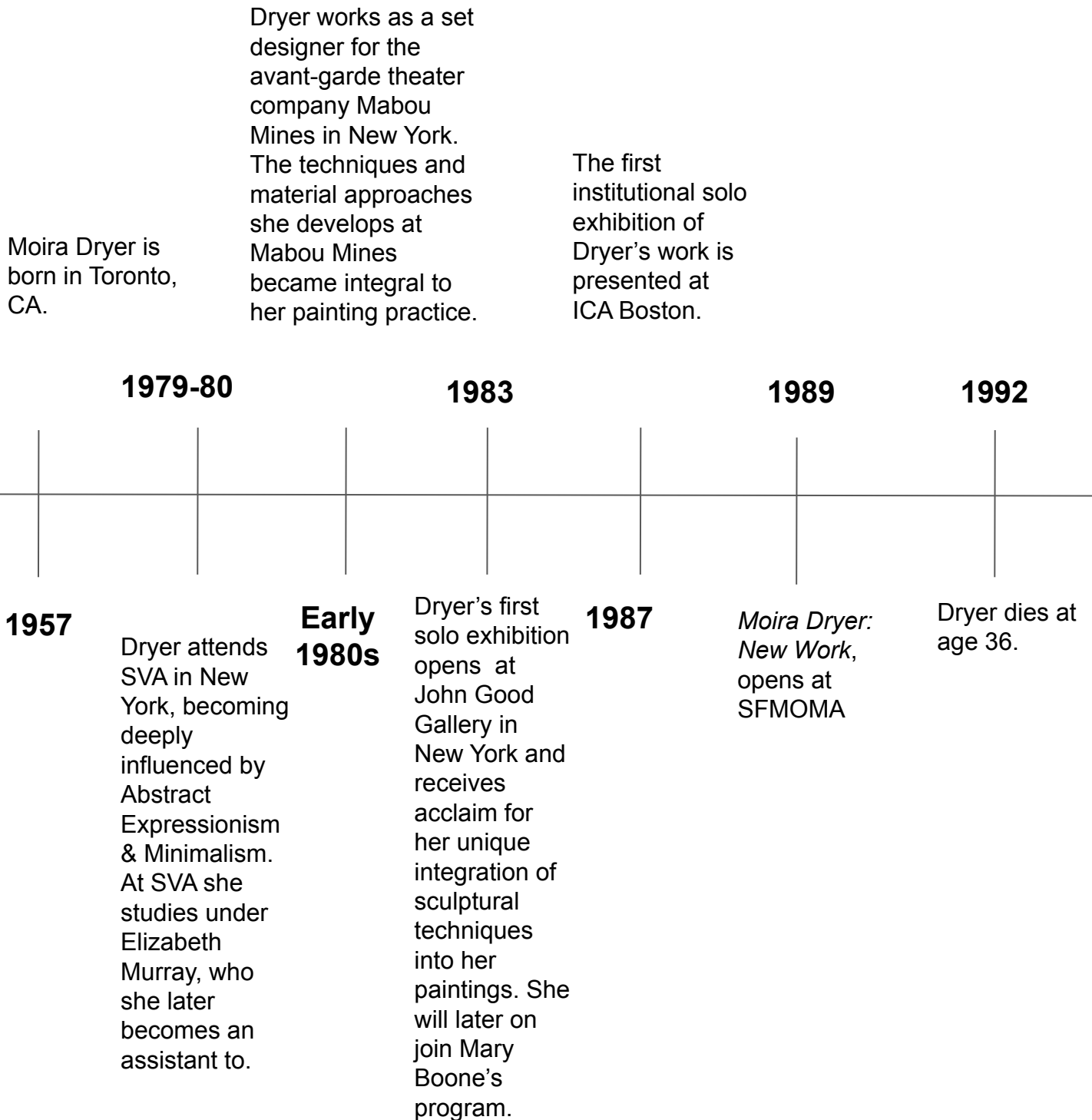


Untitled, 1986–88
Casein on paper
Unframed: 4 7/8 x 7 7/8 in.
Framed: 9 x 12 in.

“She opened up something new in abstract painting and helped relocate something that had always been there. That something that no one talks about because we lack a credible vocabulary to define: the vernacular soul. Moira brought soulfulness to painting. The balancing act between invention and examination is what energized Moira's paintings.”

–Ross Bleckner, “Vernacular Soul,” *Moira Dryer: Paintings, 1989–1992*

Timeline of significant events



Timeline of significant events

A solo exhibition of Dryer's work opens at Gallery 400 at the University of Chicago, IL. The show placed emphasis on the sculptural legacy of her practice.

1993

The Moira Dryer Project opens at Eleven Rivington's two NYC locations. One features a solo presentation of Dryer's abstract paintings from the late 1980s—1990s; while the other a selection of contemporary artists influenced by Dryer's practice.

2007

Moira Dryer: Perpetual Painting opens at Magenta Plains in New York, NY.

2020

Projects: Moira Dryer, the first posthumous institutional exhibition of Dryer's work, opens at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. The show features works from the final seven years of her life.

1997

Dryer's work is featured in *Two Years*, an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art showcasing recently acquired works.

2014

Two major retrospective open at the same time: *Moira Dryer: Back in Business* at The Phillips Collection & *Moira Dryer: Yours for the Asking* at Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art.

2025

Mabou Mines | Early 1980s

Before transitioning to painting full-time in 1985, Moira Dryer worked as a set designer for Mabou Mines, an avant-garde theater company celebrated for its conceptual and innovative stage designs. Reflecting on the group's distinctive approach, director Lee Breuer remarked, "The difference between Mabou Mines and other theater groups is that we're interested in the values of motivational acting as well as those of the 'art' world." Dryer's paintings often drew upon her background in set design, incorporating materials like casein and plywood that were integral to her earlier work.



Performance view, *Haj*, Mabou Mines, New York, NY, 1983

Paintings as props | Late 1980s

In the late 1980s, Dryer expanded on her stage design background by creating "props"—freestanding or wall-projected works on plywood that asserted a physical presence in the room. Reflecting on the series in a 1988 conversation with Klaus Ottman, she explained, "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."

Memorandum from MOIRA DRYER

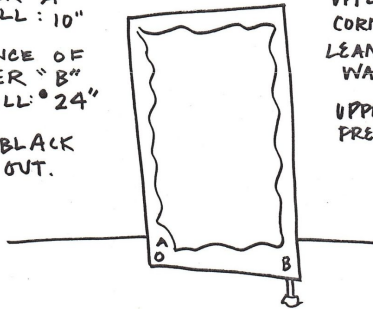
for INSTALLATION & HANDLING
OF "BIG MOTHER" 1988

① ALWAYS HANDLE PIECE WITH
WHITE COTTON GLOVES.

UNFOLD FOOT FROM TRANSPORT
+ LOCK DOWN FOR INSTALLATION



② DISTANCE OF
CORNER "A"
TO WALL: 10"
DISTANCE OF
CORNER "B"
TO WALL: 24"
BLUE/BLACK
FACE OUT.



HAVE
UPPER LEFT
CORNER
LEANING ON
WALL
UPPER RIGHT
PREESTANDING.



Installation guide for Moira Dryer,
Big Mother (1988)

Moira Dryer
Big Mother, 1988
Casein on wood and grommet
99 x 48 in.

Projects 42: Moira Dryer | 1993

In 1993, *Projects 42: Moira Dryer* was presented at MoMA as the first major exhibition following her untimely death in 1992, showcasing works from the final seven years of her career. As the 42nd artist featured in MoMA's *Projects* series—a program launched in 1971 to highlight significant emerging voices in contemporary art—Dryer joined an esteemed group of participants, including Cindy Sherman, Jeff Koons, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres.



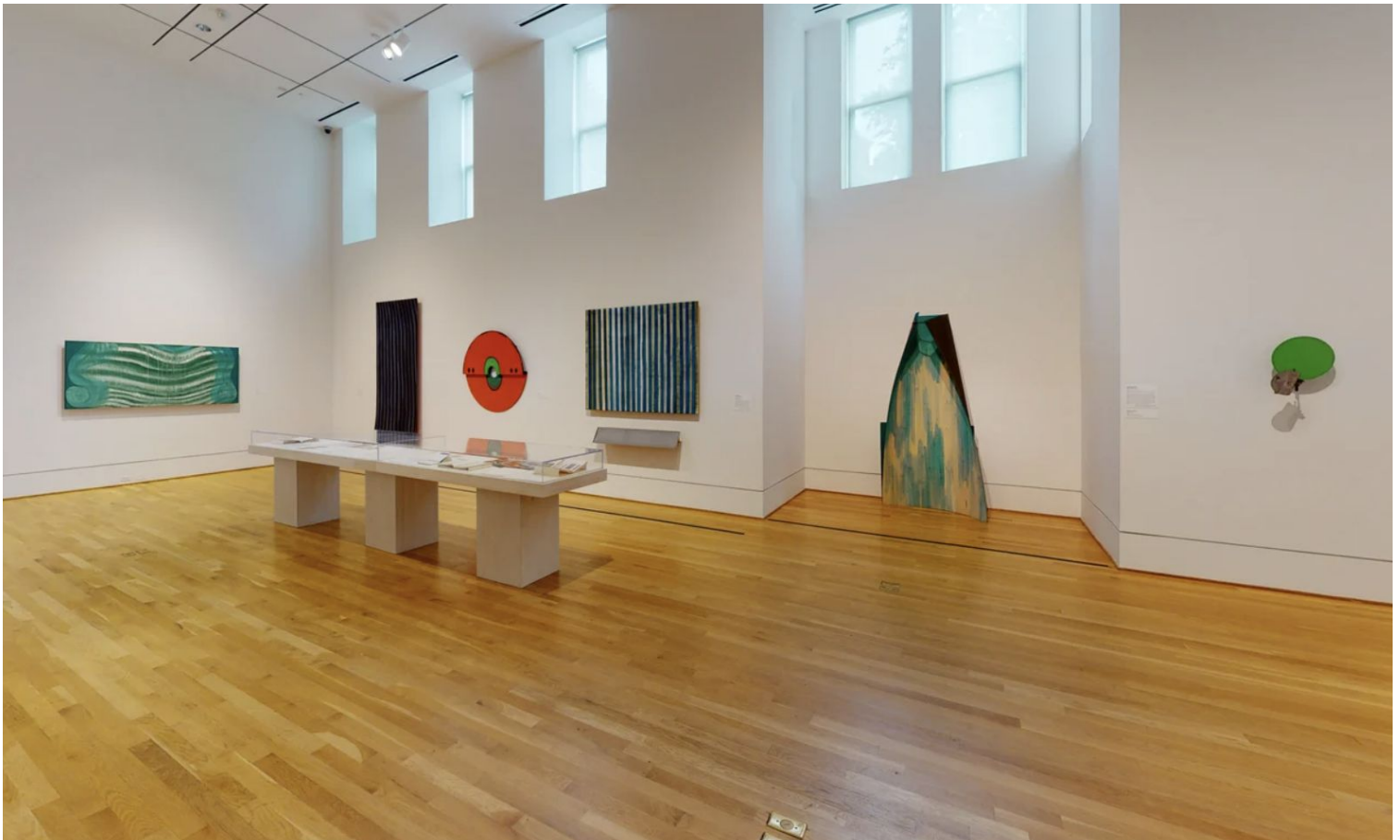
Projects 42: Moira Dryer, MoMA, New York, NY, 1993

Select Exhibitions | 2020



Moira Dryer: *Back in Business*
The Phillips Collection

Select Exhibitions | 2020



Moira Dryer: *Back in Business*
The Phillips Collection

Select Exhibitions | 2020



Moira Dryer: *Back in Business*
The Phillips Collection

Moira Dryer: *Back in Business*



Moira Dryer: *Back in Business*

Hardcover: 96 pages

2020

Published by The Phillips Collection

Select Exhibitions | 2020



The Moira Dryer Project
Eleven Rivington, New York, NY

Select Exhibitions | 2020



Moira Dryer: *Yours for the Asking*
Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art, Reston, VA

Select Exhibitions | 2019



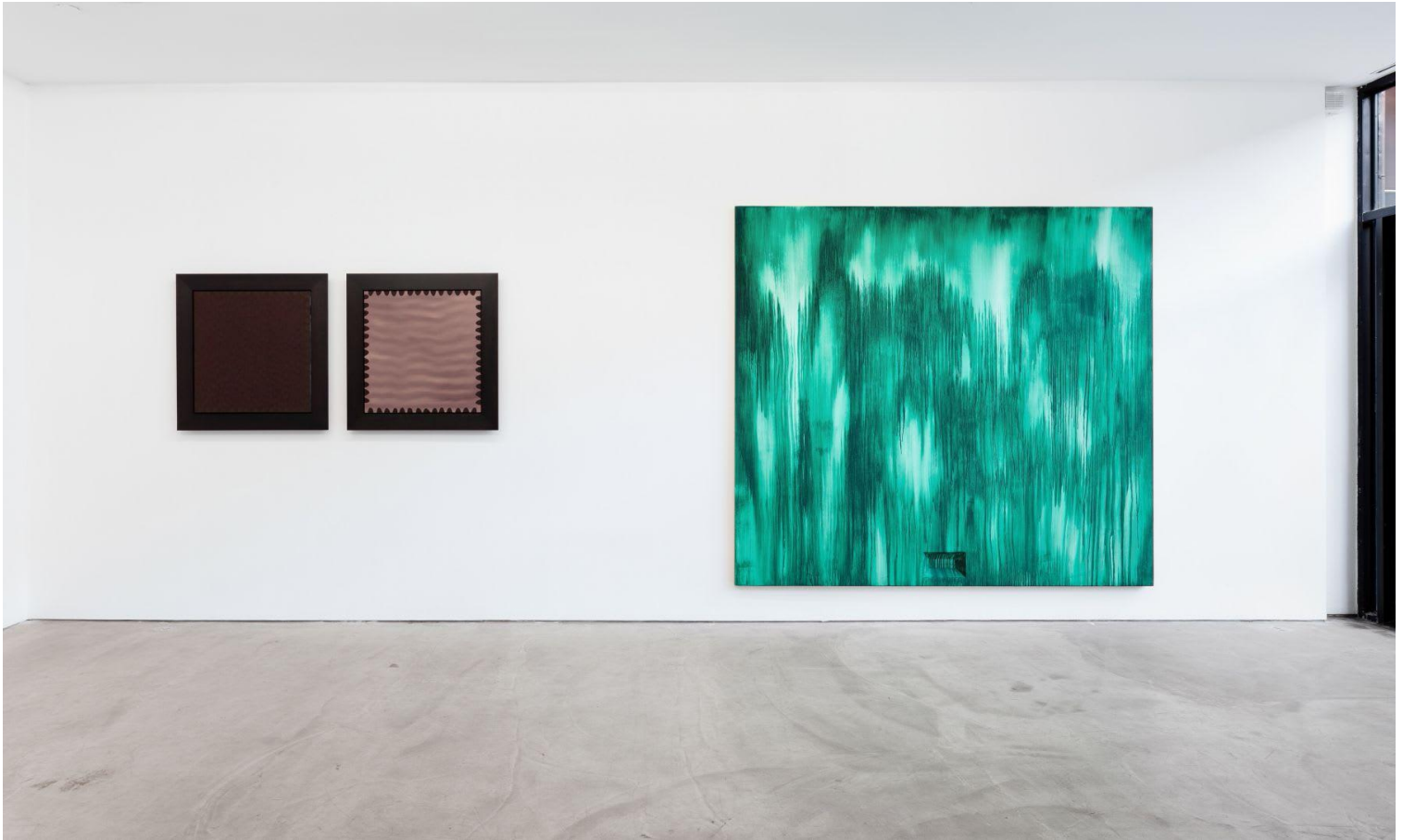
Moira Dryer
Van Doren Waxter, New York, NY

Select Exhibitions | 2017



"Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s"
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Select Exhibitions | 2014



The Moira Dryer Project
Eleven Rivington, New York, NY

Select Exhibitions | 2014



The Moira Dryer Project
Eleven Rivington, New York, NY

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Select Exhibitions | 2013



I, You, We
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Select Exhibitions | 2005



Random Fire, 1991

acrylic on wood and matboard with metal stand

overall: 88 x 130 inches

Acquired by Buffalo AKG Art Museum in 2005

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Select Exhibitions | 1998



Moira Dryer & Shirley Wiitasalo
Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, NY

Select Exhibitions | 1997



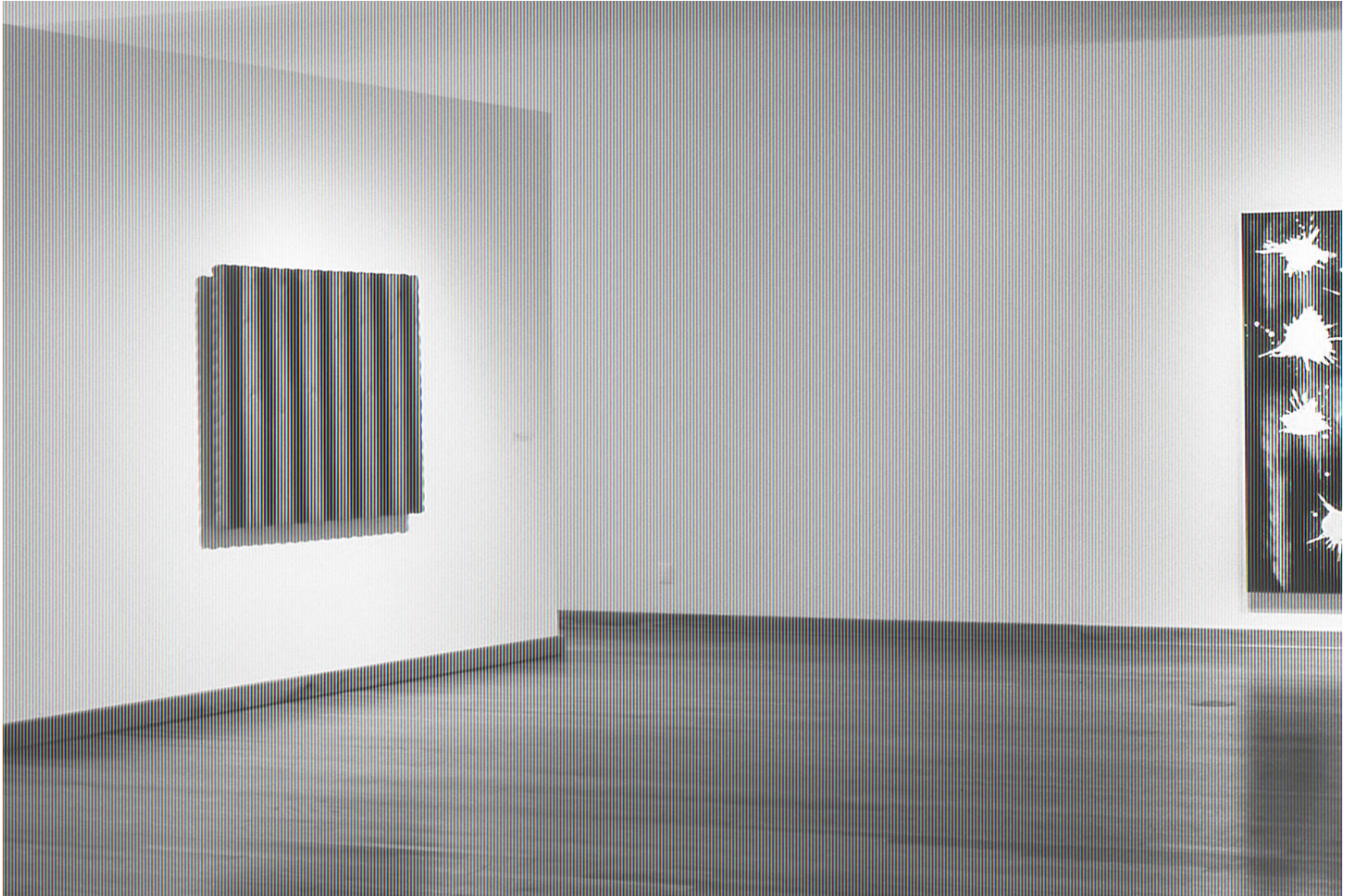
Gallery 400, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Select Exhibitions | 1997



Gallery 400, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Select Exhibitions | 1997



Moira Dryer and Jessica Stockholder: *The Point of Departure*
Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS

Select Exhibitions | 1993



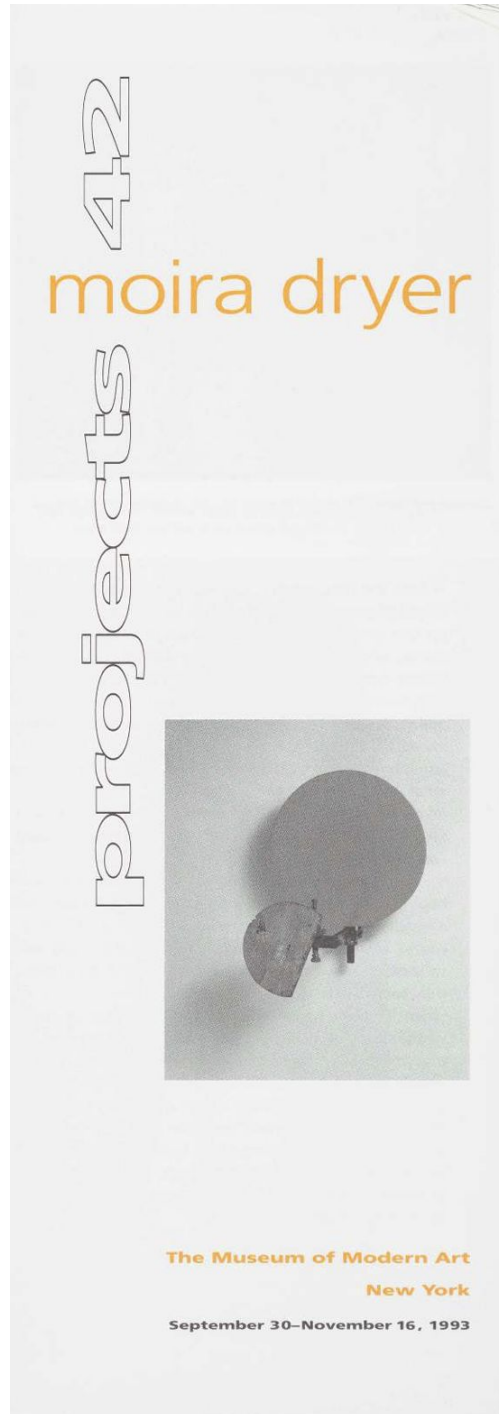
Projects 42: Moira Dryer
MOMA, New York, NY

Select Exhibitions | 1993



Projects 42: Moira Dryer
MOMA, New York, NY

Projects 42: *Moira Dryer*



Projects 42: Moira Dryer
1993

Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Select Exhibitions | 1991



Mario Diacono, New York, NY

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