

# ARTPULSE

ARTPULSE NO. 23 | VOL. 6 | 2015  
WWW.ARTPULSEMAGAZINE.COM

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"92" Fabelo 2006



Charles Gaines, *Motion: Trisha Brown Dance, Set #11, 1980-81*, color photographs and ink on Strathmore paper. eight parts: 4 small drawings, 11" x 19 1/2" each, 2 large drawings and 2 photographs, 16" x 20" each, 31 1/8" x 84 1/2" x 2", (overall framed). Collection of Dean Valentine and Amy Adelson. Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

## CHARLES GAINES: GRIDWORK 1974 – 1989

Hammer Museum – Los Angeles

Curated by Naima J. Keith

By Megan Abrahams

The years 1974 to 1989 were a formative time for Los Angeles artist Charles Gaines, a period during which he diverged from his early training in painting to embark on a new direction as a conceptual artist. A bridge figure in the conceptual movement, Gaines explored numerous theories to come up with a systematic approach to his art, one that propelled his creative process and conferred layers of significance to the finished pieces.

Much of the work Gaines produced during these early years was conceived serially, as in the 27 images that comprise the *Walnut Tree Orchard* series (1975-2014). Rather than relying on the medium of painting for this study, Gaines sought a degree of detachment. In a tour of the exhibit before the opening, he explained, “In terms of practice, I wanted to find a way to make work that didn’t involve subjectivity.”

Using photography as a jumping-off point, the artist achieved the distance he was seeking. Multiple photographic images of walnut trees became the foundation for the series. “I tried to engage the object systematically,” he said. Gaines imposed his own complex set of rules—almost a scientific method—on a multi-step process. Extrapolating from the photographs, he created a series of color-coded drawings on graphs, plotting the location of the trees with numbers, each number documenting the position of a tree, superimposing one on top of the other. “I wanted to focus on the spirit of conflict between the real world and the world of representation, to show a disharmony between the two, rather than a seamlessness.”

A similar process was repeated in *Faces* (1978-79), a series portraying human subjects, which Gaines found to be more dynamic. Graphed individually in negative and positive versions, ultimately, the faces in the series are superimposed. In a sense, he deconstructed the face, deperson-

alizing it through objective study, features plotted as if in a comparative survey. In a later series, *Motion: Trisha Brown Dance* (1980-81), the artist leveraged his unique process with profound effect. Once presumed lost, this elegant series of images captures the movement of dancers by sequentially plotting the flow of their figures in motion. As Gaines said, “It’s really a linear way of making works of art.”

Trees represent a recurring theme, a biological subject that Gaines revisited in a later series, *Numbers and Trees* (1988-89). Here, he collapsed photography and painting on handmade plexiglass cases with photographed landscapes in the background. While his earlier representations of trees were more utilitarian, using primary colors, in these works Gaines allowed himself to paint freely, injecting more vibrant pigments like magenta and yellow.

Instead of merely isolating each individual subject, Gaines was interested in conveying the full system, showing the conceptual framework by capturing the entire series in a single entity. “I was very much interested in that paradox. I wanted to make a piece where I collapsed seriality in one object.”

What is realized in the finished works is a subtle harmony of form, color and shape, a merging of scientific method and unexpected artistic innovation. ■

(February 7 - May 24, 2015)

*Megan Abrahams is a Los Angeles-based writer and artist. A contributing writer for WhiteHot Magazine of Contemporary Art since 2009, she also writes for Art Ltd. Megan studied fine art in Canada and France and received her M.A. from the University of Southern California School of Journalism. She is currently writing her first novel.*

## REVIEWS

### ED MOSES: DRAWINGS FROM THE 1960S AND 70S

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

#### NOW AND THEN

William Turner Gallery – Santa Monica, CA.

By Megan Abrahams



Installation photo of the exhibition “Ed Moses: Drawings from the 1960s and 70s” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), May 10 – August 2, 1-15. © 2015 Ed Moses. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

#### Ed Moses: A Los Angeles Icon

*Terror is my driving force. Paint is the medium.*  
Ed Moses, September 2014

If art appreciation has something in common with detective work, early in his career, Ed Moses left a trail of clues foreshadowing the artist he was yet to become. In the past year, a string of landmark solo exhibitions focusing on phases of the artist’s oeuvre have offered breathtaking insight into the extraordinary depth and range of his enthralling and important body of work, along with evidence behind his motivation and method.

Visible throughout “Ed Moses: Drawings from the 1960s and 70s” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) are keys to both the man and the eventual paintings he went on to create and continues to produce today, decades later. The 89-year-old artist systematically laid the foundation for his future work by devoting almost two decades primarily to drawing. Moses has persisted in the continual evolution of his vision throughout a 60-year career of constant reinvention after becoming an artist almost by accident. For someone with a self-declared compulsion for creating art, it’s striking that Moses was introduced to art via such a serendipitous route.

“How I came to be a painter is a joke. I was struggling in pre-med, couldn’t even use a slide rule,” Moses said during a private visit to his studio last September.

In 1948, Moses was enrolled at Long Beach City College, disillusioned after two years of pre-med studies, when some friends urged him to meet an art teacher they called a Bohemian. “I wanted to see what a Bohemian looked like,” he said.

The teacher was Pedro Miller from the Chicago Art Institute. The first time Moses saw him, Miller drove into the art department park-

ing lot in his convertible and stepped out of the car barefoot, his hair caked with clay and paint. The teacher proceeded to the classroom, overturned a trash can, sat down and started lecturing.

“I’d never seen a teacher do anything like that,” said Moses. “So I immediately signed up.”

When Miller set up a still life à la Cézanne, the other students assessed the composition by holding their pencils in the air. Moses didn’t know what to do. As Miller approached, Moses dipped his fingers into the pots of color and made a finger painting. Miller took one look and said, “Now here’s a real artist.”

It was a turning point for the young student. “He saved my life,” Moses said.

Today a Los Angeles icon, Moses has played a formative role in the West Coast art scene. One of the first artists to show at the famed Ferus Gallery, Moses later joined the art faculty at UC Irvine, where he went on to teach many young artists who followed. Painting is still part of his daily routine. From 6 in the morning until 2:30 in the afternoon, he works in a large outdoor studio in the light-filled courtyard of his home on a quiet residential street in Venice, Calif. An outdoor studio was a requirement, as Moses discovered after hosing down his canvases in a previous New York studio—causing water leakage to the floor below.

Next to the courtyard, behind a storage room stacked with canvases, is a hidden gallery featuring a magical installation Moses created, inspired by *Labyrinths*, a collection of stories by Jorge Luis Borges. Canvases in solid colors and crackle paintings alternate with warped mirrors on which Moses painted delicate droplets. Reflected in the mirrors, the paintings morph into wavy shapes. From the vantage point of the spinning chair in the center of the room, the reflected images change in infinite hallucinatory variations.

Last September, Moses was busy selecting work to be featured in “Cross-Section,” his retrospective at UC Irvine Claire Trevor



Ed Moses, *Stares Dwn*, 2015, wood, aluminum rails, angle iron and paint, 80" x 70." Courtesy William Turner Gallery, Santa Monica, CA.

School of the Arts (Oct. 11-Dec. 13, 2014). While his studio assistant displayed different canvases for consideration, Moses demurred on the very notion of being labeled an artist. "I'm an obsessive painter. I'm not an artist," he said.

The topic of obsession comes up a lot and may be a key to the resonance of his work, the longevity of his career and his success in realizing his vision. Moses likens his art to the study of anthropology, referencing how early man became conscious of his own existence when he saw his footprint in the mud. "That's why I exist," he said. "I had to leave marks, compulsive marks, repetitive marks, pressing, pressing, over and over again, showing I exist. I guess that's what I was doing in a way."

Among the most compelling early marks Moses made are his flower drawings of the early 1960s. Moses acknowledges the influence of Jasper Johns in his use of repeated design motifs. The series of graphite flower drawings were inspired by an oil cloth the artist found on a trip to Tijuana. The flower images tie in with the theme of obsession, repetition, making an indelible mark in the mud. The drawings are also precursors to the large-scale *crackle* paintings Moses produced 50 years later. The crackle paintings came about when Moses was creating monochromatic works on canvas, trying to replicate a crackle effect with paint. He developed what he calls his "secret sauce," which he applies beneath the layer of paint. When Moses hit the canvas in a certain way, he discovered it produced a rippling crackle, which he can manipulate to create a gorgeous repeated floral effect.

The mechanical drawing classes Moses took in high school gave him an added technical acuity, informing his drawing and approach to painting. Although Moses has produced numerous vast abstract canvases without a figurative, representational or literal narrative, much of his work is anchored by a concern with line. This is particularly telling in the grid drawings of the 1970s, a theme that re-emerged in the later diagonal grid paintings. Subtle vestiges of the grid crop up in the new generation of paintings in his latest solo

show, "Now and Then" at William Turner Gallery from June 6 to August 15. These paintings would be a complete surprise if not for the traces of intersecting lines in the form of crosses repeated across the surface. Created by a stencil, the presence of the crosses is a thematic thread superimposed over other marks in the compositions. Layers of marks allow an intriguing glimpse into his process.

"I like the idea of seeing evidence of the process and application. That's part of the beauty of it. The work reveals some of the history of the mark making, and then one day it lights up, self-illuminates. Wow!" Moses said in a conversation with LACMA curator Leslie Jones, hosted by William Turner the week of the opening.

Mostly rendered on wood panels, the new series reflects the solid substantive ground on which it is painted. Primary colors—a preponderance of reds—and black predominate. The work is characterized by dots, drips and other marks that interplay with the crosses. Moses added unexpected embellishments—a soupçon of assemblage—although that's not the intention.

"I never liked the idea of assemblage. It just sort of grew out of the situation," Moses said.

Incorporating a sculptural element, in *Stares Dwn* (2015), ledges, which Moses calls "pockets," project from the painted surface. Assorted wooden items rest inside—paint sticks used for stirring house paints, a stencil-cut tarantula and star shapes. Aluminum rails form a frame outside the border. Several of the new paintings have aluminum or copper rail frames as well as chains draped across the surface, hanging in loose curves—another version of line. Moses included the chains, found in a hardware store, because, "I like them. They look good."

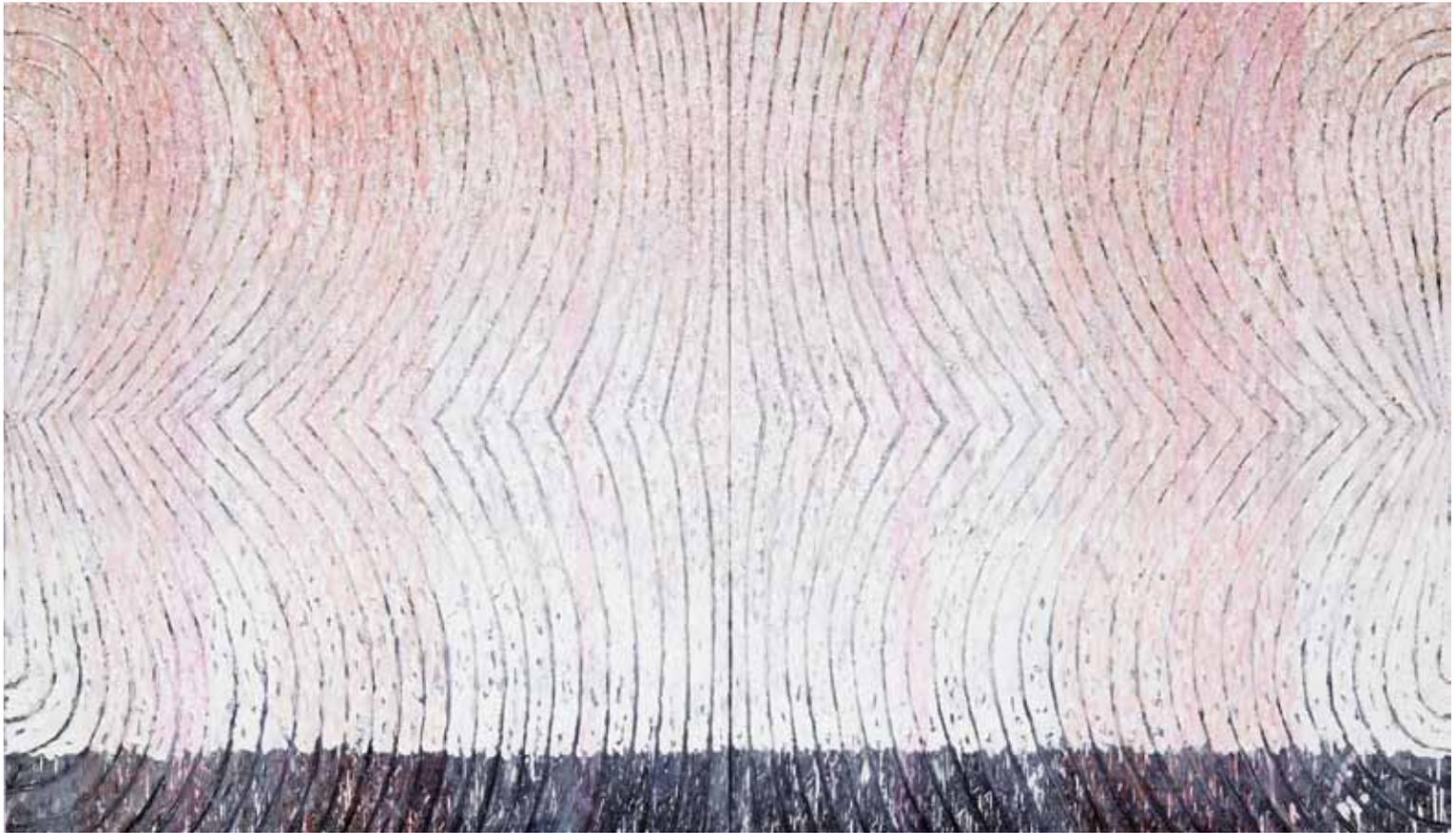
The metal rails are more integrated in some of the pieces than in others, as in *Aleff* (2015), in which Moses painted the rails in the blue palette of the painting they frame. What's compelling is not that the embellishments complete the work, but how the paintings become more dynamic and engaging because of the added dimensional elements.

Last October, Moses and a coterie of artists and friends traveled on a bus chartered by Turner from Bergamot Station in Santa Monica to UC Irvine for the opening of the retrospective. There, Moses led his entourage through three galleries of paintings, each more stunning than the next, discussing his process with humor and candor while using his cane to point out details. The comprehensive survey showcased the vast range of the artist's strategic exploration of the painted medium from the 1970s to the present. It's apparent the life work of Moses is a continual exploration, in which he refuses to be harnessed to any single idea or avenue of expression, regardless of how rewarding that one direction might be. Instead, he excels at each concept and leaps on to the next.

Ultimately, Moses' paintings are a fortuitous marriage of contrasts, a meeting of contrived accident and deliberate control. The artist, who abhors the label "artist," prefers to be thought of as an inventor and discoverer. For Moses, it's all about the continuing experiment. "It's always the same," he said. "I never get better, I often get worse. And sometimes I get lucky." ■

**Ed Moses: Drawings from the 1960s and 70s**  
(May 10 - August 2, 2015)

**Now and Then**  
(June 6 - August 15, 2015)



Christine Frerichs, *Warm Winter Kiss (for Constantine Brancusi)*, 2015, oil and acrylic on two canvases, 36" x 60." Courtesy of Klowden Mann Gallery.

## CHRISTINE FRERICHS: SERENADE

Klowden Mann – Culver City

By Megan Abrahams

The metaphor of music permeates this series of paintings by Christine Frerichs—characterized as they are by mood, the gradation of color building towards crescendo, composition approached with almost mathematical deliberation and flowing lyricism of line. The artist connected this series to music, in particular, music as a statement of romantic love. Fittingly, the exhibit is named “Serenade,” in reference to one of the largest paintings. “This body of work touched on how abstraction can stem from emotive states,” the artist said, in a one-on-one conversation at the gallery during the run of her show.

Riveting for their layered complexity, richness of texture and dramatic color, the paintings are also infused with narrative significance, like painted memoir. For Frerichs, the larger canvases—those approaching the size of a human body—are symbolic portraits, abstract embodiments of a person or people. In them, the artist delves into the feelings evoked by relationships, and the building of personal identity.

The genesis of this recent work is a previous series of ten paintings, in which Frerichs created allegorical motifs to describe what she calls, “the stages individuals go through to become who we are through vulnerability.” Under each canvas, she articulated a figure 8, an abstracted rendition of the human form. In the new series, Frerichs re-contextualized the figure 8 further, breaking it down into subtle repeated lines. Beginning with a thick layer of acrylic modeling paste, she carved grooves, creating a figure 8 pattern based on the scale of her own body. The curved lines repeat like ripples. Partly derived from the artist’s observations of how ocean tides meet, creating cross-cur-

rents that may be gentle or full of friction, the paintings are also meant to represent the dynamic between partners in a relationship.

The underlying concept was also inspired by Brancusi’s sculpture, *The Kiss*, in which two integrated figures are carved from a single stone. In each painting, the artist joined two canvases to construct one composition, dividing the symbolic figure in half. The half figures represent two beings coming together, forming a whole. Alluding to the inherent paradox in the way the halves reflect, Frerichs said, “The meeting point is the place they split.”

Beyond the abstract reference to figures, the works evoke landscape, water and sky, connoting the light and atmosphere of New York, Lake Tahoe and Los Angeles—places with special emotional meaning in the artist’s life. Up close, the fine marks across the surface almost appear pointillist in technique. From a distance, the canvases glow with diffused light—a gradation of color and intensity with a palette ranging from modulated light-filled pastels to dark colors with depth and intensity, expressing an emotional spectrum from ecstasy to heartbreak.

A series of smaller paintings, (each 8.5 x 11 inches, oil on canvas) in the gallery’s project room, are like letters Frerichs has written to herself, or, “diagrams to describe relationships I’ve had in my life, or loves or places I’ve been.” Like studies, they are light-hearted steppingstones to the stunning emotionally charged larger works—the profound rendition of the artist’s unbridled introspection. ■

(March 7 - April 11, 2015)

## CRAIG TAYLOR: ENFACE

CB1 Gallery – Los Angeles

By Megan Abrahams



Craig Taylor, *Internal Friction Stacked*, 2014, oil on canvas, 72" x 54." Courtesy of CB1 Gallery.

Derivative of portraits or sculptural busts, Craig Taylor's recent complex abstract paintings achieve striking visual tension through the contrast of scraped-out layered backgrounds and the built-up application of paint on the dominant shape—or subject—configured in the foreground.

The theme of the exhibit is a revealing double entendre—*Enface*, meaning to write on the face of something, usually paper. In this series, the artist embellishes the suggested portraits or busts—in effect, faces—through systematic marks made with thick marks of paint in a stringently limited palette. There is a sort of start-stop to the marks, surfacing above an historical record of various versions of different backgrounds.

The forms in the foreground—subjects, or perhaps faces—appear in subtle relief from backgrounds comprised of layers of paint that have been applied in succession and then removed, leaving the echoes of assorted pigments visible in ghost-like shadow through a film of muted green-gray blue. The end result of the scraped-out backgrounds is a smooth burnished patina of exposed under-painting, revealing an intriguing glimpse into the artist's process, a deliberate and intricate method that requires hours of working, undoing and reworking to achieve its profound nuanced effect.

If it weren't for the pedestal shapes at the base of each abstracted bust, the portrait connotation might be less apparent. The shapes dominating these canvases could be construed as maps, satellite im-

ages or organic forms, like islands or rocks in the desert. In *The Absolute Fragrance* (2015), Taylor mostly confined his palette to muted grays, greens and blues, reminiscent of the colors found on camouflage fatigues. The gold background magically glows with light. Little vertical raised relief marks in the background coexist like a negative or reverse image of marks in the dominant foreground shape.

*Internal Friction Stacked* (2014), features a still subdued, but more varied palette—pale lavender, a hint of rose, umber, green, blue—each muted with white to create subtle tints. Spaces in the large mass, which loom from the canvas, provide a window into the background. There is architecture, solidity, in the prevailing shape. Demarcated by the built-up application of paint, it becomes a mesmerizing though inconclusive entity, enveloped in a mysterious aura, anchored with a sense of gravitas.

Lines confer dimension to the central form, or subject, most notably in *Without the Transistor of Reason* (2015), which features an abstract extrapolation of the head of a cartoon rabbit. Here, the artist has described the pedestal at the bottom of the frame in a horizontal plateau that almost appears to jut out from the plane of the canvas. Not sculpture, or even bas-relief, these paintings defy the flatness of the surface, capturing the essence of abstract sculptural shapes and compelling the eye to linger.

(March 7 - April 11, 2015)