

Moira Dryer: *Perpetual Painting***March 13–April 26, 2025****Lower Level and Level Two**

Magenta Plains is pleased to present Moira Dryer: *Perpetual Painting*, a posthumous solo exhibition of works from 1986 to 1992.

So many conversations about Moira Dryer's work center around the lasting relevance of painting, her painting. Peers, gallerists, curators, collectors, family, and friends who knew her personally during her brief life speak of her today with the same deep love and admiration, with a little smirk for her playful rebellion, as if she will walk in the room to say hello at any moment.

Both *The Perpetual Painting* (1988) and *The Ghost and The Machine* (1987) wink at this idea of longevity. Titles were an important part of Dryer's practiced thinking and as many pages in her studio notebooks were taken over with found language collages and lists of possible titles. With an almost engrained sensitivity for the fragility of life, the artist supports the idea of the mind-body duality now colloquially and patronizingly referred to as "the ghost in the machine." Pushing this just a bit further, as she actively pushed the paint in large loose waves over the surface of the panel, she titled the work, "the ghost and the machine," clarifying that the two indeed coexist, asserting their autonomy. The wheel and arm imbedded in the top corner of the panel remember the life of the painter—the physicality of the stretched arms, the rotation of the heavy panel that created drips now running parallel to the floor in a ghostly defiance of gravity—who now is separated from the physical body at indefinite rest.

Painting has died a thousand deaths. To paint, especially when Dryer was hard at work, when conceptualism and expressionism were fiercely locked in debate, Dryer applied the idea of the ghost in the machine more broadly—conceptualism and expressionism were the mind-body duality that appears in all her work. She presented *The Perpetual Painting* as a conceptual double entendre asserting the endurance painting as if an infinite wave or a pulley system with an endless belt.

Dryer's work was serious. She was addressing real topics of art history and of her time. She was a great lover of Renaissance art and mathematics, decoration, and language, among so many other relevant interests. She also had a wry sense of humor. She poked holes, literally and figuratively, in the cohesive surfaces and images of her work, as in *Untitled* (1992); she gave cultural meaning and aesthetic value to mathematical concepts like shock in *Culture Shock* (1990) and many of the drawings on view; and she poked fun at the idea of the artist's hand in the work by representing fingerprint whorls (*The Fingerprint*, 1987) and thumbprints impeding on the face of the painting as if to assert their hand (*Untitled*, 1990).

It is because of this deep commitment to thought and expression that Moira Dryer continues to feel ever-present and prescient. By approaching her paintings with plurality, they will forever be relevant and alive.

–Lily Siegel

Moira Dryer (b. 1957, Toronto, CA – d. 1993, New York, NY) 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).

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

Lily Siegel is the Executive Director of Hamiltonian Artists, a artist-centered nonprofit based in Washington, DC, She was the curator of concurrent Moira Dryer exhibitions in 2020, *Moira Dryer: Back in Business*(The Philips Collection, Washington, DC) and *Moira Dryer: Yours for the Asking* (Tephra Institute of Contemporary Art, Reston, VA). Siegel has held curatorial positions at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Siegel earned her MA in Modern Art History, Theory, and Criticism from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and BA in Art History, Theory, and Criticism from the University of California, San Diego.

The gallery wishes to extend our sincere gratitude to our generous lenders and partners who helped make this exhibition possible.