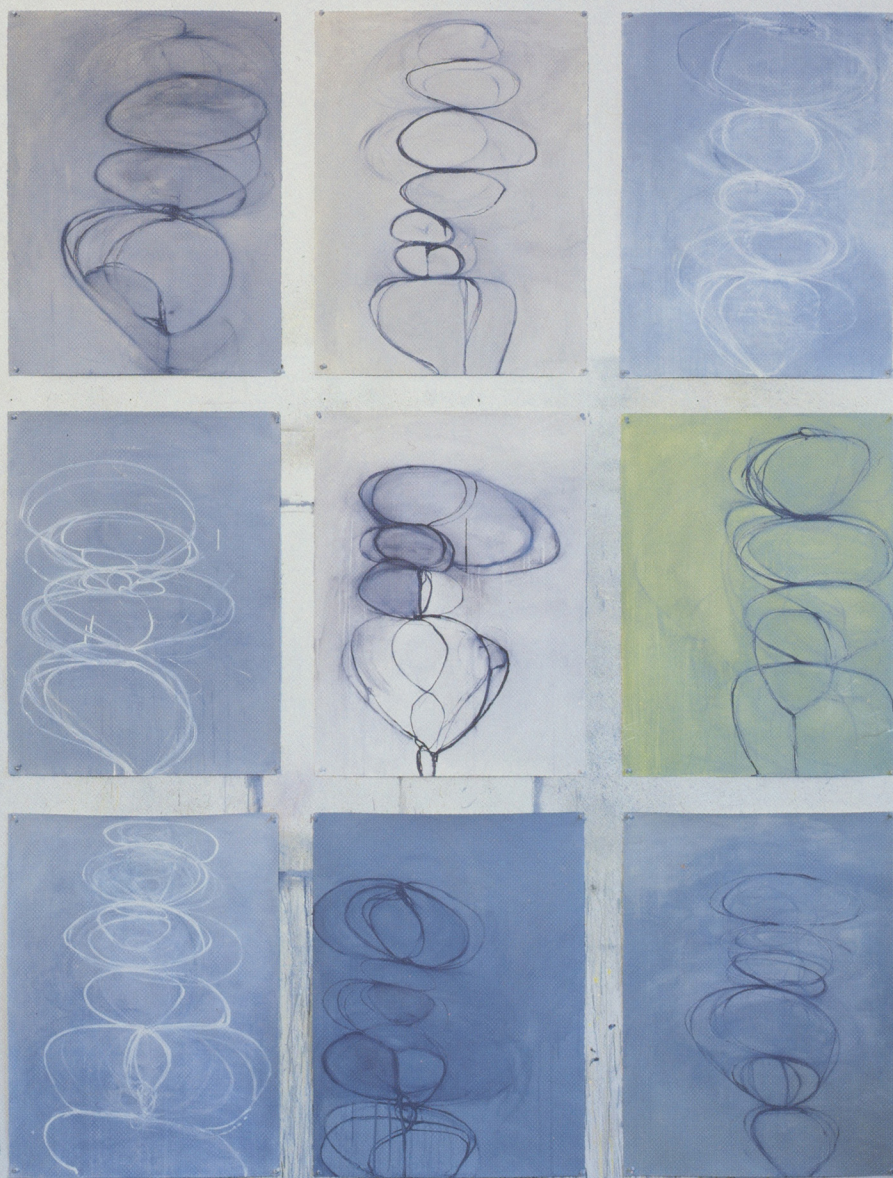


JILL MOSER



## PERFORMANCE AND POSSESSION

IN JILL MOSER'S North Fork series, psychological and formal investigation are inseparable. Each of these more than forty drawings is defined by a field of pastel color, which can be gentle or stormy, and by circular and elliptical lines, which can be assertively black or ghostly white. The color might be washed out. Lines in the background are washed over so that they hover in the distance like the tracery of a dream. Colors and lines may drip or bleed. In the foreground, lines may be layered or incised. The rounded outlines—always closed—suggest ancient stones and ripe bulbs, which are stacked on top of one another around a centralized axis. Since many begin below and rise above the picture plane, the stacks are invariably too big for the space that clutches and sometimes invades them. Sometimes the stones are supported by bulbs. Sometimes stones seem to bud from bulbs. Sometimes bulbs seem to sprout from stone.

With this simple yet emotionally complex and expansive language, Moser orchestrates and explores a dizzying range of responses, emotions and gestures. The figures her stacks suggest can be playful or accusatory, seductive or hard, regal or trashy, courteous or rude. They can dance, twirl, bow or stare. They can seem flamboyantly naked, quiveringly exposed, or as formal and obedient as a geisha in traditional dress. The body types can be as lithe as a Vogue model or as fecund as a prehistoric Venus. In almost all the drawings, two contradictory impulses are developed at the same

time: Moser's figures are gregariously public, they always perform, but they are also intensely private.

There is no psychological or physical essence here, no one irreducible identity. The stacks of forms can assume multiple personas and express multiple responses within a single configuration. Because the sizes of the circles or ellipses vary and each can seem to be growing or turning at its own speed, each figure seems to be a construction of multiple and often competing rhythms. Because all the drawings are so clearly related, the series can be seen not as one big ever-expanding family or troupe but rather the same figure modeling, parading and presenting for analysis and admiration its diverse and competing selves.

Each figure wants everything at once. Each appeals to the visual delectation of the viewer, yet at the same time seems both temperamentally and politically uncomfortable with being objectified. Each reaches out to the eye, but also turns inward and by so doing declares that a part of its identity will remain out of sight. Since there are no features on any of the circles, each figure can seem to be looking outward, facing the viewer, and yet looking from side to side. Just as important, each can also seem to be looking toward the background. Even the most frontal figure looks away as much as towards us. Each figure wants attention yet refuses to be owned.

As a result, with all their spontaneity and panache, these drawings can not be looked in the face. The figures do perform for us, but they are also performing for someone or something else. They do remain fully active in front of us but they are never wholly there. They are creatures of camouflage, masters of concealment. Since few of the figures are entirely confined within the rectangular space, what they were at origin, or what they might be when they spiral through the roof of the drawing or flatten themselves out on or below the bottom edge, is impossible to determine.



To whom do they belong? The most powerful force in these drawings is space. The figure-ground relationship that is so essential to Moser's work can be intimate or tense—or both. It is not a relationship of equals. While the voluptuous and aristocratic verticality of the stacked forms can suggest a classical beauty, the character of these drawings is not classical. We are a long way here from the balancing acts of so much abstraction in which a line can be made to balance a color and a small circle and an extended field can have the same formal and emotional weight. Disequilibrium is in the fabric of these drawings. A tough, curious, unresolvable imbalance is the order of the day.

Most often, the mobile, multi-sided figures are gripped by space, which is usually extremely physical and often intent on possessing the figures before they stop moving long enough to possess themselves. The figures can turn their backs on us, but not on space. They can charm us, but not space. They can spin freely and push upward and outward, but space thickens around them so that freedom, at some point, is in question. When the circular or elliptical lines in the foreground reach toward the washed-over lines in the background, space gets between them and keeps them apart. The figures do not struggle with their multiple selves, they accept them. But they *do* struggle with space. They write their states of being on and in space as it applies its grip. As it does, the stakes for which Moser is playing become clear and the drama of these drawings takes hold.

—MICHAEL BRENSON

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