

JILL MOSER

SIXTEEN STREET



S E P T E M B E R 1 1 - O C T O B E R 2 4 2 0 0 9

YOU CAN MARK ACROSS THE NIGHT  
WITH A TIP OF AN EMBERED STICK,  
AND YOU CAN ACTUALLY SEE IT  
FIXED IN ITS INFINITY. YOU CAN  
BE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN OF ITS  
TREACHEROUS IMPERMANENCE.

Ken Kesey, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, 1964



■ **Jill Moser** is a painter who has produced drawings, prints, and even animations in pursuit of a rendered visual language which while forwarding the perpetually unfinished business of abstract painting, suspends her audience between points of unsettling beauty, sly humor, and bracing mystery. Like the pianist who forsakes the concert hall for the improvisational jazz den, Moser's audience would be hard earned but informed, watching her every move. One of the defining moments for the artist came early—her exposure as a teenager to the laboriously created abstract films of Stan Brakhage. It might be intriguing to mentally compress Moser's entire oeuvre into a single thumb-driven flip book. Within the real time of a single two dimensional space, extensions of line would boogie, whirl, and slap themselves silly across a continually shifting color surface. Every work of the artist, I believe, harbors an unseen mechanism sparking off the flicker of animation.



On a Max Beckman scholarship at the Brooklyn Museum and later in Hunter College's MFA program, Moser's interests would be diverted from the canvas by performance, film, and video art. She would be drawn especially to art produced as bi-products or residue from some other activity; examples would include Bruce Nauman's hermetic early videos of actions performed alone in his studio or Ana Mendieta's earth/body works. Working on Mylar with other hardware store materials to produce spectral rubbings from the wall of her first studio, Moser wished

played neon violins and lurid graffiti spilled off subway cars onto gallery walls adjacent to the shiny products of the new Warholian cool. Moser, choosing to draw and paint, would sidestep fashion and seek direction through the dead end maze of 80's art by following marks made with her own hand.

Moser valued and closely studied many artists, among them Lee Bontecou, Richard Tuttle, Judith Bernstein, Elizabeth Murray, and Eva Hesse. Many of these individu-

## THE CANVAS REASSERTS ITSELF AS A SITE OF ACTION OR AN EXPECTANT STAGE

to make art that was muscular and genderless. There is something mournful about the proto-mechanical act of rubbing material over a surface to produce an impression or ghost, be it from a gravestone or off a name on Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Max Ernst's post Dada 'frottage' is the earliest and most schizoid of any artist's search for secrets embedded in non-art industrial materials. Surrealism's permissions were lost under coats of paint in postwar New York. Abstract painting, as locally practiced by primarily male romantics, had lost its romance by the time Moser stepped into her own studio in 1979. Androgynous performers

als had refused to take their assigned seats in history's classroom, making gender-unspecific handmade art. Hesse, whose sculpture bridged the formal sublime of the New York School and quirkier post minimalism, is especially useful in regard to Moser's painting since 1995. Line made physical threaded throughout Hesse's abbreviated life's work in the form of knotted rope or string glued down, mummified in resin, or left to hang. Moser the painter flattened out Hesse's physicality while picking up on the theatricality in the exaggeration of repeated elements. In 1999 her own line snapped free from its function of mooring forms to our field of vision.

Moser's previous art occupied itself with a general cast of players: lozenges, ringlets, blood cells, coffee beans,—you name it (as the artist would later ask of us)—bobbling shapes in and around the canvases' edge mapped by erasures, vibrations or false starts. In her elevation of the mark over concentrations of form, she picks up a dropped baton from abstraction that had been left out of the conversation from minimalism on. For her, the canvas reasserts itself as a site of action or an expectant stage. 'Line' has many definitions in Webster's, but its most serviceable may be a mark 'distinct, elongated, and narrow'. Elongation provides the artist with a greater opportunity for masquerade, resulting in our labeling individual strokes as 'fluid', 'ornate', 'controlled', or 'ensorious'. Richard Wollheim asserts that line is representational 'appearing to be stretched out, and in front of, and across something else'. Moser's pictures are a continuation, not a reenactment of Modernism's many attempts to fix movement. The bonus here is in the artist's loosened wrist allowing fantasy to bloom in elastic forms that sprout the wings of exotic insects or of machinery gone berserk, recalling the creatures sprung from surrealist Roberto Matta's warped id. Her firmly articulated line may appear as fuzzy as yarn or as elegant as the blue piping upon fine porcelain. Her palette, in service to her drawing, distances itself from the heavy spectrum employed by abstract impressionism's Manhattan depressives. In these new works on paper, she acts upon washes of watery blues and slate grays, often employing the vivid citrus of yellow and orange in her linear tours de force. The difficult color silver was introduced into her recent work—in Moser's handling it reads not as an escapee from a paint shed but as the ethereal trace of one of Andy's floating Mylar pillows.

HER FIRMLY  
ARTICULATED LINE  
MAY APPEAR  
AS FUZZY AS YARN  
OR AS ELEGANT AS  
THE BLUE PIPING  
UPON FINE  
PORCELAIN



Artists often educate their hands to produce what Chuck Close refers to as ‘art marks’, flourishes that would often signify nothing other than space filling busy work. The brisk cross-hatched “W’s” that embellish Jasper John’s drawings and prints are examples of line as unmistakable signature ‘owned’ by that artist. ‘Unlearning’ the



unconscious performance of mark making drives artists to disrupt this encoded process of eye to hand mimesis. Authenticity may only trail from the hand of the pre-verbal child, simultaneously filling and negating space

Moser employs no contrived methodologies, or embered sticks, to author the automatic drawing that is central to her art. Her renewed interest in the frenetic painterly cinema of Brakhage, Robert Breer and others allowed her to think cinematically, opening the door to the pleasures of continuity, sequential production and accumulation. To ‘draw writing’ comes not from the mediumistic channeling of the voices of history, as with the suave Cy Twombly or the bombastic Julian Schnabel, but through rewinding her present back to the cultural fixations of her youth. One such ‘crush’ was Art Nouveau, a decorative style that wound its way from the late 19th century and was later revived by graphic artists of the 1960’s enamored with Victoriana. What in this caught



her eye? The forces of nature distorted into a design movement’s standards of beauty, or the complex erotic possibilities thereof? While in high school, Moser would produce a slide presentation of rapidograph drawings derived from Hector Guimard’s architectural designs that, if presented now, would look relevant for its use of media alone.

Free of gravity along with its duties of description, Moser’s scribbling adjusts its mask and inhabits itself to perform. Taking on a character, it bolts onstage halting to deliver a sensual solo or frenzied monologue. One imagines the artist relishing the time constraint imposed on every act, knowing when to bring the proceedings to an end.

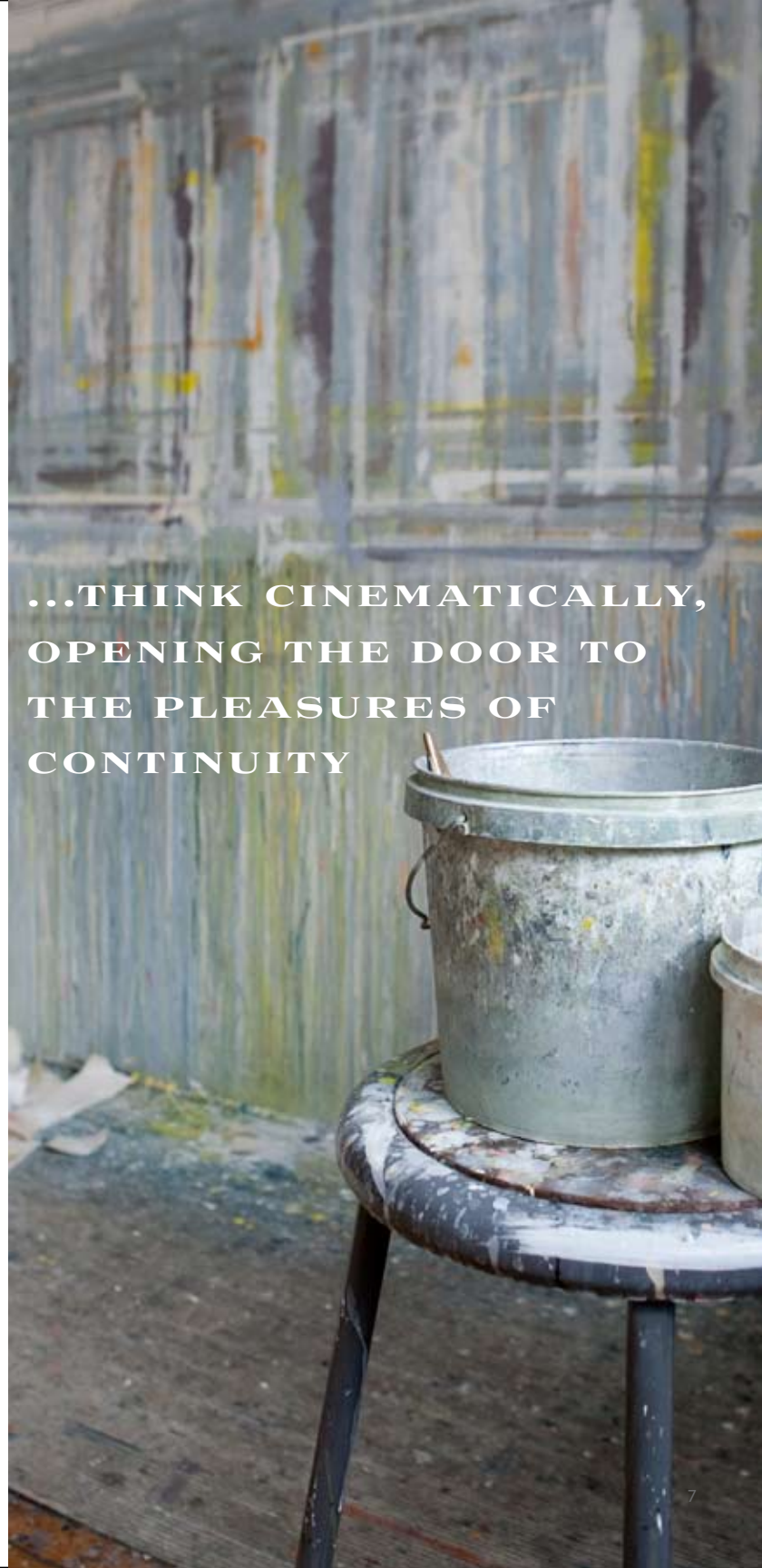
Moser has long appreciated George Herriman’s ‘Krazy Kat’ comic strip (1913-44) for its construction of an alternative universe housing the bizarre courtship of Ignatz Mouse and (genderless!) Krazy and for the cartoon’s ability to say a great deal using very little. Here every mark is as functional as those in the Mayan codices. Herriman’s almost lunar desert, like the sea, is the spare backdrop to psychic dramas where (to paraphrase the Jefferson Airplane) logic and proportion fall ‘sloppy dead’. Could these expanses be found in the horizontal divides in

Moser’s recent work? Any natural body of water mirrors the sky in an eternal diptych—two opposing ‘paragraphs’ of text forever occupying the same page. I will also pitch the idea of these blank rectangles of space as nostalgia for the cinema screen that hosted the immersive maelstrom of the artist’s early ‘flicker film’ heroes. Moser’s line develops out of the conical form so repeatedly that I cannot dismiss the projection, the transmission of light through a lens, as a referent critical to any interpretive approach we may take.

Today’s imaging technologies provide, to those who can afford it, not only measurements of our functions but the out-of-body transcendental experience once offered only through the ecstasy of spiritual enlightenment. What we look like ‘within’ can be brought up on a screen. Optical science has demonstrated that we overlay dense, spidery patterns of sightlines upon all we see. Brain scans document ‘thoughts’, our utterances can be made visual through the vocoder which synthesizes the human voice into unique language—is this not what Moser does? A doctor’s daughter, she was cognizant of the importance of data critical to analysis of an individual’s physical well being. The jittery vistas of ink that stream onto a chart from an arm or chest are not existential roads to nowhere but factual information set out for divination before a informed practitioner—a word now liberally applied to anyone in the arts who makes anything. With the camera’s recently digitized image no longer the lone arbiter of proof that an event occurred, where else besides science can the truth be found? Most probably in moments lived out in the real world, which includes Jill Moser’s studio.

Tim Maul  
2009

...THINK CINEMATICALY,  
OPENING THE DOOR TO  
THE PLEASURES OF  
CONTINUITY







10 sixteen street 4.11 2008 gouache on paper 30 x 22 1/2" 76.2 x 55.2 cm



sixteen street 4.10 2008 gouache on paper 30 x 22 1/2" 76.2 x 55.2 cm 11





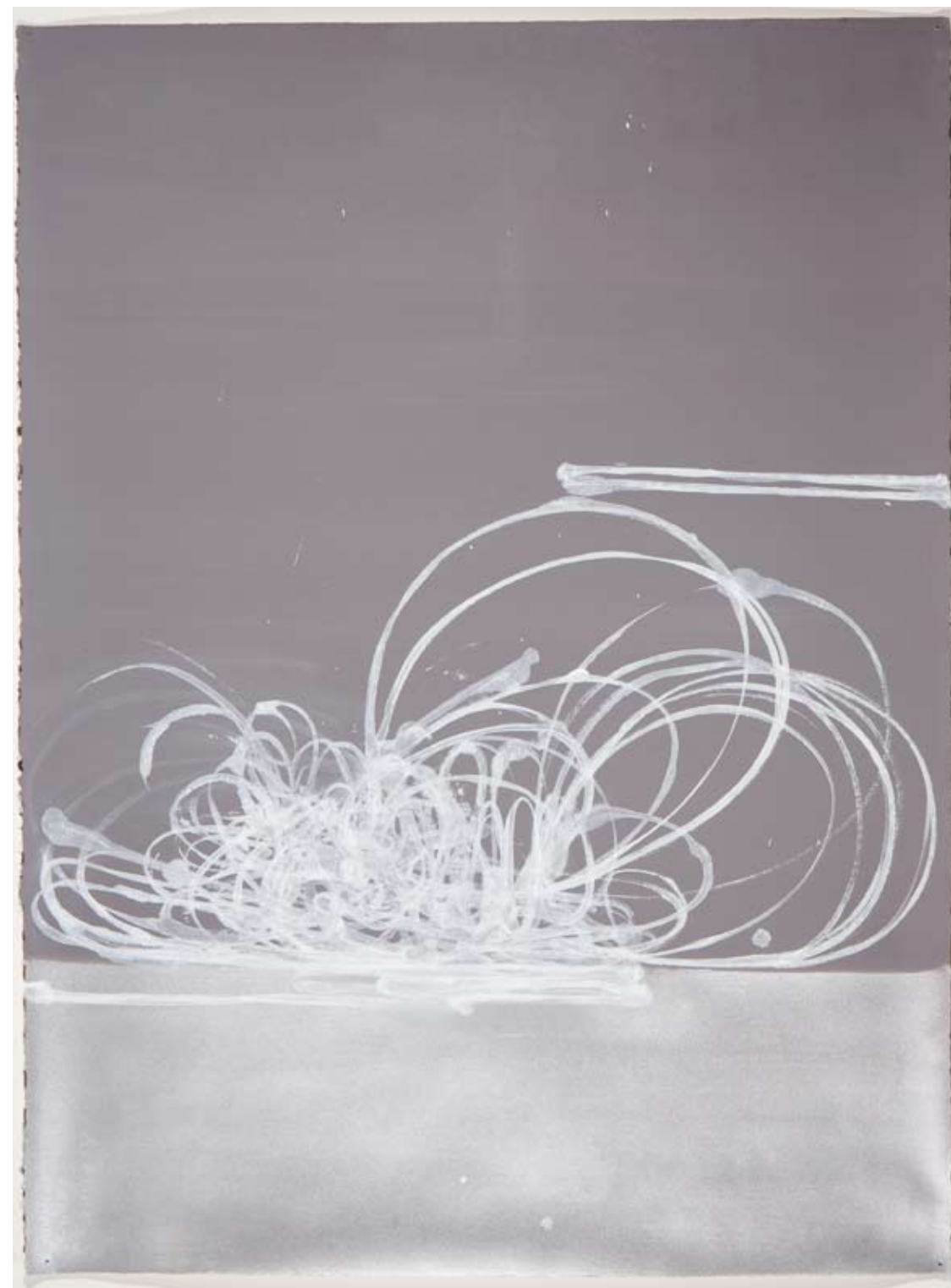


14 sixteen street 4.07 2008 gouache on paper 30 x 22½" 76.2 x 55.2 cm



sixteen street 5.05 2008 gouache on paper 22½ x 30" 55.2 x 76.2 cm 15















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**SIXTEEN STREET**

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