



Ed Moses

ALBERTZ BENDA

Ed Moses's miniretrospective at Albertz Benda, which featured a dozen of the artist's canvases, was also a memorial to his stunning achievements. The earliest, *Peeleb*, was made in 1998; the most recent, *Krak-BLK*, 2014, was created only four years before his death this year, at the age of ninety-one. The paintings testified to his versatility and endlessly exploratory creativity. He was an action painter, as he acknowledged—but there were few action painters who were as “open to change,” to quote his friend Frank Gehry. Moses called himself the Mutator, implying that his art was in a constant state of metamorphosis. The sobriquet is certainly apt. It was difficult to imagine that the same hand made all the works in this show. Some of the images were painterly, others linear—thus the contradiction between pieces such as *Bray-Fale*, with

Kuspit, Donald. “Ed Moses,” *Artforum*. September 2018.

albertz benda

515 W 26th St | New York, NY | 10001
Tel 212.244.2579 | www.albertzbenda.com



View of "Ed Moses,"
2018. From left:
Crumel, 2004;
Ignon, 2006. Photo:
Casey Kelbaugh.

its rich, smeary browns and blacks, and *Ignon*, with its precisionist facture (both works 2006).

Moses could careen between extremes in the same year. If he was a "signature painter," he had many signatures. And why not? A meditating Buddhist for much of his life, he made work that appears as though he was waiting for the special moment of spiritual enlightenment (or satori), when one abandons the compliance of the False Self (or a particular mode of artmaking) for the spontaneous creativity of the True Self (with its many facets of expression), to reference the distinction made by psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott. Moses repeatedly moved from conformity and inauthenticity to nonconformity and authenticity in a determined attempt to remain true to himself. He said that all of his paintings were "self-portraits": pictures of a self that refused stasis, casting off old stylistic skins the moment they lost their spiritual significance. Thus Moses could abandon the turbulent darkness of *Bronco*, 2002, for the colorful suaveness of *Diamond Jim*, 2008 (the work from which the show borrowed its title), and then abandon that in 2011 for a strangely subdued mixed-media work, *Untitled*, a painting spotted with circles resembling craters on a pockmarked moon.

Moses's works have a greater affinity with European art informal than with New York's Abstract Expressionism. In the former, the artist sustains a lyrical flair; in the latter, the artist stops with an epic mess. Jackson Pollock, after all, was all about raw power. Moses's poetic works, however, were concerned with accumulating a refined nuance with no preconceived conclusion or form: Expression is never finalized, but remains provisional, flexible, without a grandiose outcome in sight. Considering the fact that Moses lived and worked in Los Angeles—Venice, specifically—with his studio close to the Pacific Ocean, one might say that he surfed the surface of the canvas with his paint rather than dripped it around, as Pollock did. One should also note that there's no mention of Moses in H. H. Arnason's magisterial, two-volume survey, *History of Modern Art* (1968). Only *Grandma Moses* is named, which suggests the tragic shortcomings of textbook art scholarship.

—Donald Kuspit

Kuspit, Donald. "Ed Moses," *Artforum*. September 2018.

albertz benda

515 W 26th St | New York, NY | 10001
Tel 212.244.2579 | www.albertzbenda.com