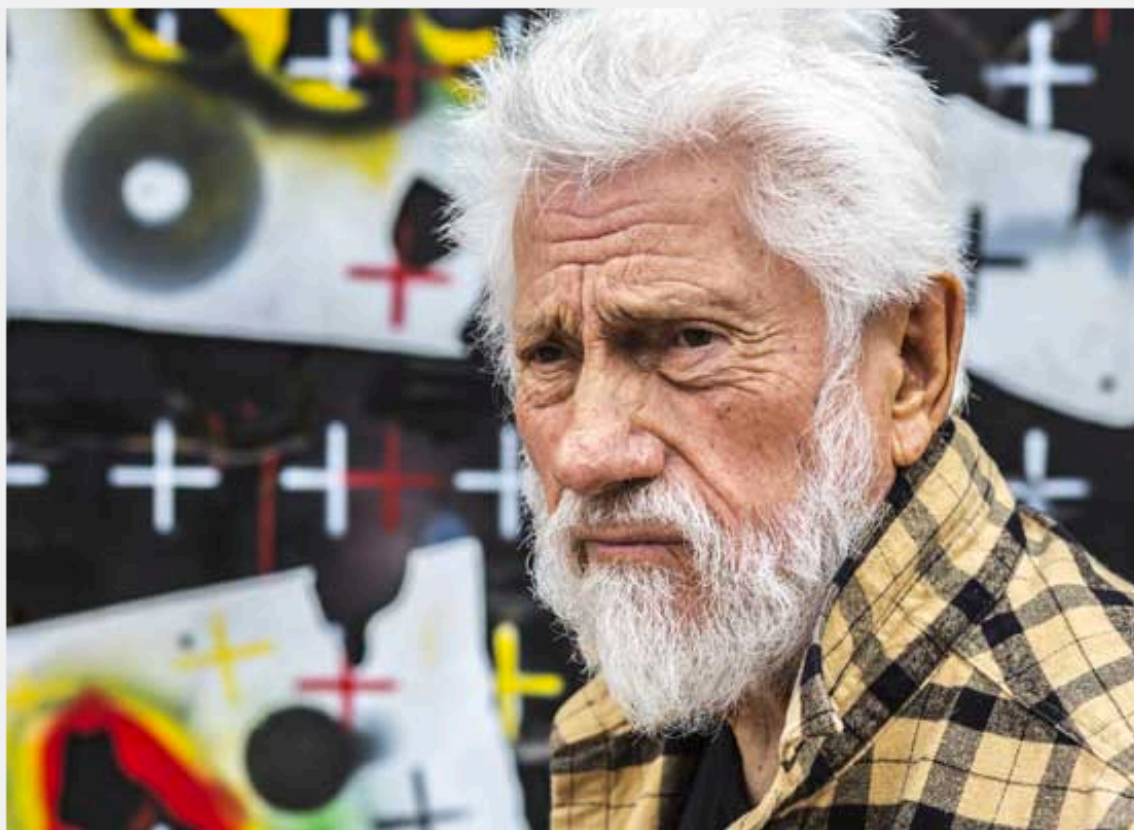


# Argonaut ONLINE

Art on ‘an Endless Path’



Ed Moses and a work in progress last year at his Venice studio

Photo by Ted Soqui

Ed Moses may be 90, but there’s something about painting that won’t let him quit making art.

“I’m an obsessive compulsive, so I have to paint every day,” says the Venice artist, an alum of the late-1950s “Cool School” collective that was the catalyst for modern art in West Los Angeles.

Moses gets up at 6 a.m. each day to be in his studio by 8, ready to work.

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“I’ve been painting for 50 years,” he says, “and I’ve always been obsessed with chasing paintings.”

The pursuit continues with *Moses@90*, a survey of the artist’s paintings and works on paper from the 1950s to the present. The exhibition opens Saturday, April 30, at the William Turner Gallery in Bergamot Station Art Center and the former home of the Santa Monica Museum of Art.

Moses says his latest work is inspired by the writings of Jorge Luis Borges — specifically Borges’ book “Labyrinths” and its short story “The Garden of Forking Paths,” about a German spy who learns from a Chinese scholar that his ancestor had created a marvelous labyrinth in the form of a misunderstood novel.

Taking a cue from the story’s mind-boggling concepts, Moses has created a series of paintings that evoke the labyrinthine nature of the book’s plot and themes. Pictures of his new work show layers of lines crisscrossing to the canvas’ edges, running over the brink with abandon.

But Moses has never been one to color inside the lines. A childhood bout of tuberculosis took him out of school for a year, leaving him with plenty of time for his mind to wander out of bounds.

“All I did was listen to soap operas and draw in Crayola coloring books, filling in the animals and forms,” Moses told *Hyperallergic* in a 2015 interview. “However, as much as I wanted to keep the color within the edges and just fill in, I would always go past. But by going past the edges, I was leaving patches of color in the coloring books that became very intriguing to me.”

Moses crossed boundaries again when he took a junior college art class with abstract painter Pedro Miller. As related in Hunter Drohojowska-Philp’s definitive text on the Los Angeles art scene in the 1960s, “Rebels in Paradise,” Moses would sit in the back of the class because he wasn’t sure what he should do. One time when Miller approached, Moses panicked, stuck his fingers in the paint jars and started finger painting.

“I always do the opposite of what’s supposed to be done. Rather than a paintbrush, I used my fingers,” recalls Moses.

Miller was so impressed that he showed Moses’ canvas to the class and declared, “Now here’s a real artist.”

Moses’ paintings are still admired for their unconventional approach. These days the artist pours, scrapes and sometimes brushes paint onto paper or canvas. He’s even developed a special technique to crackle his paintings, which he calls “craquelures,” by applying a “secret sauce” to his canvases. These will be on view along with Moses’ recent mirror paintings.

In all, Moses sees painting as his way of making his mark on the world. As he told *The Argonaut* last year, “It’s all evidence of my activity,” like “leaving tracks in the mud.”

A tactile quality has always resonated throughout Moses’ work. During the 1960s and ‘70s, his graphite tracings of a flower, based on a design from a Mexican oilcloth that he acquired in Tijuana, dominated his work and became known as the Rose Drawings, some of which are also on view for *Moses@90*.

Moses’ direct contact with paper was not only an anomaly, but an “anachronism” in 1960s Los Angeles, when neon, resin, glass, acrylic and florescent lights were the primary materials of the California Light and Space or Finish Fetish movement, explains LACMA curator Leslie Jones in an essay for the 2015 exhibition “Ed Moses: Drawings from the 1960s and ‘70s.”

“While other artists were buffing and polishing to make pristine surfaces seemingly untouched by human hands or creating ethereal spaces through transparency and illumination,” writes Jones, “Moses was scribbling, cutting, stenciling and decorating bits of paper with graphite and colored pencils. ... He proclaimed drawing’s viability as a medium of exploration and innovation, even at the most unlikely time and place, helping to establish drawing as a medium with a future as well as a past.”

Bending boundaries and stretching space, Moses’ artwork is bound to stand the test of time, but even he doesn’t always know when his work is done.

Sometimes, he says, a painting “squeals look at me!” and he knows he’s finished.

Others can take a “lifetime” to complete.

“My paintings are on an endless path,” says Moses. “There’s no beginning and no end. It’s a labyrinth.”