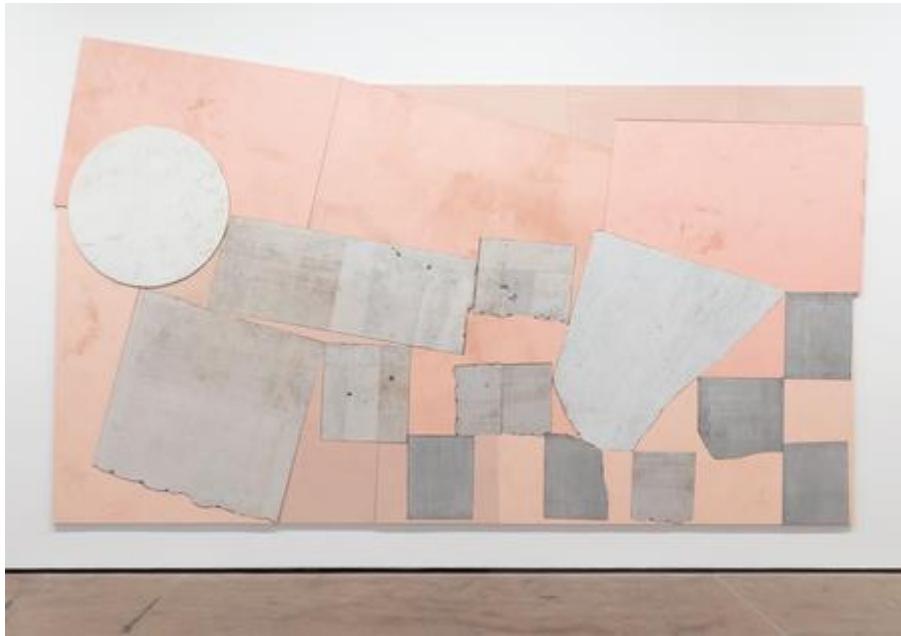


# SEANKELLY

Chamberlain, Colby, "Sam Moyer | Sean Kelly Gallery," *Artforum, Online*, January 3, 2018.

## Sam Moyer SEAN KELLY GALLERY



Sam Moyer, *Cherry blossoms fall on half eaten bun*, 2017, marble, stone, acrylic on canvas mounted on MDF panel, 11' 1" x 18' 6 1/8".

Sam Moyer's first solo show in New York, "Night Moves," took place in 2008 at Cleopatra's, the independent storefront space in Greenpoint founded that year by Bridget Donahue, Bridget Finn, Kate McNamara, and Erin Somerville. There, Moyer presented five "paintings" made of stretcher bars wrapped in moving blankets. Appropriately enough, Moyer had first become interested in the formal qualities of moving blankets—their off-kilter color combinations, the patterns of their stitching—while assisting the artist Mika Tajima, who at the time had taken to displaying paintings in the kind of wooden storage racks typically found in a gallery's back room. In much the same way that Tajima's installations pointed to painting's commercial function as salable inventory, Moyer's ready-to-ship ensemble acknowledged the art handlers responsible for facilitating its transit.

Moyer's thematization of labor seemed to situate her alongside Tajima, R. H. Quaytman, Cheyney Thompson, and other artists engaged in a performative analysis of painting's production and circulation, yet other aspects of "Night Moves" complicated such a reading. Mindful of Cleopatra's sporadic hours, Moyer outfitted the room with a surfeit of fluorescent floor lamps, creating a dramatic play of light and shadow over and around the moving blankets. Without that intervention, the exhibition might have appeared half-finished or purposefully spare, like some storefront variation on Michael Asher's celebrated 1970 Pomona College project. The floor lamps signaled Moyer's desire to generate for her audience a striking visual experience, even (or perhaps especially) for neighborhood passersby, en route to the dry cleaner or Café Grumpy, with little or no interest in how latter-day Conceptualism came to envelop works on canvas.

In the years since, Moyer has stopped working with moving blankets in favor of swaths of fabric that she distresses, bleaches, and dyes herself, and stone that she sources from local marble warehouses. For her recent exhibition at Sean Kelly, "Wide Wake," Moyer mounted hand-painted canvas over irregularly shaped pieces of MDF panel and set them alongside chunks of marble or travertine until, like interlocking jigsaw

pieces, the materials cohered into an image. Nine such works, each approximately ninety-two inches tall by fifty-two inches wide, lined two walls, varying in color and construction but holding to the same rectangular gestalt—save, that is, for the final entry in the series, *Mary's Chair* (all works 2017), in which a black stone jutted out just past the picture plane. Moyer also added a slanting upper edge to the monumental, eighteen-and-a-half-foot-wide *Cherry blossoms fall on half eaten bun*; its downward slope parallels the composition's listing sweep of marble blocks wedged between peach and beige patches of canvas.

To a striking degree, each of the stone-and-fabric compositions in “Wide Wake” betrayed the same competing tendencies that once previously informed “Night Moves.” Up close, the works attest to the labor of their construction: the weight of the stone, the finicky angles cut into the MDF, the successive treatments of the fabric. From a few steps back, however, the concrete properties of these demanding materials dissolve into diaphanous fields of color that recall the spills and veils of Helen Frankenthaler or Morris Louis—albeit with a crucial difference. The juxtaposition of grained stone and stained fabric brings the sensuous illusionism of post-painterly abstraction disconcertingly close to another kind of visual effect, one we might call reverse trompe l’oeil. Whereas trompe l’oeil typically “fools the eye” by passing off a picture as three-dimensional reality, Moyer’s work dematerializes stone into a weightless two-dimensional plane. Either way, with time, the eye registers that it has been deceived. Moyer has achieved an unusual merger of modernism’s focus on forms inside the frame and Conceptualism’s attention to the conditions outside it. The result is a painting, or a “painting,” that is not so much self-critical as it is self-conscious.