

# SEANKELLY

Small, Rachel. "SAM MOYER." *THEGUIDE.ART*. October 2020.

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Photography Aundre Larrow

In Central Park, the jagged grey rock formations that seem to have sprouted out of the ground are among the rare sites that breach Manhattan's all-encompassing built environment. As bluestone, they echo the region's geological foundation.

That suspended existence—in between states of being—has long been a source of intrigue for Sam Moyer. Throughout her career, the Brooklyn-based artist has forged seamless transitions from one medium to the next: going from an initial focus on photography, to making fabric-based paintings, to formulating process-driven work, to experimenting with freestanding sculpture, to redefining the limits of stone and marble. She achieved the latter, namely, with her landmark 2014 show, titled "More Weight," for which she installed a massive marble platform on the ground floor of Rachel Uffner Gallery.

More recently, in a 2017 show at Sean Kelly Gallery, Moyer unveiled a large-scale marble and steel piece dubbed *Both Sides Now* (2017), which, functioning as a sort of room divider in the exhibition space, featured a "portal" through which visitors could pass. Though a simple architectural form, its broader conceptual implications seemed to resonate across the wider arc of her practice.

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When, not long after, Moyer was approached by Public Art Fund's Daniel S. Palmer to devise an original commission for Doris C. Freedman Plaza, which is off the southeast entrance to Central Park, the conceptual applications inherent in the location were hardly lost on the artist. Armed with ample technical know-how from her multidisciplinary ventures, she embarked on what would prove to be her most ambitious project to date.

The fully realized installation—which, titled *Doors for Doris*, debuted in mid-September—reveals a three-part monumental sculpture that emulates revolving doors. On each one, an outer post-and-lintel assembly of rough, grey stone imparts a certain gravitas—and indeed, with it being the same type of bluestone that's found in Central Park's craggy protrusions and New York's bedrock, this seems only fitting.

While, in all three parts, the wings appear suspended, mid-pivot, relative to their central axes, the monolithic partitions are decidedly immobile. All the better to take in the minutiae visible on the marble slabs—which Moyer sourced locally—that embellish the surfaces of the doors.

RACHEL SMALL: *Doors for Doris* came to fruition as this trio of monumental sculptures that are structured to resemble rotating doors. How did the initial idea come about?

SAM MOYER: The curator, Daniel S. Palmer, and I started talking in 2014. Not necessarily about doing a project—just as curator and artist. I had done a show with Rachel Uffner Gallery that had a large marble installation ["More Weight"]. I think the scale of that work kept him thinking about me as a person that could work for a public space, for an outdoor space. I was offered Doris C. Freedman Plaza, which I was excited about, because it's a threshold: It's an entrance between the park and the city and I really thought that was a ripe territory for conceiving of a sculpture. I wanted to make something that was specific to that location and inspired by the materials of the city, because it didn't make sense for me to just design a sculpture and plop it down, which I feel like happens a lot with public art. I wanted it to feel like it came up from the ground.

SMALL: The physical execution of the piece took place in late spring and summer of 2020, as COVID-19 still loomed. How did you stay the course despite these circumstances?

MOYER: We went into overdrive on production over the last few months. I was extremely lucky in that the project was *about* to start production. So, everything was lined up. It had gone too far to cancel. We waited out the first six weeks or so of the lockdown [in New York City]. As soon as construction and industrial production was allowed to start again, we put our masks on and went back to work. We assembled the formal compositions here in my studio. By summer, it was three of us moving stones around on the floor wearing face masks. So, I

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would say the sculpture came together through a combination of luck, trust falls, and people willing to show up.

SMALL: How did you go about sourcing the stone and various marble pieces?

MOYER: The core is bluestone, and that was pulled out of the mountain by the guy whose family has basically owned the mountain for many generations. I believe in trusting people that know material. So, he and I worked collaboratively on choosing those stones. The marble scraps are all remnants and castoffs from production and contractors, interior design, architecture, tabletops—all the ways that this is a utilitarian material. A lot of the pieces are either offcuts or old versions that have been demo-ed or thrown out. The circle pieces in the sculpture are actually tabletops from Paley Park, which is right next to the Public Art Fund offices. For some reason, they have Knoll tables. Anytime the tabletops get damaged, they replace them. And I scored a ton of them. So, that's site-specific, where those were returning to the neighborhood that they had spent years in.

As far as where the stone comes from, that's a big part of the concept of the piece: the global journey, the migration of the stone from all over the world, and how it represents the places it originated from, geologically and culturally. Then there's the more recent history of whatever utilitarian use it had and then was cast off from. It holds the marks of that. So, there's a couple layers of history to the stone.

SMALL: I found it interesting that you mentioned wanting *Doors for Doris* to feel as though it "came up from the ground." It seems apropos that Central Park was designed to uphold 19th century class distinctions, so that foot traffic was confined to dirt paths while people in carriages could access a separate network of thruways connected by the park's bridges. Then you've got revolving doors, and there's this intriguing resonance with this system of passageways in the park.

MOYER: Totally—and maybe a class system, too. Doors are such a metaphor for something being opened and closed. What's more like that—where you're invited, but also shut out—than the class system? America's [equivalent] is "pull yourself up by the bootstraps; you can figure it out if you try hard enough" ... but then, no you can't. It's that slap-kiss relationship—which I think works for immigration, the class system, all of that. I think architecture portrays that in so many ways. That's why I like the idea of the revolving door, because that metaphor is on blast in the constant mechanism in a revolving door versus something that's just open or shut.

SMALL: As a motif in your sculptural practice, you started to structure pronounced openings, not doors, per se, into large-scale, standing pieces around 2015.

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MOYER: It's one of those things you don't even realize. But I think that it is a theme that runs through my work. I have a long-standing drawing series called "Payne"—it's about Payne's Gray, but also windowpanes. For [a show at] 56 Henry, I made a stained-glass window that was all brick. In this "open, close" metaphor, something can be itself [and] at the same time represent polarities of its existence. Something as simple as a door or window, it's also representing entrance, exit, welcoming, refusal—all of these very weighted [concepts]—and not just about physical movement, but about social and emotional movement, too.

So, with these rotating doors being set in stone, it's sort of a flip of the idea of what a rotating door actually is—which is all about the mechanism, all about the movement. Somehow it becomes more about the mechanism of the movement when it's frozen in space. It becomes monumentalized, and it's like the reference to the action makes you think about it more than the actual action of moving it would. Because Doris C. Freedman Plaza is an entrance to the park, I wanted to emphasize the idea of a threshold and an entry. It's about that transition from one space to another. From the buzz of the city, to the oxygenated quality of the park. I think that this transition—physical, emotional, mental—goes hand in hand with passing through something. And to pass through a door that is opening and closing at the same time encapsulates the metaphor.

SMALL: Looking back on the process of realizing *Doors for Doris*, have you honed in on any major takeaways from your experience?

MOYER: I'm still in awe that we accomplished it. [I feel like I've had] dumbfounding luck in that I happened to have a project that's outdoors, right now, at a time when it's so hard to be with people inside. The park was a special space before, because it was a respite from the city. But now, it's really part of people's routine. It's the way that they get out of the house. Something that was really special while installing it was seeing all these people that have their walking routines become so excited, or interested, to have a new thing to look at on this daily ritual—which is so important. If we think back to March or April: that one block that we all let ourselves do daily...and we were like, "Should we be doing this?!" [both laugh]

SMALL: What else have you noticed in terms of how passersby have been reacting or interacting with *Doors for Doris*?

MOYER: I think something that's so incredible about public art is [how], because it belongs to the public, there's no fear or trepidation around it. People really touch it as they walk through the space. People move around the doors and feel the stone and all the many different textures. [Although] it's a material that's part of our everyday life and our world, I don't think we consciously interact with in that way.

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Then there are also kids playing with it because it's a new thing in space. And there are also dogs peeing on it. And there are people that are sad the other sculpture is gone, things like that. That's what is so amazing about public art, it's for the public. They have every right to hate it as much as to love it.

Published: October 7, 2020

*"Sam Moyer: Doors for Doris" is on view at the Doris C. Freedman Plaza at Central Park, New York City through September 12, 2021. This exhibition is curated by Public Art Fund Curator Daniel S. Palmer.*

All clothing the artist's own. White jacket with text: *A DRESS / Address: What They Asked: Christine Blasey Ford, Suzanne McClelland + Alix Pearlstein, Neoprene Trench Coat, Limited Edition, 2019.*



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