

Binlot, Ann. "Artist Sam Moyer creates a personal narrative in abstraction."  
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### **In the wake of her installation at Central Park and exhibition at Sean Kelly Gallery, Sam Moyer speaks to Document about creating art in isolation**

At the corner of Fifth Avenue E. 60th Street, at the Central Park entrance also known as Doris C. Freedman Plaza, stands a triptych of massive sculptures by Chicago-born, Brooklyn-based artist Sam Moyer. Commissioned by [Public Art Fund](#) and on view through September 12, this is the first solo public art installation by the artist, whose works are in the collections of the Whitney Museum of Art, The Morgan Library, and Fondation Louis Vuitton. Moyer chose to name the sculptures *Doors for Doris*, after the late Freedman, the location's namesake who founded Public Art Fund in 1977. Although the enormous panels are abstract in nature, their materials reflect the diverse population of New York. The blue stone that frames each "door" is native to New York, while the marble and stone remnant panels that make up the doors were sourced from around the world.

During the pandemic Moyer produced a body of work that is currently on view until April 24 in the exhibition *Tone* at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York. Puzzle-like geometric sculptures of soapstone, concrete, and beachstone collected from Moyer's Long Island home sit at the front room of the gallery, while in the main room hang a series of works made of slabs of marble that fit perfectly into rectangular plastic-coated canvases. Soothing in nature, the pieces were made during the pandemic, a time when our lives

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were surrounded by an urgent and confusing chaos as countless people around the world fell ill and lost their lives to the deadly virus. Document questioned Moyer about *Tone* and *Doors for Doris*, her meticulous process, and being an abstractionist in a time when identity politics is so prevalent in art.



**Ann Binlot:** *Tone* is described as an exhibition ‘focused on connection, contemplation, and exploring the boundaries of the relationship between maker and material.’ How did you go about collecting the materials for this show? What drew you to the marble, sandstone, concrete, and other materials you used in these works?

**Sam Moyer:** I have been working with found stone remnants since 2014, and all of the stone pieces are cast-offs from architectural projects and renovations in New York. The variation of the material has lent itself to a wide array of works over the past seven years, but this show was made in a more focused, intimate, practice, partly to do with the pandemic and partly to do with coming off of making a huge sculpture for the Public Art Fund. I needed to work closer and zoom in on the poetics of each remnant, finding and defining relationships between the shapes.

**Ann:** You created these works during the pandemic. How did your circumstances affect the way in which you work compared to before the pandemic? Were you able to concentrate more or less?

**Sam:** It was an emotional pendulum. Some days the quiet, slower pace allowed me to go deeper into my practice, sometimes the noise of anxiety made it harder to work. I struggled with making this show, but I managed to make work throughout the entire process. I was, and am, so grateful to have my practice.

**Ann:** Describe the ‘tone’ of your life as you created this body of work.

**Sam:** Externally quiet, internally noisy. The city had a tone of ‘waiting,’ the sound of a pause. It was a New York none of us had seen or heard. As was the case for a lot of

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people, I was able to eventually carve out a nice rhythm that was only possible in stopped time.

**Ann:** In the front room are a number of geometric and biomorphic sculptures composed of materials found around your home in Long Island Sound, including stones you collected along the beach there. You sandblasted elements to 'echo the seawall near your home.' Why did you find the seawall near your home so inspiring?

**Sam:** The seawall is made of concrete that was mixed on the site using the stones from the beach as aggregate. I see the worn away remains as a beautiful time capsule of the specific place; the nature of that location being the action that wore away the material just to reveal itself, like a man-made mirror.



**Ann:** I'm sure you don't want to reveal your entire process, but the marble pieces fit together so well into the canvas. Was that process difficult? What was the physical input required?

**Sam:** It's a process that's been tweaked and honed over many years. It's not difficult but it takes patience and skill and some intuitive math. I think it's great when a simple process, like inlay, which has been used for centuries, can be used in a new context and suddenly be confusing.

**Ann:** The color palette of the exhibition is very soothing. How did you go about selecting the colors that you used?

**Sam:** It's a reaction to the stone, but for this show the palette swings on that same emotional pendulum I was riding. I felt some real moments of faith in humanity and I felt some of the hardest fears right next to each other, within hours of each other. The palette of this show echoes that range, and contrast, and sometimes the sudden jump. I was also thinking a lot about the surface and light of Monet.

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**Ann:** *Doors for Doris* is your first public art commission. You use imported stone with rock that are native to the New York region. Why did you choose to use these materials as a metaphor for the diversity of the denizens who populate the area?

**Sam:** The blue stone that makes up the frame for each work is native to New York, but the marble and stone remnants within the composition are from all over the world. Those pieces of rock represent the actual land of the countries they come from, carrying the minerals of their origin. I was attempting to use the bedrock stone of New York to frame the amazing diverse palette of its population.



**Ann:** Other than that the sculpture is located in The Doris C. Freedman Plaza in Central Park, why did you choose to name the triptych sculpture after Public Art Fund founder, Doris C. Freedman?

**Sam:** I admire Doris Freedman and I believe the legacy of opportunity that she left to New York—of artists' ability to continually share their work with the public—is amazing. I find it important to look at what had to happen, who had to do the groundwork, for an opportunity to be provided, and it felt appropriate to honor her and her vision.

**Ann:** In a time when identity politics is so prevalent in both society and in art, what are the challenges of being an abstract artist at this moment?

**Sam:** I think it's a very exciting moment in art! My work is also my identity. It's not narrative or illustrative, but it's wholly stemming from my internal world. The challenges of being an abstract artist are always present because it's a private system depending on a full trust-fall that you're hitting a 'tone' that others can tap into.

**Ann:** How is your tone of life now? What are you working on at the moment? What is coming up for you in the near future?

**Sam:** The tone is suddenly pretty high pitched. I am right in the middle of planning, and making, a show for my LA gallery, Kayne Griffin, and life is speeding up right alongside that. The door definitely feels open again.

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