

Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Sam Moyer:
More Weight, 2014,
fluorescent lights,
polysilk, dyed fabric,
aluminum frames,
marble; at Rachel
Uffner.

SAM MOYER

Rachel Uffner

Sam Moyer's impressive third solo exhibition at Rachel Uffner advanced the artist's history of creating works that activate a familiar, painterly space on the gallery wall but have much in common with sculpture. Aside from the exhibition's large-scale title installation, *More Weight* (all works 2014), the 19 other pieces fall broadly in line with what Moyer has somewhat reductively called "wall sculptures." Yet this latest offering, while still bearing marks of a developing artist, showed Moyer expanding her own definitions to good effect.

Moyer has said that the work on view was inspired by that shrine to Minimalism and early Conceptualism, Dia:Beacon, whose artists, from Agnes Martin to Michael Heizer, resonate through this cool, crisp, refined show. The series "Breakers III," in the front gallery, presented Moyer at her sleekest: eight glossy wall pieces, each made from some combination of reverse-painted glass, plexiglass and fabric. They all share a title, dimensions (72½ by 54½ inches) and identical brass frames. Within those confines, Moyer applies blackish, watery paint, whether in whirling smears or, more commonly, in horizontal strokes that recall both Gerhard Richter's "Abstract Paintings" and the beaded streaks left by a bad windshield wiper.

In some, fabric layers sandwiched between the glass and plexiglass add an arid texture. They are dyed, bleached and manipulated, often to convincingly resemble the veined, speckled and stratified surfaces of stone, acquiring a kind of weight-by-association. It's a gorgeous technique, but its usefulness has limits. Though subtle and integrated in most "Breakers III" pieces, the optical illusion in two of them feels overdone—too crucial to their *raison d'être*.

The 11 unframed works upstairs might have succumbed to such gimmickry if they hadn't been so fascinating otherwise.

Each piece contiguously marries an irregular slab of castaway stone to a canvas dyed to mimic stone. From a distance, stone and canvas are easily confounded, teasing one's expectations regarding texture, temperature and weight. On one level, it's another neat trick. But tricks fatigue, and the works' power lay less in some clever juxtaposition than in the physical beauty of the materials and how they fit together. With pieces like *Mayerhoff* and *From California*, I felt most engaged from up close, illusions thus dispelled, inspecting the seams where roughly cut or broken stone edges forced Moyer's hand in creating her equally irregular canvas complements.

Moyer's juxtapositions found apotheosis in the title piece, installed downstairs in the rear gallery: a thick, flat, 10-by-24-foot marble slab placed on the ground, echoed overhead by a parallel and slightly larger ceiling panel of stone-impersonating dyed fabric backlit by fluorescent lights. Its mordant title, *More Weight*, refers to an infamous episode of the Salem Witch Trials, in which a man named Giles Corey was placed under a wooden platform loaded with heavy stones in an attempt to extract a plea, ultimately killing him. Literally *pressed* for a response, his was "more weight."

Visitors were encouraged to walk atop the marble stage and, hence, beneath the hovering canvas. To stand poised between those two planes was to feel one's self pulled by opposing forces, acutely aware of one's own body weight as something both rooted and light. I thought of the wary compulsion provoked by Richard Serra's sculptures, so impossibly elegant and so dangerously heavy. Serra's *Delineator* (1974-75) is Moyer's obvious formal reference, comprising two similarly posed steel plates. But I couldn't help suspect a sly nod to his *Sculpture No. 3*, which did, in fact, crush someone to death in 1971. Weighty stuff, indeed.

—Austin Considine