

Calling Out of Context

Stripped of their intended functionality, the raw materials Sam Moyer uses to make her art are free to command our attention.

You wouldn't guess it from experiencing her art, but Sam Moyer admits to being a little goofy. Her lighthearted demeanor is reflected in her work; it lets her compartmentalize the multitudes within her Self.

"The work is always a safe place for me to be as serious as I wanna be," Moyer says. "Which is scary for me, you know. It can be scary to be serious."

Moyer's work may be serious, but it's anything but stagnant. Her chosen medium has evolved over the years, moving from photography to paintings to sculpture. Much of her recent work is centered around massive slabs of marble, MDF and epoxies, piecing together unmodified scraps to create new structures free of the context of their raw materials. She most recently had a group show curated by Jessica Stockholder at Kavi Gupta in Chicago, and next spring she expects to have her second solo show with her gallerist Rachel Uffner in New York. It's a life that seems almost inevitable, when you consider her upbringing.

Moyer grew up in a family of artists. Her mother was a painter who later became a shrink. Dad works in the movies as a gaffer, part craftsman and part artist, designing lighting scenarios to support any given concept. "He kind of rides the line between being this union worker and being a creative on set," Moyer says. The duality of his blue-collar arts job informs her idea of "work" to this day.

"I think that that propelled my idea of labor a lot," she explains, "that blue collar quality of going to work and getting to work."

But before she got to work, Moyer went to school. She matriculated at Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C., in the fall of 2001 to study photography. When the Pentagon was attacked on September 11, her entire photojournalism class ran out amidst the chaos to get photos. That was all it took to make her realize that reportage wasn't for her.

Moyer was still very interested in the "essential qualities of photography," however: the idea of light, printing, and the darkroom practice. She understood that by learning the rules and limitations of the medium, she could find the way she wanted to express herself.

"I eventually became just interested in studying fine art because I wanted to figure out how to support ideas, as opposed to having it be purely based on a craft," she explains. "It was learning the craft to support the idea."

After earning her MFA from Yale School of Art in 2007, Moyer relocated to New York City where she found work as an art handler. Every day, she wrapped art works in haphazardly stitched-together pieces of cloth, the awkward shapes and textures inspiring her to reimagine the fabric free of the context of its function. The works she made, "Night Moves," were well-received, and her fine-art practice was born in earnest. It was the first time that she pivoted her practice, from two-dimensional photographs into the three-dimensional space. It would not be the last.

Moyer has always been a visual artist, but her disciplines are perpetually evolving. She says that after a while, she noticed people projecting their own idea of what the patterns in her works represented or mimicked. So she began to consider what might occur if she worked with a material whose patterns were less open to interpretation. Her marble works are arguably her most striking to date; the stone is fabricated for commercial use, and Moyer does not typically make alterations. The shimmering slabs of polished rock appear much more lively in her works than they ever would as a suburban countertop. But it's clear where the patterns came from—the earth itself.

Moyer's transition to marble was quite natural. While preparing her exhibition space at Art Basel Miami Beach in 2012, she decided that the work required a proper venue. So she created a marble bench to complement the paintings on view. "I feel like I'm always playing curator a little bit with my own work," she says. "I tend to make things for the environment that they're going into. I've always appreciated the idea of 'Here's a place to sit and take your time, if you want to.' Like the benches in front of the Chagall Windows in Chicago. It's an invitation. And that relationship can be direct."

Those first marble benches she created were quite literally tied to the works she was exhibiting—a theater built to complement the textures of the work they showcased. She looked for the patterns in the paintings as she sorted through pieces of stone, selecting ones that matched. The first benches were complementary, but she's been deviating from that standard ever since.

She developed a relationship with the people at a marble fabricator warehouse she frequents, to the point where they now give her a heads-up and put aside choice pieces they think she might like. Because she mostly



"SAM MOYER: MORE WEIGHT"
Installation view
April 26 - June 8, 2014
Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

Artwork SAM MOYER
Words MATTHEW ISMAEL RUIZ



Above:
HOUDINI
2015
Bronze and marble
92 x 65 x 24 inches (233.7 x 165.1 x 70 cm)

Opposite page, above:
ME & WOLFIE
2015
Marble and dyed canvas mounted to MDF
78 x 98 inches (198.1 x 248.9 cm)

Opposite page, below:
UNTITLED
2015
Marble and dyed canvas mounted to MDF
66 x 49 x 1 1/4 inches (167.6 x 124.5 x 3.2 cm)





"SAM MOYER"
Installation view
December 6-9, 2012
NADA Miami Beach

"I eventually became just interested in studying fine art because I wanted to figure out how to support ideas, as opposed to having it be purely based on a craft... It [became about] learning the craft to support the idea."

SAM MOYER

tries "to keep the pieces in their original form," her selection criteria is crucial to her process. All the marble pieces are scraps from renovations, initially fabricated to fit in someone's kitchen, mantle, floor, whatever. By removing them from their original context, Moyer seeks to find their true identity.

"All that stone was slotted to be very functional, whether that's a countertop or a table or whatever it is," she says. "To take those scraps and remove them and kind of elevate them from what they are, have them purely be formal, just be about their shape and their color and their texture ... [it's about] taking something that once had a function and removing that so that it can just be itself to a certain degree."

While the idea of finding the identity of an inanimate piece of stone ventures into the realm of the absurd, Moyer sees things differently. In her view, only when the object is stripped of its function can we truly take it seriously.

"The functionality becomes a higher thing, where we have to project our own agenda onto it," she says. "[The stone] is no longer literally serving the purpose of holding something or supporting something. All it can hold and support is our attention, and maybe that's more important."

Moyer can spend five minutes or five months working on a piece; sometimes works in progress can find themselves moving around to different corners of her expansive studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She's been in the space for about a year but has always bounced around to different locations, most of which were not so large. And as her success has grown, so have her workspaces, and in turn, the size of her works. The

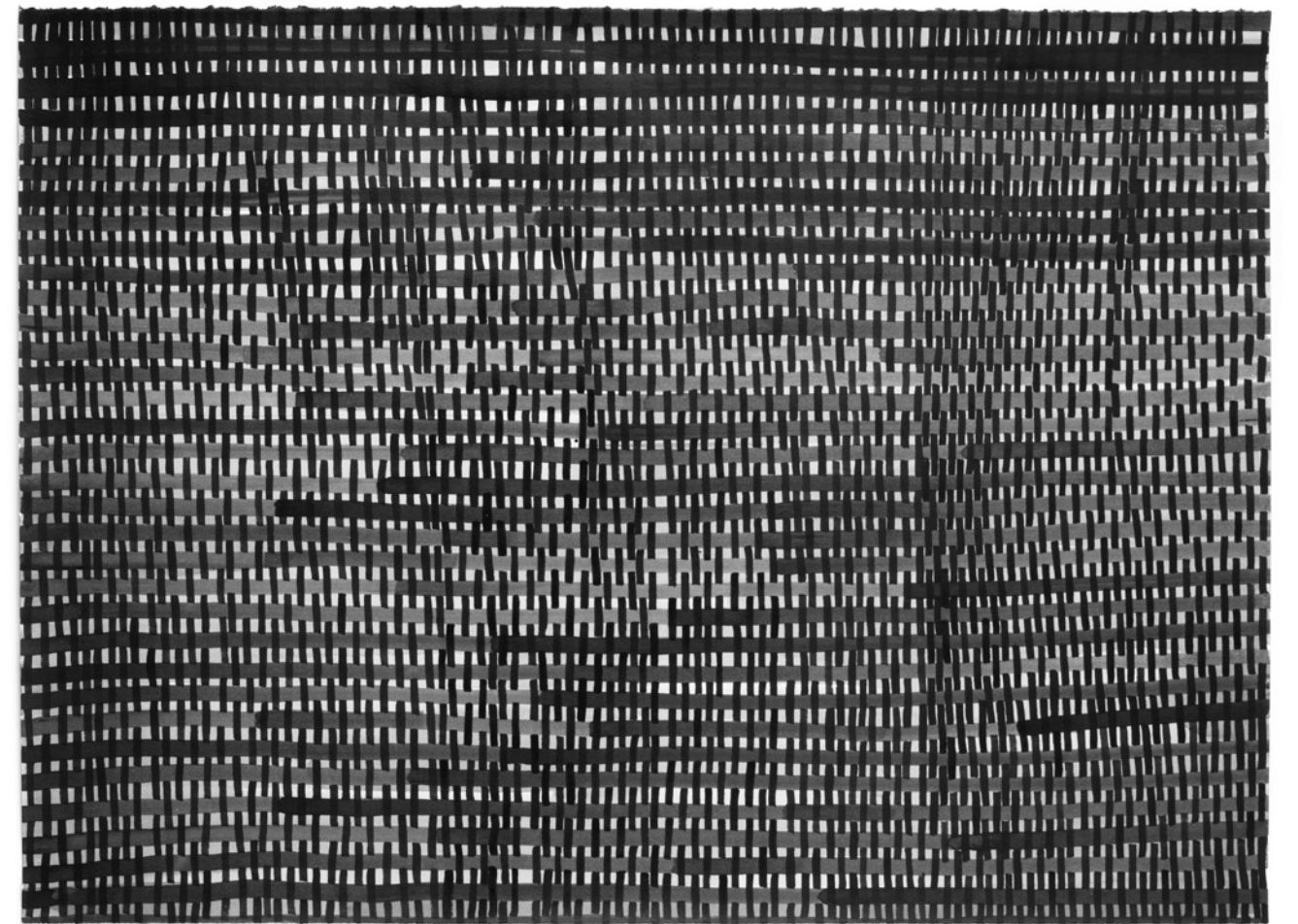
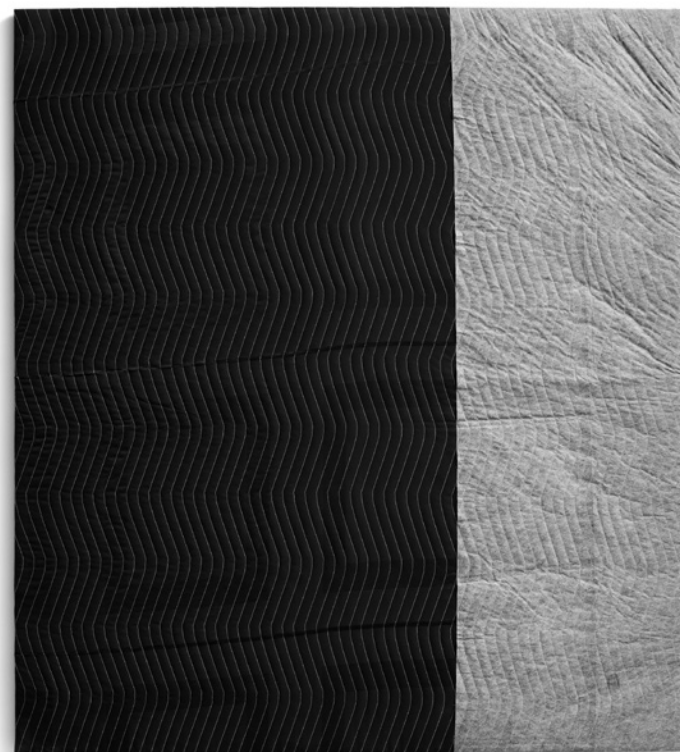
centerpiece of her breakout solo show at Rachel Uffner, "More Weight," is nothing if not massive. "I tend to fill whatever space I'm in," she admits.

Despite her expanding practice, she still uses boundaries to contain her work. She creates rules, such as not cutting the pieces of marble, and uses them to challenge herself to create within that structure. But the limits she places on herself are there for her to use and disregard at her pleasure. When they cease to work for her, she breaks them.

"I'm reacting to what's in front of me and thinking about that reaction, and letting it move on to the next step," she says. It's clear that her practice is a journey, something that she shapes but allows to exist in flux. "In reacting to the environment, I ended up wanting to engage with it more, engage more with architecture and space and not have it necessarily be my specific point of view and have it be something people can walk up to and unpack their own baggage and engage with on their own."

As an artist, Moyer has progressed through several distinct periods, working with various mediums. Whether acrylic on wood or ink on paper, glass paint on Plexiglas or printed vinyl on aluminum, or simply slabs of marble or bronze, are all carefully considered. The evolution of her practice is a lifelong odyssey, spurred by a creative impulse that refuses to stand still. She's terrified of plateauing, so she simply doesn't.

"If you do things a bunch of times in a row, you start to yearn to do something else," she says, "so listening to what that is is what kind of guides you to the next thing, right?"



Opposite page, above:
UNTITLED (WOOD DRAWING) I
2011
Pine 1" x 2" lumber, acrylic paint
60 x 48 inches (152.4 x 121.9 cm)

Opposite page, below:
NIGHT MOVES
2009
Moving blanket, wood
66 x 60 inches (167.6 x 152.4 cm)

Above:
CLOSE SCREEN
2011
India ink on paper
22 x 30 inches (55.9 x 76.2 cm)

All images courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York.