

# rachel uffner

## the painted word

March 24, 2012

### Sam Moyer at Rachel Uffner Gallery

In the small space of Rachel Uffner gallery, Sam Moyer's dark and moody paintings, which in some cases are almost as large as the walls on which they hang, are imposing. Although extended off the wall by the wooden panels on which they are mounted, the paintings' ripply gray surfaces confront the viewer less as three-dimensional objects intruding on his or her space than as deep voids into which he or she might fall if not quite careful. Such a risk, along with the precarious feeling it engenders, promote a slowed-down pace of viewing that corresponds to the concept evoked by the exhibition's title, "Slack Tide." This phenomenon refers to the short period of time, caused by the meeting of the incoming and outgoing tides, when a body of water approaches a balance in tidal movement and becomes almost still.



Sam Moyer, "The Drink," 2012. Ink on canvas mounted to wood panel, 82" x 120".



Vija Celmins, "Ocean with Cross I," 2005. Lithograph on paper. Image courtesy C4 Gallery.

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The title's reference to water, and particularly the ocean, is apt. For all their abstract resemblances – other reviewers have proposed lunar landscapes and crumpled bedsheets – the paintings most often recall large-scale, black-and-white photographs of the sea. Moyer would seem to think so too, given her choice of titles such as “The Drink” and “Slackliner,” which respectively suggest the ocean's imposing depth and dynamism. The works are what might have resulted had Wade Guyton reproduced a picture of one of Vija Celmins's meticulous seascapes on his inkjet printer. Yet they are not photographs, or even reproductions of photographs. Nor are they printed, like the artist's earlier experiments with Xerox facsimiles. To produce these new paintings, Moyer first dyes pieces of raw canvas in India ink, then allows the fabric to dry in wrinkles and folds. Once set, the artist stretches the canvas out, draws line and patterns (usually stripes) with bleach, and finally irons it onto the panel. This choice of material, combined with the process to which it is subjected, gives the finished paintings a soft focus and inviting tactility unachievable in photographs printed on paper.



Wade Guyton, "Untitled," 2007. Epson UltraChrome inkjet on linen. Image courtesy Gio Marconi.



Sam Moyer, "SlackLiner III," 2011. Ink and bleach on canvas mounted to wood panel, 82" x 64".

The gallery's press release positions Moyer's paintings in “the liminal space between the two- and three-dimensional” and places them in the lineage of 1960's Minimalism and its transgressions of the boundaries between painting and sculpture. Yet, when standing in front of one of Moyer's immense canvasses, their dimension seems to be directed more inward than outward. Particularly in light of their oceanic titles, the paintings present the sort of infinite, illusionistic space ironically created by utter flatness that was most famously achieved by Frank Stella in his 1950s “Black Paintings,” which did not so much belong to Minimalism as anticipate it. At the same time, the paintings' potentially and even frightening enterable space can be related back to the infinite abysses of Abstract Expressionism. In this context, we might understand their deepness as more of a metaphysical depth than a physical one. Such an approach lets the artist's process come to the fore, which, although not entirely innovative, helps give her work another form of depth, namely a conceptual one. While certainly aesthetically impressive from the shore, it is only by diving into Moyer's works that one can approach the profundity hidden below their surfaces.

*“Slack Tide” is up at Rachel Uffner Gallery from March 4 to April 22, 2012. Images courtesy Rachel Uffner Gallery.*