KATY MORAN

STUART SHAVE / MODERN ART- LONDON

KATY MORAN, Pillow Drinker, 2009. Acrylic, oil pastel and collage on canvas, 38 x 46 cm. Courtesy Stuart Shave / Modern Art, London.

Katy Moran's small paintings at first look like aged found objects, gestural semi-abstractions produced sometime in the '60s. She uses techniques of erasure that mimic the effects of damage and deterioration. Voluptuous acrylic brushstrokes are applied, allowed to dry, and then partially removed with solvents and abrasion. There is a penchant for glossy grounds in a range of soiled cream shades that resemble the color of faded institutional wall paint. Paradoxically, it is the deceptive appearance of an outdated idiom that makes Moran's work conform to the post modern currents of recent painting, in which Tomma Abts reenlivens Suprematist conventions and Sergej Jensen makes colorfield stain paintings, torn and shabby, as though they actually hailed from the '60s. New is the inclusion of collaged elements. *Lady bear with a back full of hair* (2009) incorporates printed fragments of cartoon imagery, as if to alert us to how Moran's flamboyant painterly gestures themselves function as cartoonish symbols – sometimes almost figurative – which make fun of their own expressionistic flourish. The generated intricate details defy analysis: tiny windows through which we peer into an imaginary world. *Muffin Power* (2009) gathers into a swirling Baroque space, with scraps of illustration cast randomly into the mix as though they were shredded in the heat of the process.

Mark Prince

KATY MORAN

TATE ST IVES
Summer 2009

Sara Hughes

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATY MORAN

Sara Hughes

Sara Hughes
Can we talk about the particular focus of your show at Tate St Ives? It kind of defines a moment, doesn't it?

Katy Moran
Yes, it comprises the diptychs, triptychs and single paintings which I have made since the show at Tony Meier Gallery in San Francisco late last year (2008).

SH When you are making your paintings, there is usually an implicit dialogue between them as an idea unfolds, which comprises the series or 'batch' of works. I am wondering if we are witnessing a transition into a new batch here, or whether it's more than that?

KM When I start painting after a show like San Francisco, once everything has left the studio, it's always the start of something else – even if it is not a conscious thing. The fact that the studio is bare forces me to begin again.

SH So does it set off a linear progression across the paintings, as you make every work in relation to one other?

KM Kind of, but as soon as I get going I always put the works up on the wall, and I am looking at them all together to see how they fit as a group. It's a very natural thing, I can't help it; like someone co-ordinating an outfit – whatever they might put on, they would be thinking about each choice in relation to whatever else they'd be wearing. I suppose that's why just recently they have begun to form triptychs or diptychs. So it's really more like a conversation, because I am working on three or four at a time. I might even grab some of the dead canvases in the studio as

well. They could be really old things – there is no specific loyalty to or focus on anyone canvas at anyone time.

SH So you don't begin with any fixed outcome in mind?

KM No, because sometimes I start out and I have an idea of what I am going to do, but it never works out that way. It's almost like scratching around for something to get it going and during this process I can be all over the place.

SH So, in relation to several works in the show, including *Travelling Mercy* 2008, *Jaguar Nights* 2008, *Short Legs I'm Coming* 2008 and *Rinky's* 2008, can you talk a bit about how your painterly language has evolved? They all seem to share this unerring dynamism at the centre of the canvas that is animating a series of associated forms, but they are less intense, looser perhaps than works I have seen before. The image in general feels pared down.

KM Yes, when you say pared down there are a few, for example in *Short Legs, I'm Coming* and *Travelling Mercy*, where I have washed off some of the paint. With these I found myself painting on the canvas and each time it just seemed there was too much build up, too much paint on there. I just wanted to get rid of it. So I'd let it dry partially and then wash it off. Partly so I could lose control of the image, see what might come from losing half the paint and keeping half the paint.

SH There is a lovely tension between chance and order there, but it also invokes a strong aspect of time. Melissa Gronlund in her essay for your exhibition at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima) last

Overleaf: *Short legs...I'm coming* (Detail) 2008
and overleaf: *Short legs I'm coming* 2008
Acrylic and oil pastel on canvas and wood panel in 3 parts
38 x 46cm 51 x 27.7cm 46 x 38cm
Photo: Todd White

year, discussed the notion of how material narratives are perhaps embedded in the layers of your paintings and how this encapsulates both a sense of depth and time. Time compressed or frozen. She also talked about you working on them in one session. Do you still do this?

KM Well, now I have started bringing in old works, I can't really say I do anymore. In *Travelling Mercy*, the one in the white frame was actually an old painting that I found, and I liked the surface and just painted on top of it. I am beginning to think again about things, paintings I had rejected, and how they might be reused.

SH It's a bit like employing your own works as ready-mades or found objects. You've talked to me before about that sense of divorce you sometimes feel from older work, and how they feel like they've been made by someone else or at least represent a version of yourself that you've become unfamiliar with. With that distance, I guess you begin to view them again more objectively rather than subjectively?

KM Yes, you come across them with new eyes because you have no attachment. But it's also helped by the frames I've started adding as well. I think that using the frames like a picture finder, going along and creating a new picture by isolating certain aspects, helps me to see something completely different, something that I couldn't see before because I only saw this whole image restricted by the edge of the canvas. Cropping and collaging allows me to lose that restriction. I can surprise myself in this way and find new pictures.

SH And you are using found frames to do this?

Rinkys 2008
Acrylic on wood panel
40x50x3.5cm
Courtesy of Stuart Shave
Photo; Todd White

KM Yes, although I found a bit of wood the other day that I am taking to the framers to have made into a frame, but normally I just find them. I try to accrue them in the studio, so I can just pull them in and see if they work or not. But as I say they are part of the process, not just stuck on at the end.

SH And they have a particular style about them, a strong period aesthetic in themselves – like the Hessian frame on *Travelling Mercy* that looks as if it's been teleported from the 1970s; and that wonderful frame on *Jaguar Nights* with the metallic cigarbox corners and chunky chain. Was that an object that you painted over or did you reuse that frame from somewhere else? Does it have a personal history?

KM No, it was from Goldbourne Road Market which is just round the corner from the studio. It is quite bizarre. But I love all that kitsch crap that you find in markets – I do have to restrain myself a bit. The Hessian frame had been in the studio for ages, I don't even know where it came from. I just grabbed it one day to isolate the painting.

SH They have a distinctly domestic feel about them. When you are choosing those frames, are you thinking about what they might signify or what else they might bring to the work? How they might set your painting off?

KM To be honest, I am not specifically going round looking for these things, I just seem to acquire them; and I am going on gut instinct, what feels right. But I am playing with taste I suppose, an interest and amusement in peoples' taste: which does make me think about domestic spaces and what people

put in them and why. And then I am thinking about how that relates to contemporary painting and style now.

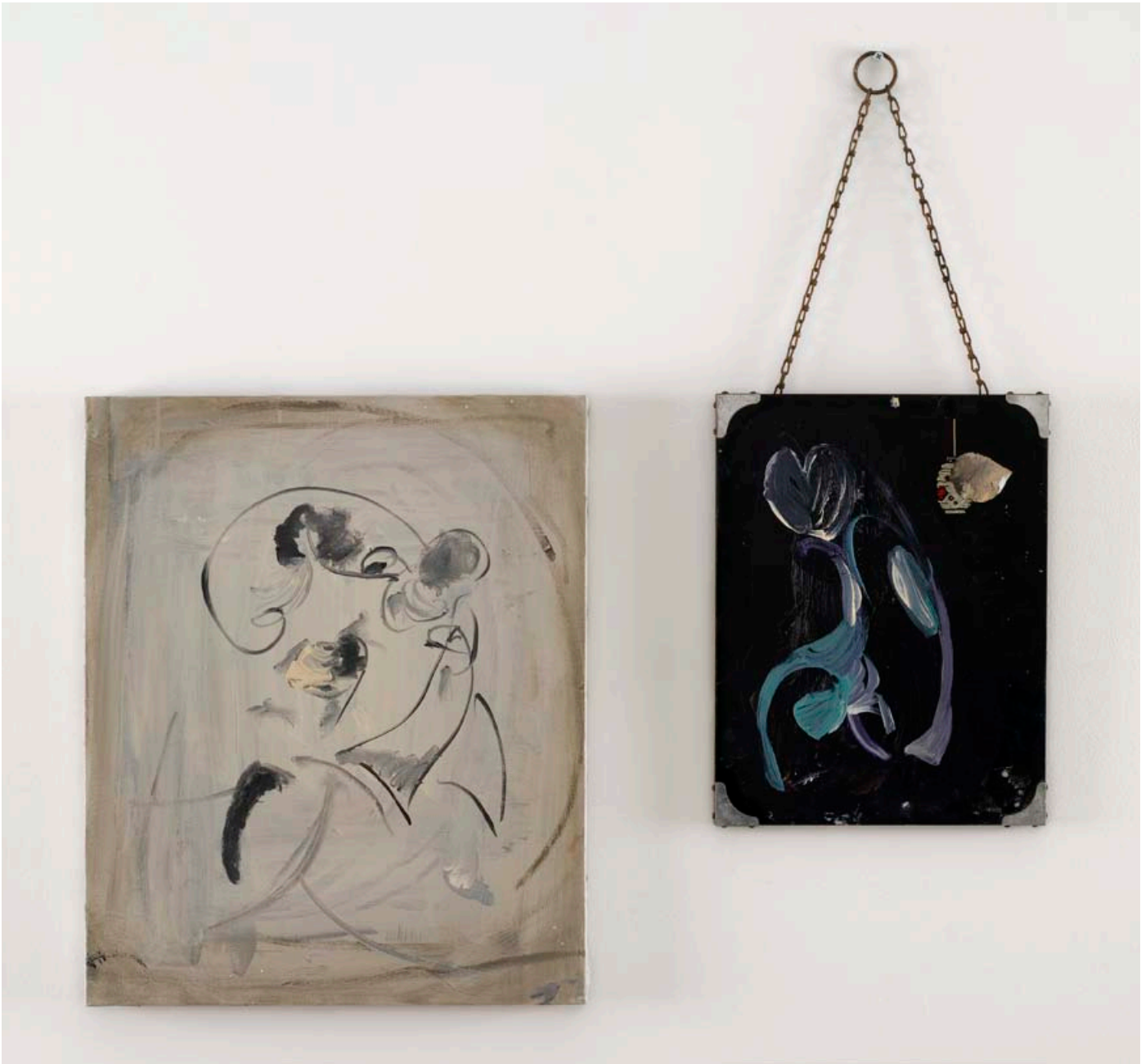
SH I like the way that in *Short Legs*, the edge of the central canvas mimics the frame, almost affirming the implicit role of the frame in the work. But I notice in the other parts of this work - and some of your other unframed canvases - you have intimated or painted frames around the central activity. Is this emerging need to frame a device to enclose the central image, to stop it from shooting off the edge of the canvas, or are you perhaps defining an imagined, subconscious world from the real?

KM I didn't consciously think about it, I just found myself doing it. It's more about the fact that I like aged stuff. Like paper that's got damp or bleached in the middle so the edges are all yellow. I love that kind of aesthetic, that slightly weathered, dirty or tarnished look. But maybe without knowing it, it was a way of framing that central activity. It's instinctive, it seemed right to do on some of them and I don't question it.

SH You quite often talk about 'rightness' in the process of making. If we go back to your working process, you have mentioned that you always take the material as a starting point and let things evolve. I am interested in that journey that takes you to a point of resolve and what it is that suggests that moment to you? With such an intuitive relay of decisions, how do you know when you've got what you are looking for?

KM It takes time. Often it really surprises me and I just don't know what to make of it. But something makes me stop and think 'could this be interesting?' Then I look at it

Travelling Mercy (Detail) 2009
Acrylic on canvas in 3 parts with found frames
44.5 x 40cm, 38 x 46cm, 55.5 x 46.5cm. This part 44.5 x40cm
Courtesy: Stuart Shave/Modern Art Andrea Rosen Gallery and Anthony Meier Fine Arts.
Photo: Todd White



compared to the other paintings that I have on the wall, things I feel I know already and that I think are working. You just have to sit it out. I can make something and feel I know it works straight away, but more often than not it takes time for me to get used to it. It's not a bad thing; you can surprise yourself when you have made something that wasn't contrived or planned, even if it wasn't really what you thought you were making - it can be better because of that.

SH So is it atmosphere, sensation or form that preoccupies you?

KM Sensation is the word or idea that resonates with me most, although I think I am striving for, or concerned with, all three. I think about marks which to me seem either dead or alive. When paint is alive and has energy, it conveys through sensation. When paint behaves in an illustrational way, like a photograph or a graphic, it's understood intellectually, the brain registers a figurative image of something and then it moves on to the way the paint has been put on the canvas. Painting in terms of sensation means that the painting is felt first and then the brain slowly leaks back to the figurative image.

SH I recall you described your painting as on the 'cusp' of abstraction and figuration. Is there consistently something emergent within them?

KM Well, I always see my paintings as figurative, and most of the time that's when they work for me, when I see something in them. And they're quite personal I suppose - characters that I recognise or things that feel right to me. But recently it's changed somewhat. Whereas previously I have used a found image as a guide or a

Previous Page: *Jaguar Nights* 2008
Acrylic on canvas and board in 2 parts
46 × 38cm
32.7 × 252cm
Private Collection
Photo: Todd White

source of reference, I don't do that so much any more. I'm just working from my head. I still look at a lot of stuff in books, magazines and I still take a lot of pictures on my phone, but sometimes I find I have to put them away because they don't help me. I have got to just scout around for the idea.

SH What sort of things are you looking at initially, painting?

KM Recently less so, I am getting more interested in sculpture and photography and other media. Although I have been looking at Max Ernst quite a lot but anything and everything, I tend to flit from thing to thing.

SH It was Ernst's collage painting Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale 1924 that came to mind when looking at the framing in Short Legs, you know the way that the work oscillates between image and object.

KM Yes, but I am thinking more about collage at the moment because I am interested in how I have been putting things together. Just recently I have been feeling really restricted by the canvas and thinking, 'so I am going to get another one of those to fill' and. I am beginning to question why I would do that – rather than putting things together in a collaged way – which has surprised me. A while ago I wouldn't have thought like that, I just wanted to paint on canvas.

SH Do you think experimenting with the found objects – the frames – has helped to open up those possibilities?

KM Definitely. The other week I got a huge piece of canvas that was a printed table cloth and I just started

painting on it. And I began repeatedly cutting it down until the piece I finished with was a twentieth of the original size. It sounds a bit mad, but working and thinking about the final painting's size would have only restricted me. It would have made things contrived because I would try to make it work as a successful painting of that size. The more I think like that, the less it's going to happen. So zooming in on a piece and turning it into something else was helpful to me.

SH Previously you were employing strategies to cover the whole canvas and it was a purely additive process, and now you are taking away

KM I have washed off paint before to reuse a canvas, but I'd wash it all off so I could paint a ground again. But I was thinking about surface when I was looking at the Ben Nicholson show (at Tate St Ives) and his work is all about the surface, this weathered surface that I really like. One of the texts suggested a melancholy associated with the passing of time, the fact that nothing stays new, which is interesting in a way. But I also like the way mistakes can be left on the surface, stains and marks that you can use.

SH Because you like the process to be visible?

KM Yes, but not b~cause I have a particular belief in that; but from an aesthetic point of view those accidents can turn out to be the best things. That drip (or hole or flaw) that lands in just the right place can harmonise everything, I mean I have a belief in seeing painting for what it is, that it's not a deception.

SH There's a great drip in the right-hand painting of *Short Legs*, which

becomes a stop that stabilises the action of these gyrating forms going on underneath. Just looking across this series of new works, I wondered if you could identify a recurring form that is reiterated in these works, do you see it and do you ever come back to a particular form?

KM I do see figures repeated in them that mean something to me, but it's a personal thing. I see definite things in them - faces, though they are not necessarily human, or creatures in fragmented maps or a landscape perhaps - and there is often a humour there and an oddness, but it's in a different language.

SH That uncertainty is what makes them so compelling, and this is often compounded by the obscurity of their titles, which have an equally witty edge to them. To me they feel like overheard punch lines or partial aphorisms which don't quite reveal themselves. Do you want to say anything about them?

KM That's true. I guess they are pieced together from things I come across or pick up on a daily basis, in conversation or newspaper headlines. *Travelling Mercy* came from a taxi company I use. One of the drivers had a mobile hanging in the front of his car and it said something like "Dear Lord, grant us travelling mercy". I just thought it was really bizarre and it stuck with me. For me it captures that time and it is a way for me to log the work, or where I was, or what happened.

SH I like the way you can't help bringing your own baggage to them, because they are so open-ended. *Rinky's* evokes for me one of those dingy, local nightclubs I frequented as a teenager, where you are not

Overleaf: *Travelling Mercy* 2009
Acrylic on canvas in 3 parts with found frames
44.5 x 40cm. 38 x 46cm, 55.5 x 46.5cm
Courtesy: Stuart Shave/Modern Art, Andrea Rosen Gallery and Anthony Meier Fine Arts.
Photo: Todd White

sure if it is the beer or the plastic glass that's cloudy! I guess no end of stories can unfold from them.

KM Yes, that's what I'm interested in, rather than a literal painting and a literal title that closes something down.

SH It's interesting too, how you are collating words and experiences in the same way you filter and absorb visual materials. Going back to what currently feeds your visual language, I was also wondering whether you are referencing or looking at non-Western sources, either through specific imagery or through your experiences of living in London?

KM That reminds me that a little while ago I was looking at calligraphy and Middle Eastern script. But these things just set me off, because I was thinking about the painted mark and then about line and script. I often just Google ideas to see where that takes me. But more recently I have been interested in plotting points on the canvas – looking at Gordon Matta-Clark as a way to make a painting – and in charts and medical diagrams, but nothing intentionally comes through, and I don't stick with an idea if I don't use it. I just move along.

SH Your work is progressively more monochrome isn't it?

KM, In the past I have spent many hours mixing the right shades of paint for a work, but that was when I had a piece of source or reference material that I was using as a starting point and I would use it as a guide to mix my palette. Since I am not using anyone image or reference material at the moment, I just grab certain colours that I feel an affinity to at that moment. I tend not to mix

Previous Page: *Travelling Mercy* (Detail) 2009
Acrylic on canvas in 3 parts with found frames
44.5 x 40cm, 38 x 46cm, 55.5 x 46.5cm. This part 38 x46cm
Courtesy: Stuart Shave/Modern Art, Andrea Rosen Gallery and Anthony Meier Fine Arts.
Photo: Todd White

particular shades and would rather use the paint straight from the tubes. Sometimes I may have an idea about a particular palette, say black, white, greys - or something I have seen may influence me to try certain colours together. I have a particular loyalty to 'Titan Buff' which has lasted quite a while. Often I feel so impatient I will just grab anything, almost like it's not about the colour, instead it's the type and the way that the marks are made that's important. There is an inbuilt colour sense that always comes into play once you start working anyway.

SH And you continue to use acrylic paint?

KM I do, but in these latest works I have started using oil pastel to see how the two could work together. I tend to draw with the oil pastel first and then use the paint on top.

SH You don't make drawings in advance, though.

KM No, never. I'm worried they might drain the paintings of their energy in someway.

SH Do you think working flat on the floor and working over the top of the paintings contributes to that energy? Are you more cognitively connected to the image by working on the canvas that way?

KM It wasn't a choice thing. I have a bad back so I have had to work in that way. However you can get away with a lot more; the paint can be runnier for example. It also allows me to move canvases around more easily. Constantly turning things upside down or on their side to view them from different angles is another way to detach yourself and to see marks in a new way. It gives you other possibilities.

SH And the works can have a more informal association with one another?

KM Yes but I have become very clear about the way the works are grouped together, the specific order and the nature of the spaces between. With Travelling Mercy I would always display it like that, that's the way it has to work together. It's a way, perhaps, of having control over the work as it is going out in the world. I have often thought the reading of the singular pieces might get confused, depending on what they are placed next to; I guess grouping two or three of them in a specific format, no matter what sits around it, still allows me to make that definite representation. It can't be misconstrued so easily.

SH Do you ever think that now you are moving away from specific external references, and you are internalising your painterly language, could it ever become purely abstract? Actually, I wonder if it is possible to make an abstract painting anymore, because even the purest abstract painting carries so much history with it, maybe it can only be an appropriation in its myriad of guises?

KM It's a consideration with all painting, surely? But no, I don't ever think about purely abstract painting. I can't help but see objects, images, figuration in everything I do.

If we don't have it, you don't need it 2009
Acrylic on canvas
38cm x 46cm
Courtesy Stuart Shave/Modern Art
Photo: Todd White

Katy Moran was born in 1975 in Stockport. She received her MA in painting from the Royal College of Art. She has had solo exhibitions in London (Stuart Shave/Modern Art), New York (Andrea Rosen Gallery), San Francisco (Anthony Meier Fine Art) and MIMA (Middlesbrough). Her work has also featured in groups shows at Tate Britain (London) and Gagosian Gallery (New York). She lives and works in London.

Sara Hughes is a Collections and Exhibitions Curator at Tate St Ives. She has developed various Modern and contemporary projects in the last 6 years and has managed the Artists Residency programme for the gallery since its inception in 2003.

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Katy Moran

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

Katy Moran's solo debut at Andrea Rosen Gallery proved as "riveting" as the press release trumpeted, despite the fact that nobody could quite agree on what her abstract paintings are about, where they come from, or what they finally depict. Brushed and smeared in a romantic palette of muted olives and ochres, supported by fleshy peach or flecked with vital red, and relieved by occasional daubs of turquoise and crisp neutrals, Moran's diminutive, domestic-size canvases can read as landscapes, seascapes, portraits, or anything but. Indeed, they seemingly bait critical appraisal while embarrassing easy circumscription, bringing to mind nothing so much as Henry James's "The Figure in the Carpet" (1896) and its thematization of hermeneutics. Variously described as something that critics missed, a secret, a trick, and, most famously, "a complex figure in a Persian carpet," the enigmatic import of protagonist Hugh Vereker's own novel structures James's narrative. The story's meaning thereby deferred and ultimately refused, it becomes a highbrow caper in which what is pursued is none other than signification itself.

In a similar manner, Moran's scumbled, nervy compositions suggest potential referentiality without making a "complex figure" patent. For though Moran culls her source images from the Internet, design magazines, snapshots, and elsewhere, she also inverts them and, with great gusto, pushes them into messes of pigment whose lush materiality plays against the potentially legible details that uncannily emerge. Moran actually considers a painting finished only when she can recognize some figurative element in the colors and shapes therein; they remain oddly intimate for reasons that are elusive. Coy titles aid in this process: *Nature Boy*, 2007; *Smoker's Junction*, 2007; *Wasabi without Tears*, 2007; *Shycat*, 2008, and *Lenny K*, 2008. So, too, of course, do the works themselves, as Moran's blurred canvases hiccup signs, whether a watery vista enveloped in atmospheric haze in *Lucas*, 2007, or the plume of purple, brown, cranberry, putty, and emerald feathers in *Pecking Order*, 2008. Most paintings here evince some such hook and resonate across the installation. *Wasabi without Tears*, for one, assumes the look of a conflagration, as *Wilma*, 2008, picks up the wasabi as its background shade.

Some works employ empty centers or, conversely, allow dense accumulations to hover there. *Volestere*, 2007, looks like a violent fracas with a circular vortex, as much Road Runner cartoon as Dutch genre scene, although it cannot help but be redolent of Gustave Courbet's yawning Omans grave as well. Equally macabre, *Hooper's Retreat*, 2008, struck me as indebted to Ghicault's morgue studies: rotting flesh as still life. Likewise, gestural passages in *Big Wow*, 2007-all custards and browns in spikes above comparatively languid washes admit a New York School pedigree, while *Meeting in Love*, 2007, improbably channels Turner's frothy seascapes through chalky strokes arcing toward a high horizon, rendering them appropriately sinister. By contrast, *Lucas* is wraithlike, a jumble of blues and other colors in an airy expanse of white, connoting nothing so much as an idyll. Like so many of these works, it appears as a detail from some other setting, cleaved, decontextualized, and resized, perhaps bearing down on an unknown Impressionist's facture-another instance of an elaborate staging of disambiguated "secrets" that might be unearthed as the phantom of style.

-Suzanne Hudson

Katy Moran, *Lucas 2007, acrylic on canvas 15 x 18 inches*

The New York Times

SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2008 B11

Is Painting Small the Next Big Thing?

ROBERTA SMITH

Small may be beautiful, but where abstract painting is concerned, it is rarely fashionable. Big has held center stage at least since Jackson Pollock; the small abstractions of painters like Myron Stout, Forrest Bess and Steve Wheeler are mostly relegated to the wings, there to be considered eccentric or overly precious. Paul Klee was arguably the last genius of small abstraction to be granted full-fledged membership in the Modernist canon.

But what is marginalized can also become a form of dissent, a way to counter the prevailing arguments and sidestep their pitfalls. It is hard, for example, to work small and indulge in the mind-boggling degree of spectacle that afflicts so much art today. In a time of glut and waste on every front, compression and economy have undeniable appeal. And if a great work of art is one that is essential in all its parts, that has nothing superfluous or that can be subtracted, working small may improve the odds.

Small paintings of the abstract kind are having a moment right now in New York, with a luminous exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art spotlighting the wry, fastidiously wrought work of the German painter Tomma Abts; and PaceWildenstein presenting in Chelsea the latest efforts of James Siena and Thomas Nozkowski, two older American whizzes at undersize abstraction. Even post-war Modernism could be downsized a bit, with a show titled "Suitcase Paintings: Small Scale Abstract Expressionism" opening next month at Baruch College.

Four young painters who embrace smallness are now having solo shows — three of them New York debuts — that chal

Small as subversive: Above, "Untitled (N.32)" by Scott Olson.

lenge the importance of the big canvas.

Small abstractions avoid the long realist tradition of painting as a window, and also the shorter, late-Modernist one of painting as a flat wall. Instead these smaller works align themselves with less vaunted (and sometimes less masculine) conventions: the printed page, illuminated manuscripts, icons and plaques.

And yet, as each of these four exhibitions demonstrates, abstraction allows a serious exploration of process despite the limited real estate. This expands thealready considerable pleasure of looking at paintings that are not much larger than your head.

Scott Olson

The intently improvised geometries of Scott Olson's paintings, seen in his New York debut at Taxter & Spengemann in Chelsea, evoke manuscript illumination filtered through Constructivism and other abstract styles. His colors have a slightly watered-down, retroactive subtlety; frequently they are translucent, to reveal the complex decisions and elaborate

"Hoopers Retreat", one of the paintings in Katy Moran's show

processes packed into each work.

Different physical supports (canvas, fiberboard, heavily gessoed wood) further complicate Mr. Olson's processes. In "Untitled (N. 7)" and "Untitled (N. 32)" taping and retaping have left shards of sharp color that stand out like little ruins against absorbent grays and blacks. In "Untitled (N. 31)" and "Untitled (N. 8)" the forms are laid on in thin glazes with fine, varied textures, creating echo chambers of form that suggest faceted jewels, flattened out.

Mr. Olson clearly wants to make paintings whose smallness doesn't rule out finding something new each time you look.

Katy Moran

The little paintings in Katy Moran's first New York show, at Andrea Rosen in Chelsea, plug into another tradition — the plein-air oil sketch. But she turns her canvas, which always measures 15 by 18 inches, into a very tiny arena in which to act. Her spirited brush work creates a sense of gesture and movement that is almost comical, as if a Lilliputian artist of overweaning ambition were rushing about, dispensing profusions of feathery curls and slashing lines of paint.

These marks frequently add up to little Rococo set-tos that imply rushing figures

The New York Times

CONTINUED

themselves — scuffles and skirmishes between beings moving too fast to be identified. They may be humans (see the horizontal roll of "Meeting in Love"), birds (the confrontation of "Pecking Order") or some other animal entirely ("Orton"). Or they may be nothing of the sort.

The twin brown-on-mauve peaks of "Hoopers Retreat" suggest a cobbled-together shanty, with Hooper as the pink dot at its center. Sometimes hints of seascapes or still lifes emerge from the confusion.

Ms. Moran's colors, on the other hand, are reserved and shot through with light: a wide range of delicate grays, mauvish browns, yellowish tans and a variety of whites that keep the painting action distinct. Their goal seems to be to lend an air of dignity to the proceedings, but it is the tumult, hanging in the air, that prevails.

Mr. Connors's work can at times venture toward mid-size, at least relative to the other three artists. "Third Wave Cubism (no touching)," for example, measures 34 by 36 inches — but it is an exception. As its title implies, Modernism is much on Mr. Connors's mind. The grid, the monochrome, the minimal, the concentric and the parallel are all given a nod, but also a wink. But when plentiful, his colors are festive and a little cheap-looking.

There's a cheerful secondhandness here, a sense of vague appropriations and unnamed sources at work. And abstraction is considered as a kind of object. An untitled work floats a green-bordered black square on raw linen: it's not so much an abstract painting as a painting of one.

And smallness doesn't rule out installation art. The motifs of "Reading Room" are actually painted on two different canvases, a smaller one leaning against a slightly larger one, both sitting on a narrow shelf built into the wall. Another work, whose dark veils evoke Color Field painting, hangs on a black rectangle painted directly on the wall.

Michaela Eichwald

Michaela Eichwald is from Cologne, Germany, where abstract painting has been in a fruitfully deviant mode for nearly two decades, thanks to artists like Jutta Koether, Michael Krebber and Kai Althoff. Ms. Eichwald's New York debut at Reena Spaulings Fine Art downtown is titled "Ergriffenes Dasein: Artist Writer Mentalist." (The gallery's release translates the first phrase as "Moved by Life.")

Ms. Eichwald's work continues the deviation but pushes it in a direction of her own choosing. There's a happenstance quality to both her paintings and the handful of small sculptures she is showing: they often incorporate found objects or images and exude an outsider air. Lacquer is frequent material, which means that the colors are rich and that the surfaces tend toward shiny, bringing to mind ceramic plaques or cloisonné.

Ms. Eichwald's imagery veers toward a playful, vaguely figurative expressionism. The mostly purple, crackled surface of "N.Y.C." harbors a face with big turquoise teeth. It might almost be a plate by Picasso. Certain features — like the brown blob touched with red in "Struck" or the capital A and calligraphylike tree of "A-Abre," framed in pink, red and blue — qualify as neo-Expressionism, but they add another layer of self-awareness by shrinking the style to a manageable size. It exemplifies one of the many joys of small.

"Struck", by Michaela Eichwald

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Katy Moran

★★★★½

Andrea Rosen Gallery, through Apr 19, (see Chelsea)


Wasabi Without Tears

After tantalizing appearances in group shows, Katy Moran's first New York solo affirms the young British artist's talent for evocative abstraction. The paintings are rife with apparent contradictions: They're small in scale yet best viewed from a distance; misty veils of white shroud the subject matter, and titles may mislead more than enlighten. Moran's approach occasionally feels like a self-conscious gambit, but it keeps viewers guessing long enough to come to provocative conclusions.

Most canvases display the artist's brushy, layered style and earthy, cool color palette, yet the mood of each comes as a fresh surprise. Lucas is an ethereal cascade of blue and white that could be a waterfall, a hazy beach or a snowstorm. Alarming splashes of blood red dot a dark oval form that might be a boat or an open grave in Volestere. Light paint daubed over dark in the show's most dramatic piece suggests a battlefield at night, though the title, Wasabi Without Tears, turns the painting into a funny take on highbrow culinary machismo. Other canvases distill the essence of different moments in the art-historical canon: A cow's head emerges from a patchwork of Futurist volumes; elsewhere, a De Kooning-esque crone is rendered in dark Cubist colors; while in a third painting, a rough sailboat shape in a light-toned setting recalls a Dutch harborscape. Occasionally, Moran's jumble of forms fails to materializes into anything meaningful, and her grungy color schemes can be garish. This is rare. Instead, the work convincingly stakes Moran's painterly territory: historically astute with a dash of humor, making nods to Karen Kilimnik's romanticism and to Cecily Brown's jittery fluidity, while possessing an energy all its own.-Merrily Kerr

The New York Sun

March 25, 2008

Figure and Ground

by Daniel Kunitz

The British artist Katy Moran (b. 1975) employs a palette out of Turner, brushstrokes borrowed from de Kooning, and the press release of a lesser Gerhard Richter or some other conceptual painter. Yet without supplemental information, a visitor to her first solo show at Andrea Rosen Gallery would likely assume the small paintings on view were merely gestural abstractions.

Take, for instance, "Nature Boy" (2007), in which broad looping strokes of turquoise, brown, and black cavort with thin, calligraphic squiggles and lines of tan and gray amid an atmosphere of drier, wide passages of white and pale yellow. Like all the canvases here, it is a rectangle of 15 by 18 inches, with generously applied acrylics. One might never guess it was based on a photograph.

Ms. Moran tries to free herself from the current of nostalgia, which seems to pull her work back in time, by alerting us, in the press release, to the fact that her "source" imagery is bracingly modish: snapshots, as well as images culled from the Internet and magazines. In a sense, this approach puts her in a line of artists who have tried, explicitly or not, to reconcile figuration and abstraction, a line that reaches back to Turner and would include Richard Diebenkorn as well as her countryman, Howard Hodgkin.

The most immediate perceptual clue to Ms. Moran's approach is the fact that, for the most part, these paintings retain the figure-ground relationship of traditional representational painting. In other words, the painterly incidents here cluster, like wrestlers on a mat, in the center of the canvases, surrounded by calm strokes of a dominant background color. If, however, we accept the press release at face value — a dicey thing to do without hearing from the artist herself, it seems to me — then we should be able to discern content or imagery "embedded" in these apparent abstractions.

As in clouds, I do and I don't. The ochre and yellow spikes erupting out of the central, squirmy mass in "Big Wow" (2007) could, I suppose, be geyser jets or sails. And certainly the ear-like, central swirl and rounded, multihued haunches, and stiff brown lines of "Shycat" (2008) might, for some, coalesce into a curled corporeal figure, be it human or feline. But I must admit, such literal figures are not the first or second associations I had looking at these pictures.

I did, in fact, see the small face peeking out on the left-hand side of "Lenny K" (2008). Though, frankly, such an obvious figure materializing out of what is otherwise a totally abstract work —sturdy white and green vertical marks supporting a writhing ball of curving whites and pale olives and browns on the right-hand side, for instance — seems disconcerting, even a little cheesy. And that would be fine, if Ms. Moran were making jokes out of a style long associated with high-minded spiritualism and earnest emotional explorations, yet the overall tone here — not to mention the dour tones — feels quite serious. Indeed, the sooty whorls and foreboding, malignant yellow polyps of "Smoker's Junction" (2007) seem as serious as a terminal prognosis.

More diffuse and with brighter yellows, "Wasabi Without Tears" (2007) is certainly on the lighthearted end of this spectrum, despite its bloodstained central moment. And again, I couldn't help seeing a little snail emerging from its yellow and green horseradish fumes — though I think it would go better with garlic and oil.

Still, the pervasive solemnity of the work on view here remains all but impossible to escape, and that, I think, has to do as much with the imagery as with the pea-soupy palette. In almost every case, the artist concentrates the energy of these works in the center of her canvases: They feel biblical, as though primordial gases and elements were slowly congealing into something not yet formed. Happily, their diminutive sizes undercut the grandiosity of their gestures. That said, the peekaboo figuration hidden amidst deftly miasmic, abstract brushstrokes begs comparison with the work of another Englishwoman, Cecily Brown, who tends to be more jubilant in tone, more rococo in subject matter, and more allover in her approach to abstraction. Ms. Brown's big, sexy canvases also preen and strut more. Yet both women share an evasiveness that, to me, seems more to do with indecision than seduction.

Consider Ms. Moran's "Orton" (2008), among my favorites here. Something bold is happening in the center, a series of wonderfully showy marks — feathery oranges, skidding reds and blues, a sturdy bit of violet — all made to feel centripetally concentrated by a series of curving lines that define the bowl-like edge of the "image." But it also looks as if the artist has tried to paint over the entire canvas with off-white paint, as if she were going to start over again, leaving only parts of an underlying painting visible. The result could be gorgeous or tentative, depending on one's mood.

I have no problem with work that asks the viewer to take in some information along with its visible presentation. Ms. Moran's relationship to her source material and to the conceptual basis of this work seems as unresolved as the imagery she purports to find within these abstractions. Then again, I applaud the attempt to rough up the smoothly worn road of abstract painting, and Ms. Moran has done so with verve and considerable skill. It will be fascinating to see where this road takes her.

Through April 23 (525 W. 24th St., between Tenth and Eleventh avenues, 212-627-6000).

THE TATE WOULD BE NICE, WOULDN'T IT?

PAINTER KATY MORAN IN THE SPOTLIGHT EXPLAINS

Words: Anna Larkin
Images:
Facing Francesca, 2006, Courtesy of Modern Art
Web: www.modernartinc.com

Katy Moran's intimate paintings of emotive scenes are created with gestured brush strokes of acrylic on canvas. Like smudged Renaissance masterpieces her work ranges from the hugely expressive surging figures in A Wonderful Evening, the delicate landscape of Rosemount Valley to the manic and apocalyptic Dr. R's Parlour. Moran, who has exhibited in New York, Belgium and Berlin, lives and works in London, where she will show at MODERN ART this October, and is included in Bloomberg New Contemporaries. Seems like it's all going her way!

You're from Stockport, Manchester. How that affect the work you do now?
Both consciously and subconsciously. I remember aspects of design, furnishings. ornaments and ephemera from friends and relative's houses, even particular paintings from the local dentists/doctors. These Ihings are surprisingly fresh in my memory and often come back to me when I am in the studio. I think because my work isn't planned, there are all sorts of references and memories. which may come through in the work. intentional or not.

Top five items in your studio that cause you grief:
Uneven brick walls, huge safe, used canvases, dodgy windows, my palettes.

You did a BA in graphic design then ended up being a painter. What happened?
The BA was Graphic Art and Design and I studied Illustration. However, as the course progressed I was more interested in the fine art department. I started to paint in the final year. For a while I was still torn between commercial illustration and fine art, but ultimately I found illustration too limiting and the briefs restrictive. I wanted my work to be viewed in a different way. I had five years out of academia and then did an MA at the RCA. I had a clear idea of why I was going back and what I wanted to get out of the course then.

How often does a painting NOT work. What do you do with it then?
Constantly. More often than not paintings don't work. There is a long editing process involved. From the total amount of paintings I make, not many actually leave the studio. If a painting goes wrong, sometimes I will wash the paint off at the sink and start again or turn the canvas to the wall and return to it at a later date with a fresh idea. It depends to a certain extent how built up the paint is as to whether I can rescue it or work on it again.

Do you enjoy that process, then?
The reason there is such a high failure rate in the way I work is because I am trying to reach quite a specific outcome but through an irrational process. I try not to let one compromise or dictate to the other and this is where the difficulty arises. The outcome has to be a figurative image for me but one I have arrived at accidentally, through the use of unintentional marks. This for me conveys a more convincing reality.

What effect did being included in Art Futures 2005 have on your work?
I was grateful to Rebecca Wilson at Art Review for nominating me. The recognition, and undeniably the money from sales, came at a good time and enabled me to carry on making work.

What collection would you most like your work to be part of?
The Tate would be nice, wouldn't it?

You're in a fast crowd now, what were you like as a teenager?
A fast runner.

Katy Moran at Bloomberg New Contemporaries: Liverpool Biennial 2006 Sept 16 - Oct 22. The Rochelle School, London Nov 10 - Dec 20.

Katy Moran at MODERN ART (10 Vyner Street, London E2) Oct 13th - Nov 12th.
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words MARTIN HERBERT

Katy Moran

HERE'S HOW HOLLYWOOD WOULD TELL IT. Artist mounts her MA display, and a leading dealer (Modern Art's Stuart Shave) sees it and offers her a show.This leads to a group exhibition in New York (at 303 Gallery) Artist clicks her heels three times; someone from Gagosian sees that show, offers her a working relationship. A mere year after graduation she's catapulting towards the sort of dizzy heights that require oxygen masks. And that is Katy Moran's story sortof, if you ignore the earlier training in graphic design, the below-the-radar period selling out of a studio in Manchester and, to hear her describe it, the befuddled entry into the London artworld. Her success, now it's come, is well deserved. Hazily figurative, opulent yet obstinate, Moran's paintings are unlike anything else out there right now.

My first impression of them - sumptuous paint strokes that loosely signal human activities or landscapes, rich palette of blues, greens, pinks and greys - suggested the flouncy end of eighteenth-century painting (Gainsborough, Watteau, Fragonard, etc.) reduced to some kind of sensuous essence. And indeed Moran is interested in that stuff, but at a distance. No sentimentalist, she's fascinated by "things on the line between awful and wonderful. When I'm making a painting, I get quite excited by how close to awful I can push it, while getting something really quite lovely as well. If anything it's the regurgitations of the eighteenth century I'm interested in, the stuff that ends up on the walls of kebab shops and hairdressers." As such, her work - with its direct address to the viewer's sensibilities - is intensely concerned with the vagaries of taste.

Reflecting that balance between attraction and repulsion is quite a trick, it turns out. "I work upside down:' says Moran, using inverted images pulled from the Internet. "They're finished when I can see a figurative element in them... through the paint I'm searching for the thing it reminded me of, or suggested to me, and trying to get close to that thing." The paintings aren't always particularly readable as image, but they're eloquent in mood, inspired among other things by "Francis Bacon's idea that unintentional paint marks suggest a more convincing reality". Moran is not on Bacon's level yet, but then she's in pursuit of a different horde of images, pulling in multiple directions, inspiring quiet anxiety alongside visual pleasure. Given her recent rise, is she worried about becoming locked into a market-pleasing way of working? "Not at all: says Moran. "I'm doing exactly what I want, and I feel like I haven't compromised one bit: Spoken like a star.

ARTFORUM.com
November 2006

LONDON

Katy Moran
MODERN ART
NO.10 & No.7 Vyner Street
October 13-November 12

Young British painter Katy Moran was introduced to NewYork (audiences last summer through three tantalizing. mysterious contributions to - *A Broken Arm*, Man Spirito's smart group show at 303 Gallery. The artist's inaugural solo exhibition presents more of the same and is all the better for it. Twelve small abstractions. Moran's paintings are short, spirited essays on gesture offering swirls and collisions of thick, quick, and rich brushstrokes of color. The paintings are often densest at their centers-small hurricanes of acrylic articulating only the briefest whispers and shadows of forms, the evocative dance of a paintbrush in a hurry to get to the next point. This celerity is accentuated by the fact that several of the works haven't even been painted all the way to the edge, leaving bits of gray canvas uncovered. The press release asserts that Moran bases her paintings on pictures she finds on the Internet; if so, then it's in sharp contrast to other Google-philic artists like Thomas Ruff and Luc Tuymans. Little evidence remains of the source images in Moran's reproductions, though with puzzling titles like Captain Beaky and His Band II and safari So Goody (all works 2006), one just has to wonder.

-*David Velasco*