

NEGOTIATED POSSIBILITIES

by Mary Bucci McCoy

In 2010 Jennifer Moses was given the opportunity to leave her Boston studio behind for a sabbatical year at the Artist-in-Residence Program in Roswell, New Mexico. The residency culminated in a solo exhibition, *Spellbound*, at the Roswell Museum and Art Center. The work in that exhibition revealed the awestruck response of a native New Englander to the western landscape on both a macro and micro level. Glimpsed within these abstract paintings were echoes of the enormity of the desert and sky, the monumentality of exposed rock faces, the delicately patterned complexity of spider webs, the colors of the surrounding scrub. Since returning to Boston, she has worked to reconcile her transformative experience of the West with her lifelong experience of the urban spaces of the Northeast.

Moses uses the synthesis of opposing visual languages as a means of telling non-linear stories, explaining, "My process tends to be to paint until there seems to be no way forward and then try to introduce an impulsive and contradictory language in the work. From there it is like working a puzzle trying to integrate the two languages while maintaining the integrity of both. That is where the choices, this or that, black or white incite the creation of an image."

As she has matured as an artist, her process and paintings have become increasingly complex, rich and varied, for rather than abandoning a visual language as she moves forward, she incorporates it into her ever-expanding repertoire. Earlier influences which continue to inform her vocabulary include details of Proto-Renaissance paintings as well as decaying Italian frescos first seen during undergraduate studies in Rome; the work of Modernist painters such as Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, and Philip Guston; and Hilma af Klint, whose work Moses saw in the 2013 Venice Biennale but has been looking at

since the 1980s. More recent influences include the 2007 MoMA exhibition *Comic Abstraction: Image Making, Image Breaking* and *Amy Sillman: One Lump or Two* at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston.

Like centuries of painters before her, Moses leverages the characteristics of oil paint in a time-honored process of scraping, blocking and repainting, although she foregrounds rather than hides the journey by allowing it to remain visible. Yet at a time when the deliberate open-endedness of provisional painting is a much-discussed response to our era of ever-increasing uncertainty and possibilities, Moses takes an opposing path: she demands a resolution for each painting. She challenges herself to avoid remaining in an unresolved, gray area — making and ultimately committing to decisions, to the black or white yes or no of the process. The inherent tension of her finished paintings, comprised as they are of an accretion of reconsidered marks, is compellingly destabilizing: in this work the certainty of resolution does not mean that the dynamic tension has been relieved.

When Moses visits museums she is sensitive to the dialogue between the works of art she is viewing. While grounded in her here and now, her new paintings reach back and forth through time and across continents, in animated conversation with places, artworks, and audience. *The Black and White of Things* offers evidence that she is a painter very much in tune with the world of today, thoughtfully absorbing and negotiating visual, narrative and conceptual complexity to arrive at resonantly contemporary solutions.

Mary Bucci McCoy is a painter based in Beverly, MA. She frequently writes about art for publication.