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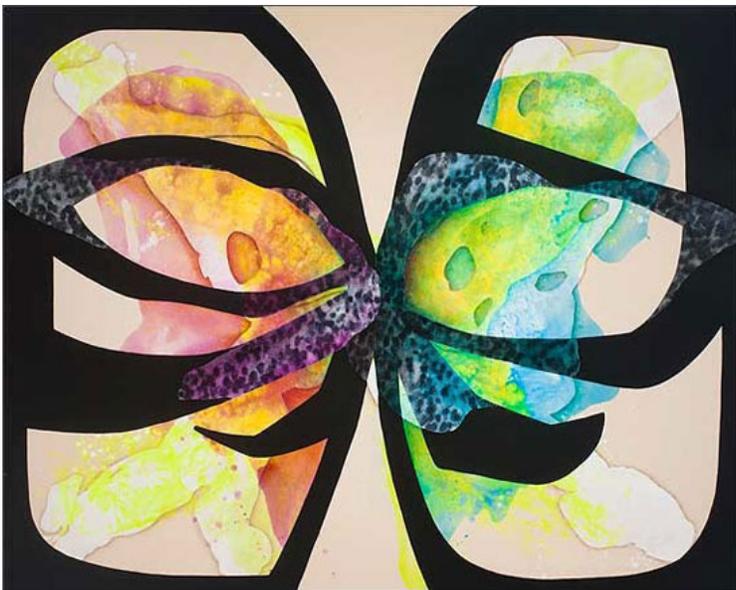
Cherry Bomb to Cherry Blossom: Carrie Moyer at Canada

by **Drew Lowenstein**

Carrie Moyer: Canonical at Canada

September 14 ^ October 16, 2011

55 Chrystie St (between Hester & Canal),
New York City, 212-925-4631



Carrie Moyer, Rock Candy Chrysalis, 2011, Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 60 inches. Courtesy of CANADA

Carrie Moyer continues to agitate...beautifully. Over the last decade she has used a layered graphic aesthetic to express solidarity with ideals of political, social and sexual equality. In her 2006 exhibition, titled *The Stone Age*, she breathed new life into still life and abstract painting alike by fusing modernist painting from both sides of the Atlantic with silhouetted Paleolithic figures. Today, Moyer continues to reap the benefits of pluralism while joyously surfing in the wake of “the death of painting”, casting a net that is smart, wide, and fearless.

In *Canonical* at Canada Gallery, Moyer charts new and unexpected territory. *Rock Candy Chrysalis* unfolds bilaterally within a flat, black-winged lattice that frames our view of diaphanous, coral-colored forms emerging from a neutral ground. The architectonic lattice and patterning throughout acknowledge a comfort with Pattern and Decoration artists such as Robert Kushner. Textural contrasts between black line, raw canvas, and glistening or matte paint drive the formal interplay throughout this exhibition. And when Moyer drops a lightly patterned, transparent veil against or behind a flat plane, hints of illusionistic shading appear. Though this painting is but one frame, Moyer's methodology creates a sense of flickering natural phenomena.



Carrie Moyer, *Filly Dollup*, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72 inches. Courtesy of CANADA

In the six-foot square *Filly Dollup*, Moyer shuffles ten layers of imagery while achieving spatial lift and slippery movement. I am tempted to say that *Filly Dollup* is the best biomorphic painting of the new century. A seemingly effortless play of contrasts between texture, color, and line masks complexity and maintains clarity of image. The formal ease, large size, decorous color, and elegant composition push beauty to the edge of current taste. *Filly Dollup* divides horizontally into three strata. The lower portion articulates an expanding terrestrial womb that envelops and nurtures itself, while the upper third of the canvas parades an assortment of floating, colorful shapes that both nestle and pass by

one another. One mottled, stony white figure seems part Casper the Friendly Ghost, part Ken Price sculpture, but may be culled from Moyer's resonant *Shebang* or *Stone Age* figures of 2006. Rifling through the last 100 years of painting with indexical panache, Moyer's biomorphs also nod to Picasso's 1930's beach bathers, Miró, Arp, Richard Lindner and Elizabeth Murray but function together as if she snapped a shot at the right moment at a party. There is an interesting tension between what is guided and what is a more randomized gesture. Though process is present, it is not as assertive as the gestures of Pollock, Lynda Benglis or Dona Nelson. This tact allows the imagistic nature of the painting to move forward. But ultimately it is the choreographic arrangement of pouring, staining, coaxing, patterning and sinewy charcoal line that animates Moyer's pictorial projection.

The Tiger's Wife intertwines psychological landscape and bodily form. Moyer's intelligence is haptic; she and by extension we, sense and recognize by her touch. A softer, more modulated approach to color, form and line playfully emphasizes transparency and off-register articulations. The smooth transitional flow between painting passages heightens the chthonic breadth of *The Tiger's Wife*, deepening pictorial space without abandoning abstract peripherality. Here, Moyer's resistance to a flattened iconic field in favor of a feminine space of the possible, reflects how women artists from Carolee Schneeman, Lee Bontecou, and Murray to Moyer herself have changed painting. A sense of multivalent form engages the viewer in a creative act of free-associative thinking. Forms resembling eggs, tubes, a phallus, a breast, and fingers float in an amniotic cosmos outlined by a vaguely pelvic shape. The glint of S.W. Hayter's line and dust of William Baziotes's atmosphere are bits of useful code that affirm Surrealist methods. That Moyer can sink into and then pull content out of a viscous, liquid-soaked canvas enables her to dismiss a list of hooks often called upon to justify contemporary abstraction. Moyer's power lies in her ability to imbed content into the plurality of form that she has found painting still offers. Overwrought referencing, clock-punching announcements about "the work", psychedelic allusions, and goofy self-deprecations are absent. Instead we are met with color, beauty, spirit, ebb and flow, the comings and goings of nether regions, experiential knowledge, and our common humanity. In a sense Moyer reframes a question posed by one of color field's progenitors by asking... Who's afraid of beauty, facility and feminism?