

Arts feature: "Carrie Moyer: Pirate Jenny" swirls and seduces

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Columbus Alive

Carrie Moyer has been a prolific artist for two decades, holding 16 solo exhibitions and participating in more than a hundred group shows from Paris to Los Angeles. Despite this pervasive output, "Carrie Moyer: Pirate Jenny" will mark the first showing for the New York resident in Columbus.

The main reason for excitement about Moyer's Columbus debut is her swirling, seductive and vibrantly colored canvases. Her paintings feature both identifiable forms, but also a complexity that invites a conversation.

"The thing about this show is it sort of encapsulates a period of work in which I was interested in creating an abstraction that's reminiscent of the world, but you weren't exactly sure how," said Moyer in a phone interview earlier this week. "It goes back to this idea where you have fragmentary images of body parts and instruments, and there are things that are vaguely recognizable."

Making the exhibit even more distinctive, four new paintings will be unveiled. These four works are the result of Moyer, a professor at Hunter College, receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship and being able to focus solely on her painting recently. They also mark a new transition Moyer has been working on lately.

Many of Moyer's paintings are constructed with black as a foundation for the work, with colors building off it. The most recent paintings function with a different graphic nature.

"One interesting thing people might notice is that black has been this structural aspect of the work ... and often the blacks form the scaffolding that other parts of the images will be hung on, in a metaphoric way. The new work I've stopped using the black in an effort to see if I can build that structure with just straight-up color."

While the finished products are compelling, works worthy of praise, Moyer's process (from materials to the physical creation of the work) is also fascinating. All of the works on view use only acrylic paints - along with an unconventional pouring technique - because it's an underrated medium that Moyer calls "the ugly step-child of oil paint."

"One of the cores to how I'm working is an exploration of what acrylic paint can do. It has been associated with the language of advertising or pop art. It's something hard-edge, very clean and plastic," Moyer said. "One of the cool things acrylic paint does is [it] enables you to do all sorts of technical things you could never do with oil paint."

And Moyer surely makes the most of acrylic possibilities. The paintings convey a mixture of textures, a balance between smooth or shiny to more grainy and coarse elements. Part of this surface quality is due to using glitter, which has changed for Moyer during her career, becoming an aesthetic refraction.

"When I started using the glitter around 2000 it was a tongue-in-cheek way of undermining the seriousness of 'painting' with a capital P. Since that time it's become an integrated part of the work where it's almost another light source that enters the canvas," Moyer said.

The most identifiable aspect of Moyer's paintings, a sense of movement, is inherent because of her background and process. Moyer was studying modern dance, but was in a serious car accident that forced her to sideline dancing and turning her artistic focus to painting. While dance may no longer be her milieu, Moyer incorporates it in the art.

"If you can imagine this, a big part of making the painting is kind of dancing around the studio. When you're doing these pours, whether they're on the floors or on the table, it's this ritualistic thing of tilting the canvas. So there's a lot of physicality to it and somehow that gets reflected in what the image ends up looking like," Moyer said.