



Title - Shin-Wak, 1989

Contemporary Art

Ed Moses, American, 1926-2018

Palm Springs Art Museum purchase for Permanent Collection with funds provided by the Contemporary Art Council

Medium – oil and acrylic on canvas

Work completed in North America, USA

Ed Moses, a prolific abstract expressionist recently passed away at the age of 91. His career spanned 7 decades and he was considered one of LA's most innovative painters and a central figure in the city's art scene leaving an indelible mark on the contemporary art world. His son, Andy Moses said of his father, "he never ceased to push the envelope." As a result, his work continually transitioned from one style to another over his long career and was the subject of many exhibitions. Moses never embraced any one movement, even at a time when his contemporaries in the 60's and 70's were working in conceptual and Pop art. This independence may have cost him a measure of fame compared to his peers who developed trademark styles.

Moses had his first major exhibit in 1958 at the Ferus Gallery in Hollywood, where he became a member of the gallery's post-World War II Cool School, a group of

artists which put Los Angeles on the artistic map both for their outsized talents and personalities – all of whom pushed the boundaries of Post War art and shaped the nascent LA art scene at a time when almost none existed. In 1978, Moses became a Buddhist practitioner, and his paintings became simpler, using only a few colors at once. As one reviewer wrote, “Moses worked in the moment, embracing and responding to elements of chance and circumstances.” Moses noted that his life and art were about “exploring the phenomenal world” and, as previously stated never adhered to any singular art movement or style. Rather he continued to experiment, embracing transformation and change.

In late 1989 Moses produced a body of work which was exhibited at the Louver Gallery in New York (Shin -Wak was produced during this period). There is little I was able to find on this piece specifically (including any significance to the title). But a review of the exhibit by Richard Kalin talked about how this exhibition marked an important change for the artist. He writes, “having spent many years exploring the subtleties of the painterly grid, Moses has now let the grid go, and the work breathes with new energy and openness.” In 1992, Janet Koplos wrote in Art in America, “Moses still paints in layers, but straight lines are now entirely absent.” I also found the process used to produce these works very interesting. A stretched canvass over a wood panel is hosed down with water. He then prepares a combination of oil paint and acrylic unmixed in buckets and begins to paint flat on the ground with a rag mop. Though there is much more to the process, I found even these techniques rather intriguing. As Kalin wrote in his review, “Moses seems to know when to let go, when to allow the physical interaction of paint, water, solvent, and canvass determine the paintings form.” This description seems to very much fit into Moses’s philosophy and approach to painting – continual exploration with few constraints and boundaries.

I was instantly attracted to this piece primarily because it reminded me so much of the graffiti (or street art as the term most commonly used) I have seen and photographed in several major cities around the world. Graffiti artists, generally speaking have very few constraints and work in a very free-form style. They are true abstract expressionists – an emphasis on spontaneous creation in an effort to show feelings and emotions. The works often appear to be created by accident or chance but are usually highly painted. What a perfect description for a graffiti artist and for Ed Moses’s Shin-Wak. Even their use of materials and process reminded me of Moses. I see in this painting shapes, color and lines that all seem to be in motion – or maybe slow motion. I love that there is no one place you should start to look or what to see. I think it is a piece where you can let your mind wander and see where your imagination takes you. This was Moses’s approach – art for him was a matter of patient waiting and watching and thinking.

Sources:

1. June 1992 Art in America, “Slow Motion” by Janet Koplos
2. February 1990 article by Donald Kuspit in Artforum
3. Richard Kalin, Arts Magazine
4. Various Press Releases in the LA Times upon his death