

Tony Moore
Triptychs: Paintings 1977-1990



Beginning his talk with the creation passages from Genesis, the sandy-bearded English man standing behind the lectern resembles nothing so much as a pastor before his Sunday morning flock. But Tony Moore is a seasoned New York artist, and his congregation generally consists of art students, some of whom, no doubt, fidget in discomfort at the unexpectedly ecclesiastical character of the program. And no wonder. Contemporary art and criticism of the 1980s has been emphatically secular. As post-mortem exhibits like the Whitney Museum's "Image World: Art and Media Culture" clearly demonstrate, art of the recent time has been mainly about "deconstructing" or decoding messages of the advertising and entertainment media (including art) to reveal how they perpetuate social values of the dominant class. During this same decade, and the previous one, Tony Moore plied a channel well outside the critical mainstream, but one that now seems to offer an alternative to the weary, wordy Postmodern/Poststructuralist inundations.

In retrospect, the project of Postmodernism (yes, it's finished) was to reinvest art with meaning in the wake of Minimalism, which, as the ultimate development of Modernist formalism, asserted that art need not and should not exceed the physical facts of its materials and making. What seems to have been forgotten by critics of this focus on the outward and visible was, that from its earliest moments at the beginning of this century, Modernism also encompassed art concerned with the inward and spiritual. Alfred Barr, founder of New York's Museum of Modern Art, produced in 1936 the first exhibition of abstract art to be seen in the United States, and in its catalog he divided modern art into two streams. The first he described as being intellectual, classical and logical. In characterizing the second he wrote that it: *by contrast with the first, is intuitional and emotional rather than intellectual; organic or biomorphic rather than geometrical in its forms; curvilinear rather than rectilinear, decorative rather than structural, and romantic rather than classical in its exaltation of the mystical, the spontaneous and the irrational.*⁺

Tony Moore's work is within this second, re-surgency current of Modernism. Trained as a sculptor at the Cardiff College of Art in Wales and at Yale University in the United States, the artist's earliest work involved the creation of participatory environments addressing the cyclical energies of nature and hu-

mankind's integral place within them. Later, at Yale, his sculpture concerned personal space, both interior (psychological) and external (physical) particularly of passageways or transitions, an investigation inspired by the impact on him of his own relocation from Great Britain to the United States. Gradually, Moore's sculpture began to consist of flat, colored planes positioned on and in front of the wall and to probe the audience's subjective responses to the actual and illusionistic space. Finally, feeling the need to create spontaneously, he abandoned sculpture and, spreading large sheets of paper on the floor, began using his hand/arm/body as his instrument of invention.

The sculpture of his Yale and post-graduate periods carried titles like "Theory Landscape: Relationship Between Man and God," or "The Nature of Existence," but when Moore turned to painting in 1980, he was, nevertheless, astonished at the religious imagery in the work. He believes that the practical processes required to build the sculpture somehow masked spiritual content that was more easily apparent in spontaneously created paintings. It is at this point in time that Moore's work becomes a nearly perfect exemplar of Barr's description: *intuitional/emotional, organic/biomorphic, curvilinear, decorative, romantic, mystical, spontaneous and irrational.*

Moore's use of religious imagery is not doctrinal. His fundamental subjects—the relationship of physical and spiritual energy, the cycle of birth, death and regeneration—are, like the Van Gogh work that often inspires him, archetypal ones related to his daily experiences expressed in forms derived from his personal history. His childhood in rural England, where, as he says, every step falls on the Celtic, Roman, Saxon, Norman, and more recent pasts, shaped and colored his imagination particularly with the Gothic and heraldic traditions of Britain's medieval period. Evidence of the ecclesiastical legacy is everywhere apparent or at least available for interpretation in his painting. The triptych format he often uses suggests an altarpiece except in the most recent works which more closely resemble stained-glass Gothic windows. (The 6.5 x 2 foot panels or a rectangle of the same ratio is derived from Barnett Newman and represents a human presence wherever it is used.) Crosses are overt or suggested. A flower resembling an anemone grows from bloody hands. A haloed leaf form suggests the traditional emblem for the Holy Spirit.

Hands are raised in benediction. Naked footprints imply the self-sacrifice of martyrs or looking up from the base of the cross to the body of the crucified Christ. Titles like "Communion" (an extended series), "Sanctuary," or "Blood of the Martyrs," substantiate such readings, but it is important to be aware that while the symbols may have religious connotations they are employed to convey a passionate sense of being alive, alive to, and part of nature. The heraldic heritage influences, not only the choice of clear bright colors and the shield-like format of his small oil paintings, but a tendency to develop emblematic forms.

Perhaps the most significant of Moore's motifs is the hand. It is not painted; it is the impression of the artist's palm. He thinks of it as an archetypal emblem of humanity which he sets off against leaf prints as symbols of nature. But like the handprints in prehistoric caves, the power of the image consists in its specificity not in its generality. The print is not a representation. It is literally a "manifestation," a strike of the hand—physical proof of Tony Moore's presence in a particular place at a precise historical moment which may correspond with the collapse of Communism in Europe ("Sprechen"), or a visit to Moscow's Red Square ("Blood of the Martyrs"), or a stage in a course of meditation ("Communion"), or a season in a forest retreat ("Sweet Briar"). Aside from conveying evidence of the artist's presence, the handprint figuratively extends the space of the picture plane through the unseen arms and body of its maker. This relates to themes of real and fictive space that the artist had examined in his sculpture and expresses his conviction that the paper or canvas is not merely a surface, but part of a three-dimensional arena of action for the artist as well as for the circulation of energy from the painting into the physical and psychic space of the viewer and back.

In a long series of small works on paper entitled, "Communion," the hand is joined with another in a gesture of harmony, of interconnectedness, of giving and receiving. The word "communion" has several connotations, including these, that are significant to an understanding of Moore's work. At its most mundane, it means to converse, to speak, to communicate. The latest triptychs, "Sprechen," and "DDR," concern the necessity, the urgency, and the difficulty, of speaking and acting with true commitment—personally, artistically or communally—and to reaching out toward those whom one confronts in an attempt

to achieve a harmonious resolution.

A more exalted definition of "communion," and the one most apparent in Moore's series, concerns the archetypal human aspiration to become one with the spirit of the universe. The touching hands represent a more tranquil and hopeful view of this endeavor than in Moore's paintings of the early 1980s. The hands close around a void which for the artist is the source of all creation and self-knowledge and into which we must be prepared to plunge in order to extend our comprehension and to expand our capacities. The paintings of 1981 and 1982 developed this theme expressionistically through the depiction of apocalyptic landscapes with footprints (his own) representing the fall into or redemption from chaos. These early paintings were often discussed in terms of the Crucifixion. That being the case, the "Communion" series can be seen in relation to the sacrament of the Eucharist as a celebration of the triumph of the universal spirit over the limitations of our physical environment and bodies. But it is precisely the importance of the body and blood and the suffering and passion of Christ represented in the sacrament which makes its language meaningful to Moore's work, for its most potent aspect derives from his conviction that the exercise and renewal of physical energy translates and communicates psychological and spiritual power and promotes harmony.

Tony Moore's art partakes in the long heritage of the romantic sublime and in the more recent tradition of spiritualist modernism. Art of the 1980s was about negation and de(con)struction. In the 1990s many artists are concerning themselves with redressing social ills and restoring belief in the importance of human aspirations toward universal truths. If the energy of the cosmos is constant, we should be cheered by the prospect that artists like Tony Moore are expending their share in the pursuit and expression of such important objectives. In many eras and cultures artists have served as intermediaries (shamans or priests) between their spirits and their people, perhaps that image of the artist is not entirely lost, after all, in our own society.

LESLIE L. LUEBBERS, DIRECTOR

TONY MOORE

EDUCATION

1971-73 Master of Fine Arts, Yale University, New Haven, CT (Scholarship)

AWARDS

1989 The Avery Fellow, Millay Colony For The Arts, Austerlitz, NY
1983 Louis Comfort Tiffany Award (Painting)
1978 CAPS Grant. Creative Artists Public Service Program, NY
1971 1st Prize. THE NATIONAL YOUNG CONTEMPORARIES, Royal Academy of Art, London, England. (Awarded by the Arts Council of Great Britain)

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

1990 Triptychs: Paintings 1977-1990, Memphis State University Gallery, TN
1989 Greenville Museum of Art, Greenville, NC
1986 Mary Delahoyd Gallery, New York, NY
1985 Mary Delahoyd Gallery, New York, NY
1983 Portico Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
1982 ROSS BLECKNER/TONY MOORE, Portico Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
1980 SPECIAL PROJECTS, Project Studio One (P.S.1), Long Island City, Queens, NY
1979 CAPS EXHIBITION, Brooklyn, NY
1976 University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV

COLLECTIONS

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
The Brooklyn Museum, New York
The Swiss Bank Corporation
Lydia Winston-Malbin, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1989 FACULTY EXHIBITION, Gray Art Gallery, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC
AN ABSTRACTION OF FORM (TONY MOORE, WINSTON ROETH, ROBERT STORR), Robeson Center Gallery, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ
1988 BLACK/WHITE/COLOR, Tower Gallery, New York, NY
ON THE WALL ON THE FLOOR, Katzen - Brown, New York, NY
FLOWERS, United Jersey National Bank Headquarters, Princeton, NJ
SUMMER 1988, Katzen-Brown Gallery, New York, NY
1987 NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL, Ruth Siegel Gallery, New York, NY
PRESENT CURRENTS, Katzen-Brown Gallery, New York, NY
1986 SUMMER 1986: A CHANGING EXHIBITION OF RECENT WORK, Ruth Siegel Gallery, New York, NY
1985 NEW ARTISTS, NEW WORKS, Marianne Deson Gallery, Chicago, IL

1984 A FEW FEARS, (curated by Ann Jarmusch), The Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA
GALLERY ARTISTS, Mary Delahoyd Gallery, New York, NY
1983 GROUP AT PORTICO: Apfelschnitt, Bleckner, Deutch, Hambleton, Joelson, Moore, Stephan, and Others, Portico Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
1982 NEW ACQUISITIONS 1981, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
1980 RECENT ACQUISITIONS, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
CAPS ARTISTS, The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
THE MONUMENTAL SHOW, Gowanus Memorial Art Yard, Brooklyn, NY
1979 CAPS PAINTING AWARD WINNERS, Ruth E. Dowd Fine Arts Gallery, State University of New York, Cortland, NY
1977 DRAWINGS, Touchstone Gallery, New York, NY
1971 THE YOUNG CONTEMPORARIES, Royal Academy of Art, London, England
1969 ART FOR WELSH SCHOOLS, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, Wales
EIGHT YOUNG ARTISTS, Welsh Arts Council Gallery, Cardiff, Wales

TEACHING/VISITING ARTIST

1990 Derbyshire College of Higher Education, Derby, England
South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education, Cardiff, Wales
Gwent College of Higher Education, Newport, Wales
1989 East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, Artist in Residence
Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA
1987 Texas Womens University, Denton, TX
1985 South West Texas University, San Marcos, TX
1976 University of Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV
University of Vermont, Burlington, VT
1975 University of Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV

CURATORIAL

1989 MANIFESTO: AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS, Encore Gallery, Greenville, NC (Curator and Coordinator)
REBEL EXHIBITION, Gray Art Gallery, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC (Juror)
THE ARTISTS FEDERATION MEMBER EXHIBITION, Staten Island, NY (Juror)
1985 AUSTIN VISUAL ARTS ASSOCIATION CITATION EXHIBITION, Austin, TX (Juror)

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1948. Raised in rural England
Legal Resident, U.S.A., 1973
Resident New York City 1973 to Present

LECTURE
October 25

20 Years: Developmental Influences
Tony Moore discusses his work Thursday,
October 25, Journalism Building, Room 100,
11:30 am. Free and open to the public.

OPENING RECEPTION
October 26

Triptychs: Paintings 1977-1990
Opening reception for the artist
Friday, October 26, University Gallery,
5 pm to 8 pm. Free and open to the public.

EXHIBITION
October 26 - November 21

Triptychs: Paintings 1977-1990
University Gallery. Gallery Hours: Tuesday,
Friday: 9 am to 5 pm, Wednesday, Thursday:
9 am to 7 pm, Saturday, Sunday: 1pm to 5 pm,
Closed Mondays and between Temporary
Exhibitions. Free and open to the public.

PANEL DISCUSSION
October 28

The Religious in Contemporary Art
An informal conversation and discussion with
Tony Moore, artist; Dr. Carol Crown,
Chairman, Department of Art; The Reverend
Joe Alford, Calvary Episcopal Church;
Dr. Stephen Benin, Director, Bornblum Judaic
Studies; Ms. Nona Bolin, Director, Women's
Studies Program; Dr. Kay Easson, Director,
Center for the Humanities; Dr. Babatunde
Lawal, Scheidt-Hohenberg Chair of Excellence
in Art History; Sunday, October 28, University
Gallery, 3 pm. Free and open to the public.

Sponsored in part by Friends of the University
Gallery, Friends of the Department of Art,
Bornblum Judaic Studies, and Adam J. and
Eileen Boxer, New York.

University Gallery
Communication and Fine Arts Building 142
Memphis State University
Memphis, Tennessee 38152
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