



By Eva Zanardi

I want to inhabit Carrie Moyers's world, where monochromatic shapes are stripped down of all details, becoming hardly recognizable abstractions. Where sensuous, saturated veils of colours and drips are simultaneously hidden, highlighted, enclosed by such shapes. Where galaxies of glitter dust the surfaces of her canvases, illuminating them. I want to coalesce with and be consumed by Carrie Moyer's spellbinding combinations of universal shapes and exhilarating shrouds of colour, as her two-dimensional worlds seem like the perfect place to be.

Carrie Moyer is an artist and writer based in Brooklyn, NY. Her work has been widely exhibited in both the U.S. and Europe. Alongside photographer Sue Schaffner, she co-founded one of the first lesbian public art projects, Dyke Action Machine!, which was active in New York City from 1991 to 2008. Moyer's writing has appeared in anthologies and periodicals such as *Art in America*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Artforum*, *Modern Painters*, and others. She is an Associate Professor in the Art and Art History Department at Hunter College.

I met Carrie Moyer at the press preview of the 2017 Whitney Biennial, the longest running survey of contemporary art in the United States. This year the Biennial was co-curated by Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks. As I enter the room dedicated to her latest creative undertaking, I see Carrie standing in front of one of her magnificently large, vibrant canvases. As I approach her, she looks at me with her piercing blue-green eyes, which are framed by colourful green spectacles, wearing a beautifully stylized, flower-shaped pendant she designed for Tiffany & Co.

**Eva Zanardi:** Hello Carrie. Could you share with me what are the highlights of this edition of the preeminent U.S. biennial?

*Carrie Moyer:* This biennial feels very smart and alive. I'm excited about the amount of painting that Christopher Lew and Mia Locks have included in the show. For me, this signals a generational shift in how curators view painting: instead of played out or "dead," painting has a role to play in the discourse of contemporary art. Chris and Mia not only included many painters but they also chose a wide range of approaches, from text-based to representational to abstraction.

**EZ:** Given your history as an activist with DAM! (Dyke Action Machine!), would you like to share your thoughts on the controversy surrounding Dana Schutz's work in the Whitney Biennial?

CM: It wouldn't be a biennial without controversy! I was and continue to be empathetic to most of the arguments except the call to destroy the painting, which is horrifying. Coco Fusco's response in *Hyperallergic* was the most articulate I've read so far.

**EZ:** Out of all the artists in the Whitney Biennial, whose work do you feel creates the most interesting dialogue with yours? Whose work do you think is most similar? Most different?

CM: I was thrilled to see Jo Baer's work as we don't see it very often in the New York. I'm really interested in how her work seems to embrace the long, long view of history. Some videos that really entranced me are Anicka Yi's "The Flavor Genome" and Tuan Andrew Nguyen's "The Island." Jessi Reaves' furniture is fantastic... but I'm biased. Jessi is my former student from RISD. Artists whose ideas feel very distant from mine would include the hyper-mediated work by Jon Kessler and Jordan Wolfson.

**EZ:** Tiffany & Co. has commissioned five biennial artists, including you, to create limited edition artworks for its Fifth Avenue flagship, as well as eye-catching displays for its world famous storefront windows. The luxury jewellery brand has a long tradition of collaborations with world-renowned female artists and designers, such as Elsa Peretti and Paloma Picasso. Could you talk a little bit about the particular flower-like shape you chose for the silver pendant you created for Tiffany's?

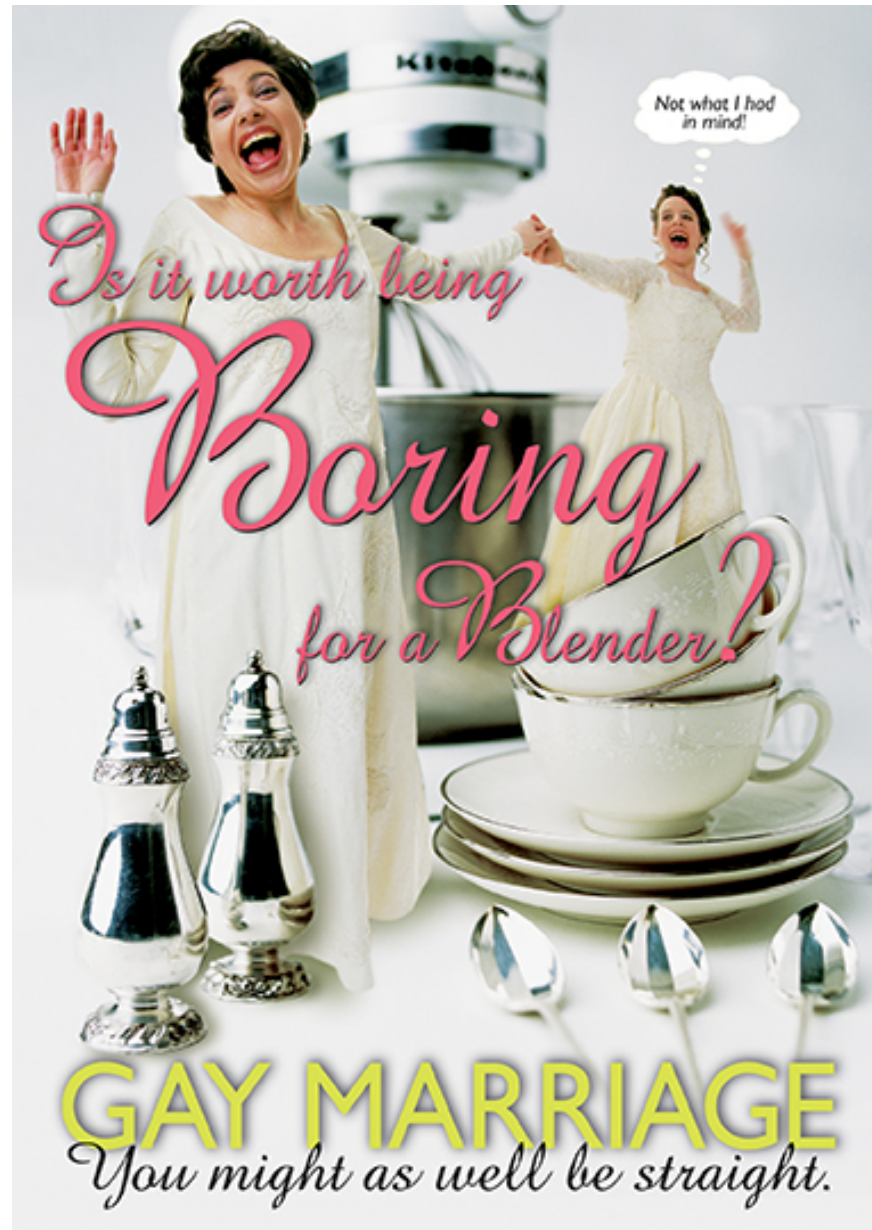
CM: The pendant design comes from my collages. I start each painting with a small collage made of cut paper. Since I don't really draw much, the blade is the tool I use to develop the large shapes. My paintings are known for mixing graphic imagery with fields of luminous colour. Often the graphic forms refer to nature-based imagery that vacillates between micro- and macrocosm, from the cellular to the botanical to the cosmological. Add to that an interest in the simplified language of Pop Art.

**EZ:** Seeing as you have both a prolific art writing background and interest in the performing arts, would you be willing to engage in an experimental or performance piece? I would name 7 of my preferred artworks by you and I then ask you to tell Art Views readers about your story as a female artist as it is insinuated through their ever-intriguing, mysterious, and original titles.

**1- Is It Worth Being Boring For a Blender?, 1997**

CM: I emerged from art school into a world in which the AIDS epidemic and the need for lesbian and gay visibility became much more important to me than making a painting. Activism and specifically agitprop became a way for me to channel my political energy and try to make an impact. The project, “Is It Worth Being Boring for a Blender?” was in response to the demand for the legalization of gay marriage. In DAM!’s view, the marriage of two women only solidifies their position at the bottom of the economic ladder.





Dyke Action Machine! (DAM!) Is It Worth Being Boring For a Blender?, 1997 Offset poster.

5,000 wheatpasted in New York City



CM: Sister Corita was an artist, activist and Roman Catholic nun whose posters captured the spirit of the 60s and 70s. Her work combined resonant slogans with eye-catching design to protest the Vietnam War, racism and poverty. She quite brilliantly merged the aesthetics and processes of Pop Art (commercial design, screen printing) with the populist political sentiments of the time.



*For Sister Corita, v. 2, 2004*  
Screenprint with glitter flocking  
43-1/4 x 30 inches

**3-Yes Rays (Sisters' Stamen), 2013**

CM: My work draws from a wide range of influences including the biomorphic mysticism of American Modernist landscapes, the Feminist Art movement of the 1970s and painters like Elizabeth Murray. In other words I'm interested in acknowledging both Judy Chicago and Georgia O'Keefe, Agnes Pelton and Arthur Dove. This painting plays with symmetry and the kind of symbolism one might find in religious painting. An icon to girl power on the cosmic level!





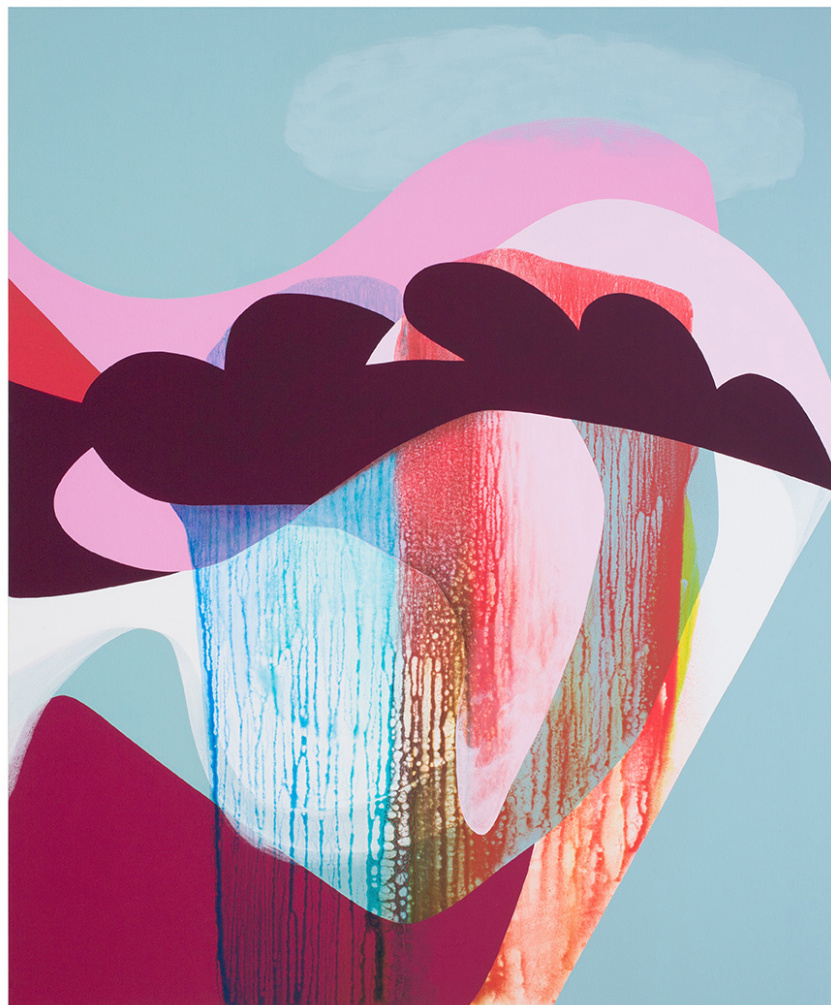
*Yes Rays (Sisters' Stamen), 2013*

*Acrylic on canvas*

*66 x 54 inches*

#### **4-Cloud Comb For Georgia, 2015**

CM: Again, I'm thinking about Georgia O'Keeffe and the sky in New Mexico. Although I was born in Detroit, I grew up on the West coast and have had very powerful and romantic feelings about landscape since I began painting seriously in my early 20s.



*Cloud Comb For Georgia, 2015*

*Acrylic, Flashe on canvas*

*72 x 60 inches*

## 5-Intergalactic Emoji Factory, 2016

CM: There's always a tongue-in-check undercurrent to my titles and paintings. Humour is important to me — whether it comes in the form of odd, bulbous shapes or “impossible” shadows or irritatingly artificial hues. A candy-coloured swath of acrylic paint seems to emanate from a glittering black cloud of gaseousness. Hmmm what else can I say 😊



*Intergalactic Emoji Factory, 2016*

*Acrylic, glitter on canvas*

*72 x 96 inches*

### **6-Mustang Sally, 2016**

CM: The great Wilson Pickett recording from 1966. The “fin” shape and colour reminiscent of automobiles and American industrial design. Always interesting in relationship between movement and stasis especially as relates to dance and design was manifested in acrylic (plastic) paint.





*Mustang Sally, 2016*  
*Acrylic, Flashe, glitter on canvas*  
*60 x 48 inches*

**7-Viene Qui Bella, 2016**

CM: This painting is a kind of homage the influence of the sculptor Sheila Pepe who is also my wife. Her work often takes the form of enormous, room-sized crocheted installations. For many years, she would create them in our loft so that, wherever you looked, you were often peering through loops and hanging tendrils of yarn.



*Viene Qui Bella, 2016*

*Acrylic, Flashe on canvas*

*72 x 84 inches*

I thank Carrie for her time and leave the room feeling dazzled. By now, the space on the fifth floor of the Whitney Biennial is filled not only with Moyer's work, but entranced reactions—a symphony of *oohs* and *ahs* from international writers and journalists. Aside from such sounds, her work leaves its audience speechless.

**Carrie Moyer's work is on view at the 2017 Whitney Biennial (<http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2017Biennial>) until June 11, 2017.**

<http://www.carriemoyer.com/> (<http://www.carriemoyer.com/>)

Eva Zanardi is a curator, art advisor and art writer specializing in Kinetic Art, Op Art and contemporary art.

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