

NICK MOSS



STEEL SHAPES

LEILA HELLER.

PRESS RELEASE:

Leila Heller is pleased to announce *STEEL SHAPES*, an exhibition of new work by New York-based artist Nick Moss. On view January 10, 2020, through February 15, 2020, the exhibition marks the artist's second solo show at Leila Heller New York. The gallery will host an opening reception for the artist on January 10 from 6 to 8 pm.

Moss's new body of work marks a significant transition from figuration to abstraction while still employing the artist's signature cut-steel canvases and industrial tools to explore materiality and color. At the center of this exhibition is his series *Steel Shapes*, in which Moss uses a blowtorch and unique patinas to test the limits of color on various shaped steel canvases welded together, recalling modernist tropes such as color-field painting, hard-edge abstraction, and assemblage. In these works, traditional linen and wood have been replaced with steel, the brush with a torch, and paint with patina.

In addition to the *Steel Shapes* series, the artist will debut three wall-mounted steel works, in which he applied the blowtorch to explore the tactility and textures of the material. He relied solely on the raw essence of the steel and the soot particles caused by burning acetylene, resulting in a subtle contrast of shape and shadow that evokes painterly abstraction in monochromatic hues. Moss inserts the powerful element of fire and the rawness of steel into a dialogue of subtlety and restraint within the framework of traditional minimalism.

Within all elements of his work, Moss deploys steel as a deliberate substitution for the traditional canvas while at the same time rejecting its historical use to create large-scale monolithic structures. Rather, as critic Lilly Wei notes, Moss "has searched for ways to present his 'steel paintings,' ultimately devising an elegant structural solution" to the past.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

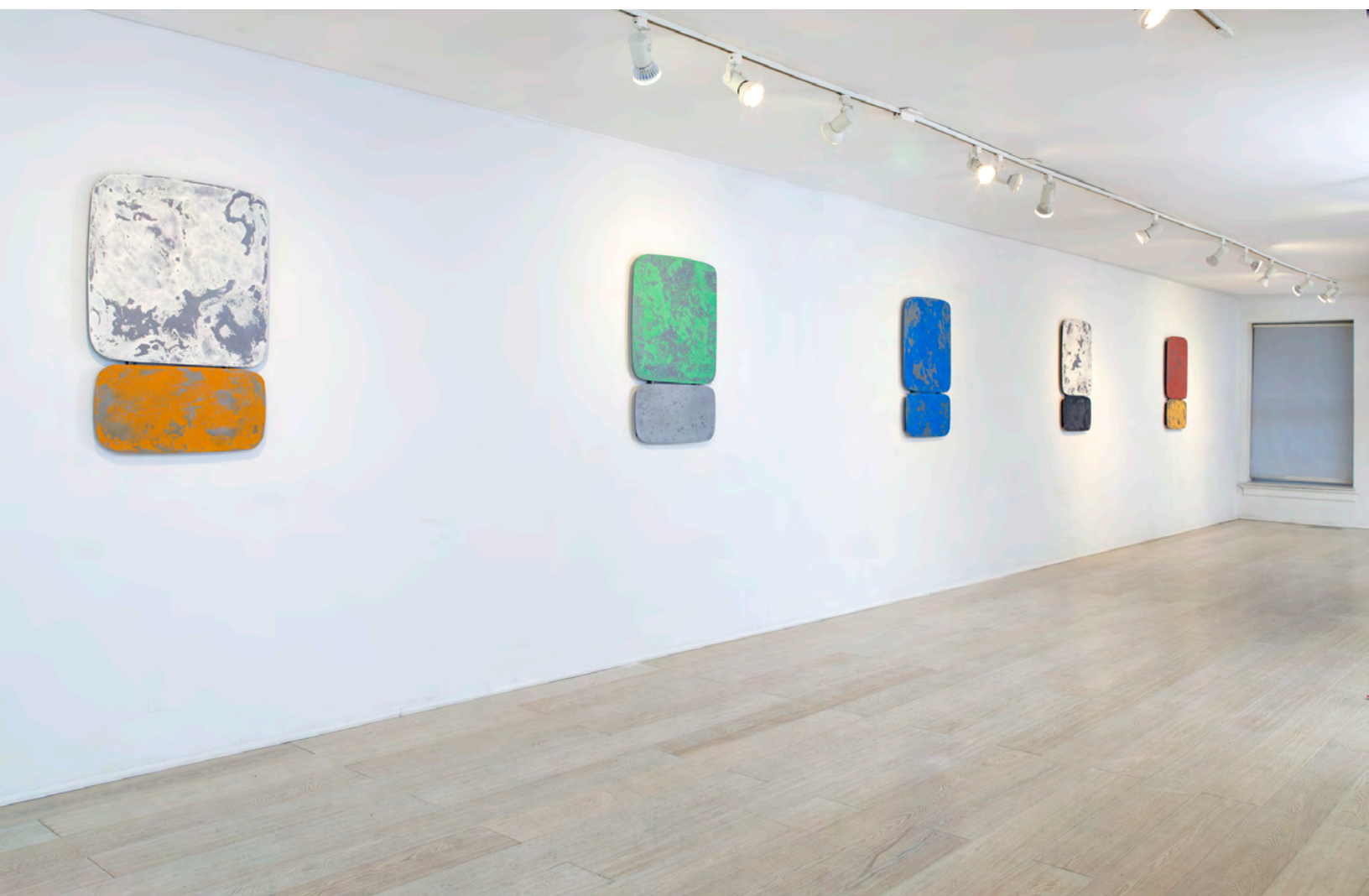
Nick Moss (b. 1985) was raised in Metamora, Michigan, and currently lives and works between upstate New York and New York City. Working as a self-taught artist, Moss is represented by Leila Heller Gallery, which presented his debut solo exhibition, *Rigorous Perception*, in 2018. He has been part of several group exhibitions at Leila Heller, including *Double Vision*, curated by Jane Holzer (2019); *Exemplary Bodies* (2018); and the gallery's summer group show in 2018. His solo exhibition *Nick Moss: Substitute for Words* debuted in Aspen, Colorado, at Casterline Goodman Gallery in winter 2019, and later traveled to Nantucket due to its overwhelming success.

Having worked on an intensive crop farm and with an industrial contracting company, Moss studied welding and metal fabrication before relocating to New York in 2007. In 2008, he joined Traeger Grills, where he led the creation, concept, manufacturing, product development, and industrial design, including re-engineering, of pellet grills made primarily of steel. By 2014, Moss had moved toward pursuing his artistic practice based in industrial steelwork. He continued to experiment with welding and steel, which developed into his current process of art fabrication.

Moss works primarily with various composites of raw steel, which he hand-welds into a canvas. Working entirely by hand, he uses industrial tools including a blowtorch, a MIG welder, and sanding implements, with unique patinas applied directly to the steel to create various abstract motifs. He also employs plasma cutting, oxyacetylene torching, water-jet cutting, laser cutting, and two-part clear coating in his practice.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Since its establishment over three decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and Southeast Asian artists. It has garnered a reputation for identifying and cultivating the careers of artists leaving a lasting impact on contemporary art and culture. Currently representing a diverse roster of Western and Middle Eastern artists, the gallery is also active in the American, European and Middle Eastern secondary art markets. In November 2015, Leila Heller Gallery opened its first international location, in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. At 14,000 square feet, the state-of-the-art gallery features three exhibition spaces, making it the largest gallery in the UAE. Showcasing leading regional and international artists, many of whom will be presenting their work in the Middle East for the first time, the gallery is dedicated to supporting the evolving practices of established artists.



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Nick Moss

Some kinda night sky over some kinda night sky, 2019

Steel canvas, patina, matte clear finish

36.25 x 24.81 x 1.25 in.

(92.08 x 63.20 x 3.17 cm.)

SOLD

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Nick Moss

Some kinda of red over some kinda yellow, 2019

Steel canvas, patina, matte clear finish

36.13 x 24.81 x 1.25 in.

(91.77 x 63.02 x 3.17 cm.)

\$15,000

LEILA HELLER.



Nick Moss

Some kinda white over some kinda black, 2019

steel canvas, patina, matte clear finish

36.25 x 24.88 x 1.25 in.

(92.08 x 63.14 x 3.17 cm.)

\$15,000

LEILA HELLER.



Nick Moss

Some kinda blue over some kinda blue, 2019

steel canvas, patina, matte clear finish

36.25 x 24.88 x 1.25 in.

(92.08 x 63.20 x 3.17 cm.)

SOLD

LEILA HELLER.



Nick Moss

Some kinda green over some kinda grey, 2019

steel canvas, patina, matte clear finish

36.25 x 24.88 x 1.25 in.

(92.08 x 63.20 x 3.17 cm.)

\$15,000

LEILA HELLER.



Detail shot



Nick Moss

Some kinda white over some kinda yellow , 2019

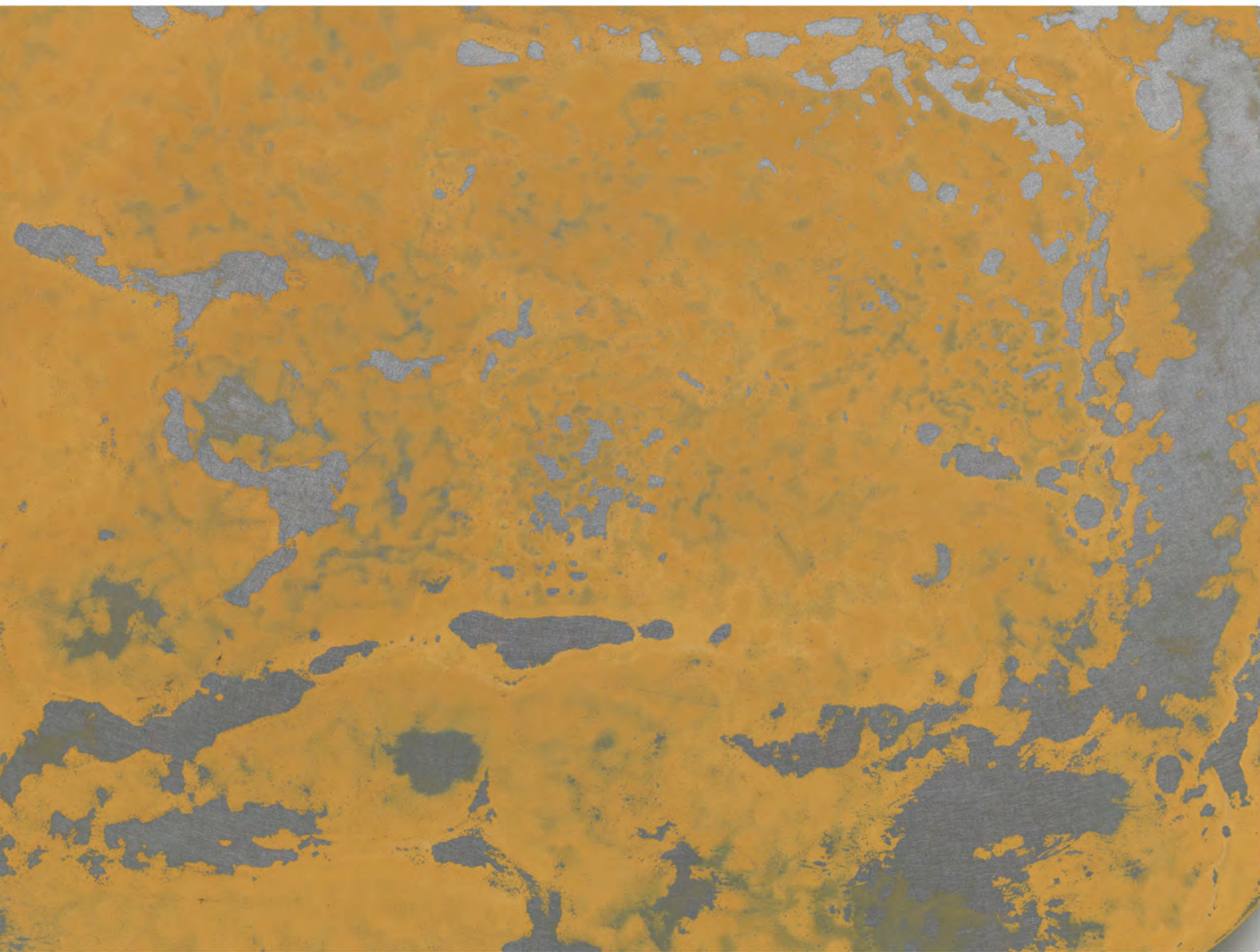
steel canvas, patina, matte clear finish

36.25 x 24.88 x 1.25 in.

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LEILA HELLER.



Detail shot

LEILA HELLER .



Nick Moss

Some kinda black over some kinda black , 2019

Steel canvas, patina, matte clear finish

36.25 x 24.88 x 1.25 in

(92.08 x 63.20 x 3.17 cm)

\$15,000

LEILA HELLER.



Nick Moss

Some kinda blue over some kinda green, 2019

Steel canvas, patina, matte clear finish

36.13 x 24.81 x 1.25 in.

(91.77 x 63.02 x 3.17 cm.)

\$15,000

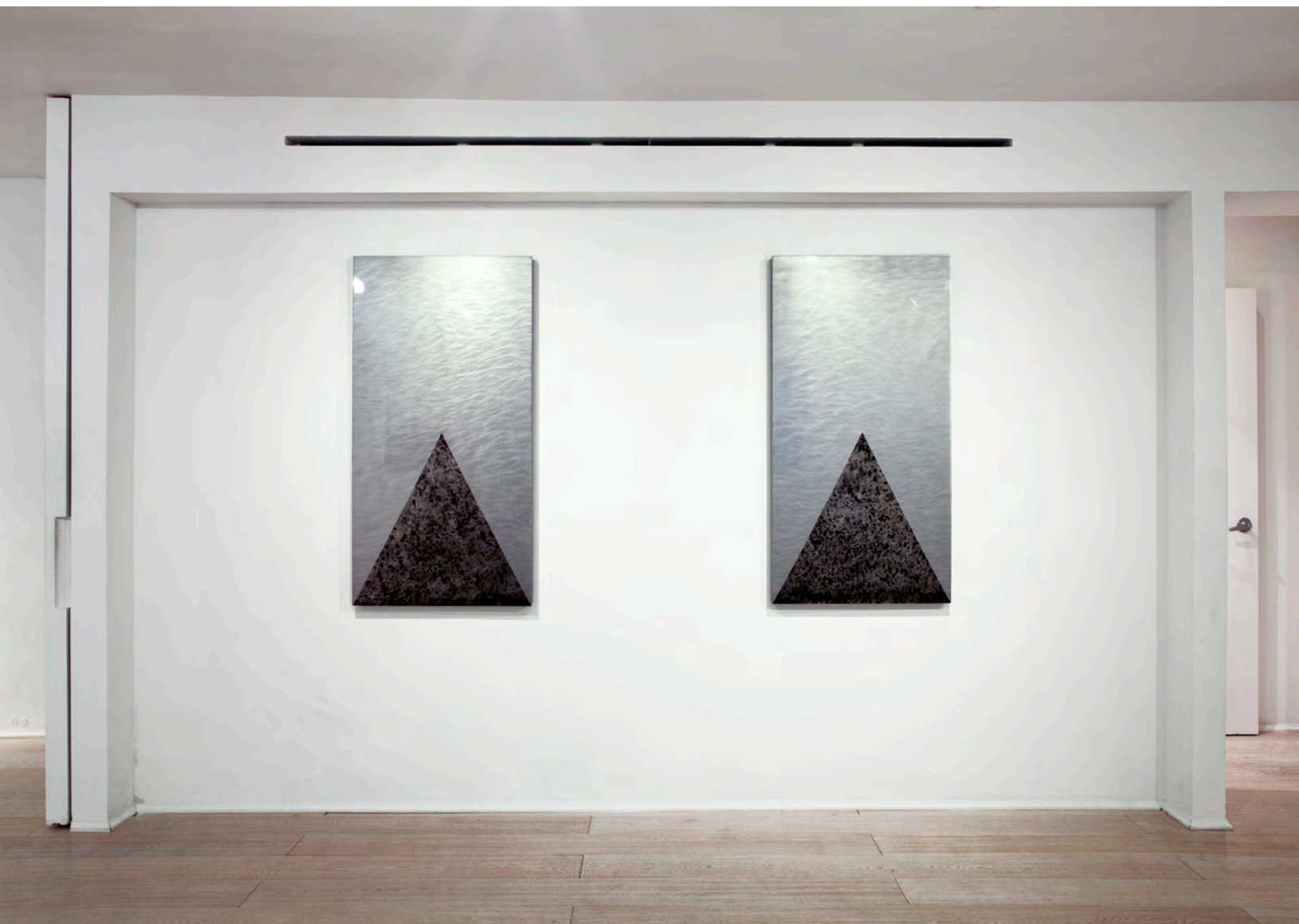
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Nick Moss

Untitled (Flame Painting), 2019

Fire and soot on sanded steel, gloss clear finish

48 x 24.50 x 2.25 inches

SOLD

LEILA HELLER.



Nick Moss

Untitled (Flame Painting), 2019

Fire and soot on sanded steel, gloss clear finish

48 x 24.50 x 2.25 inches

SOLD

LEILA HELLER.



Nick Moss

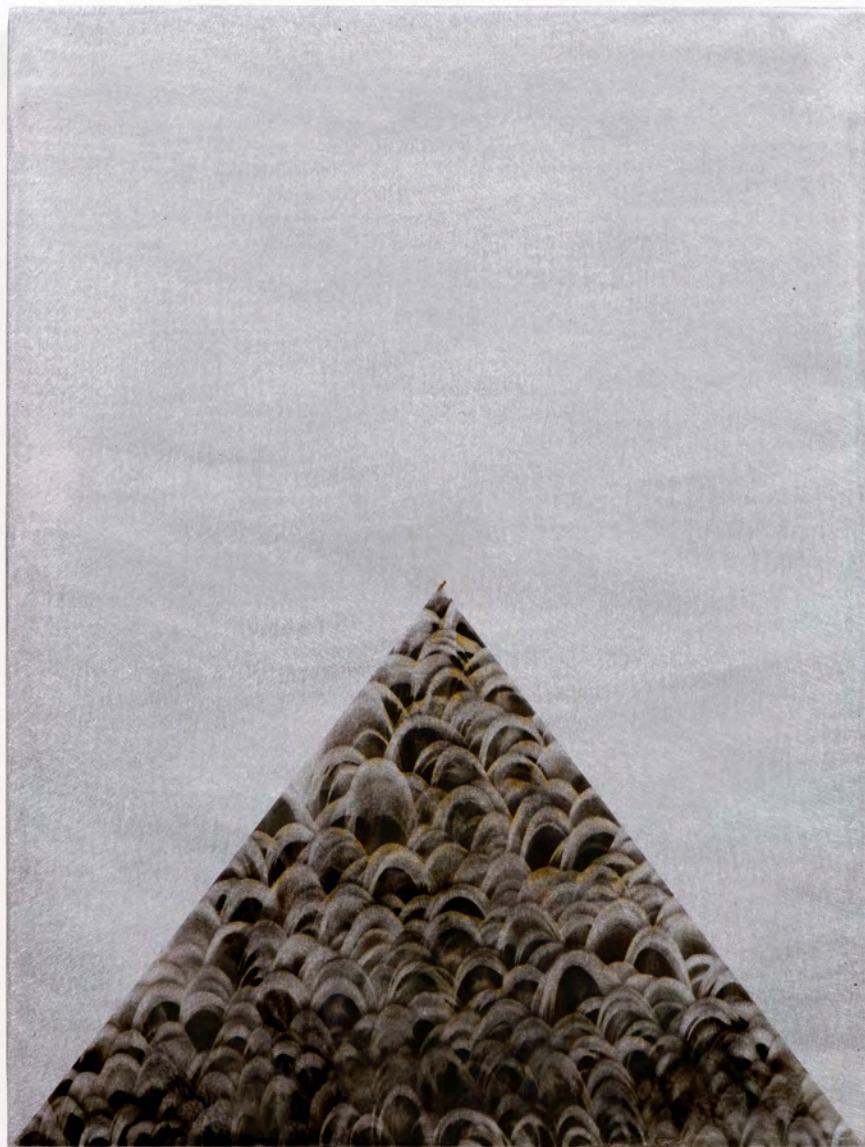
Untitled (Flame Painting), 2019

Fire and soot on sanded steel, matte clear finish

48 x 31 x 2.25 inches

SOLD

LEILA HELLER.



Nick Moss

Untitled (Flame Painting), 2019

Fire and soot on sanded steel, matte clear finish

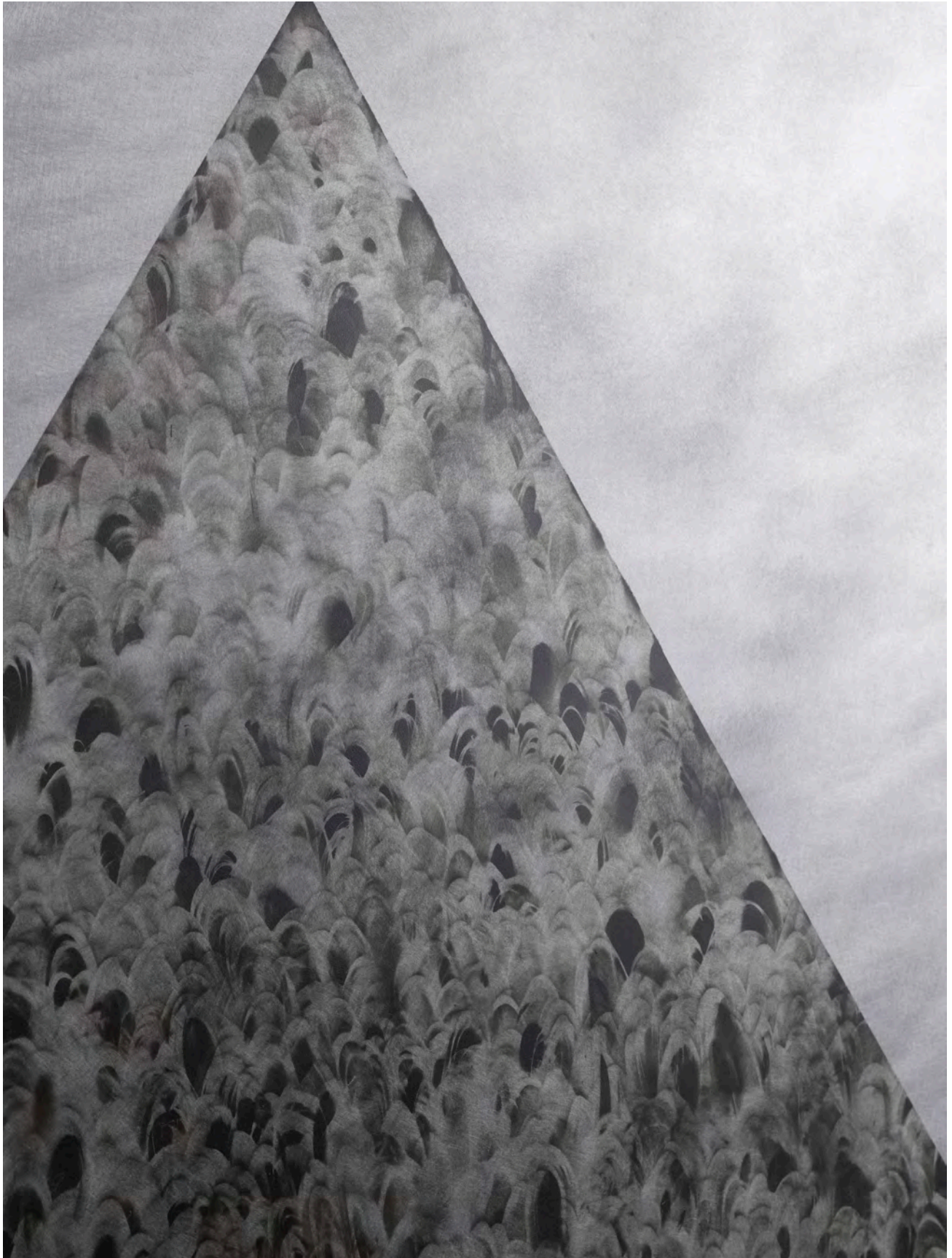
14 x 10 x 1.25 inches

\$5,000

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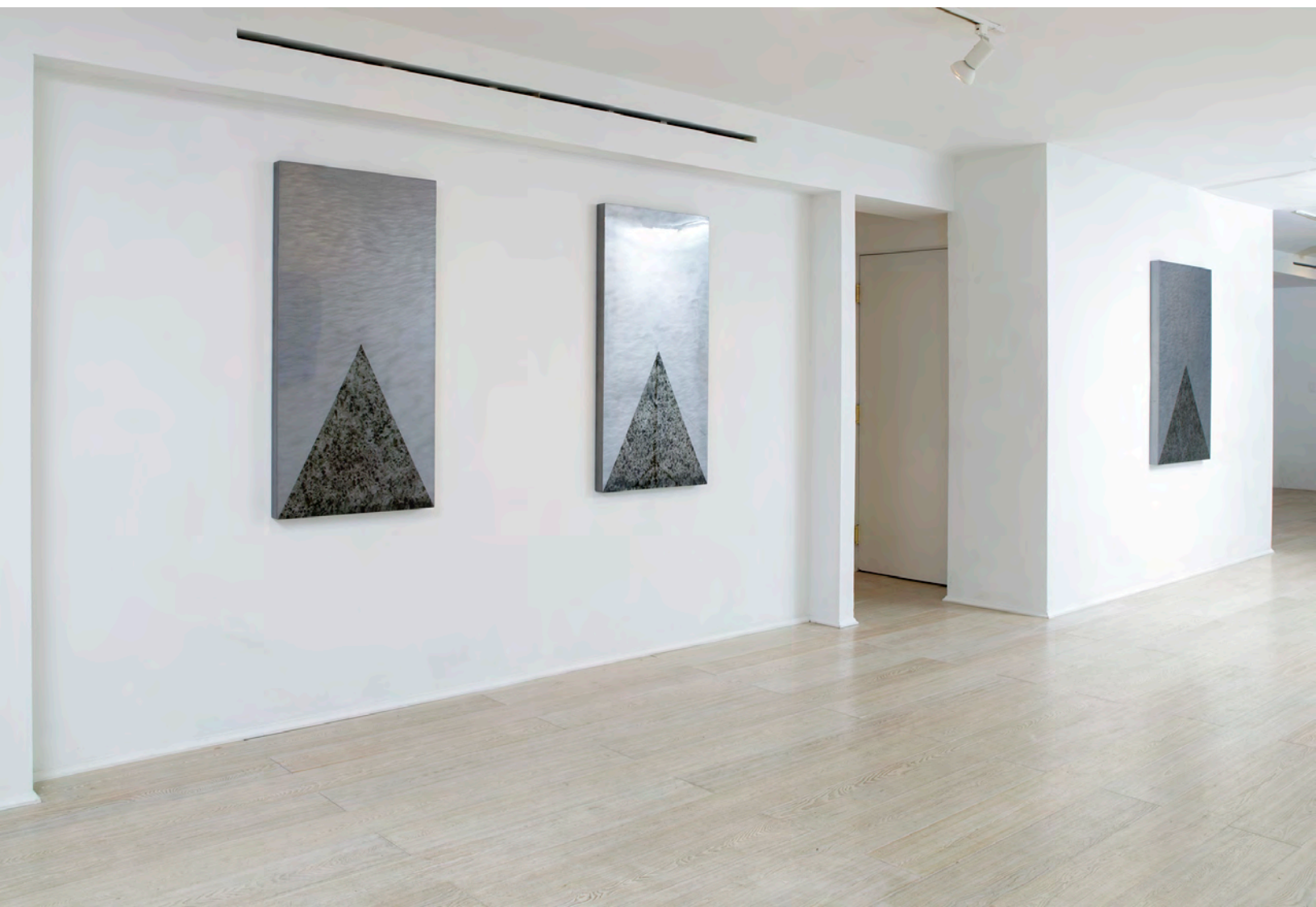
Nick Moss
Untitled (Flame Painting), 2019
Fire and soot on sanded steel, gloss clear finish
14 x 9.5 x 1.5 inches
\$5,000



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ESSAY BY HILARIE SHEETS

Nick Moss essentially paints with fire. Replacing canvas with sheets of steel and a paintbrush with a blowtorch, he uses industrial techniques to experiment with color, shape, and surface in handmade, elegant wall pieces that hover between painting and sculpture.

In a new series titled “Steel Shapes,” the 34-year-old, self-taught artist is pushing further into his ongoing exploration of abstraction. Each work is composed of two abutting forms cut from flat sheets of metal—a square poised above a smaller rectangle, both with rounded corners. The shapes are welded together from behind with a 1 1/4-inch-deep armature so that the entire structure floats slightly off the wall when mounted and casts a shadowy halo.

Within the seriality of the repeating minimalist shapes, Moss plays with free-form gesture and different color combinations across the surface of each piece. After sanding the metal, he sprays on hot patinas in various hues he's mixed. He then uses the flame of his blowtorch to push and pull the liquid on the steel at extremely high temperatures.

While Moss has mastery of his process, the swirling, galactic results are always something of a surprise after the metal cools and he sees where the pigment has, and hasn't, adhered. “You get these things you can't control,” says the artist, who lives in downtown New York and works out of a rural studio 50 miles north of the city. “The fire is going to tell the patina what to do in the end.” He seals the finished works with a two-part matte clear coat, which protects the steel and patina.

The chance compositions can read both micro and macro. On one piece, an iridescent green, flickering against the sheen of the metal, suggests a closeup of vaporous gases. On another, a brilliant blue, laced with amorphous fingers of raw steel, conjures unfamiliar oceans and landmasses viewed from space. The luster of the metal makes the colors applied to it pop and shift with the changing light as the viewer moves around each piece.

Moss's stacked forms nod to the history of abstraction, whether the compositions of Mark Rothko or the hard-edged shaped canvases of Ellsworth Kelly or Frank Stella. They are among the pioneers in the lineage of abstract painting that Moss is consciously riffing on, while using a material typically reserved for monolithic sculpture.

The artist is also directly inspired by the repeating geometry he notices and photographs in his environment. That could be the way square windows cast distorted shadows on his studio floor or brick patterns viewed while walking the city streets or the patchwork of farm fields in his native Midwest seen from an aerial vantage point. “You find so many similarities in shapes,” says Moss, who uses these found forms as a springboard to begin making work.

Moss's decision to use steel as his medium stems from an early fluency with the material. Growing up in rural Metamora, Michigan, he worked on a crop farm where tractors and equipment would often need fixing. He gained on-the-job training in welding and metal fabrication at a large industrial contracting company. In 2007, at age 22, he moved to New York City. He brought his metal-working skills and innate design sensibility to Traeger Grills, a company manufacturing wood pellet barbecue grills where he led the industrial design and manufacturing.

Since selling his interest in the company in 2013, he has devoted himself to pursuing art. "I've always recognized the beauty of steel," says Moss, who decided to work with what he knew how to manipulate. Early on, he made large-scale emojis and commonplace abbreviations of phrases such as OMG cut from steel. These pop cultural icons playfully critique how language and daily communication has shifted and regressed. In a later series, he experimented with the female figure. Using his welder to "draw" on steel, he outlined and shaded nudes in a process that required tremendous precision and rigor.

In tandem, Moss has been producing abstract works that are largely driven by process. Another series he is debuting – the "Flame Paintings" – originally came about from a mistake. He was cutting steel with a torch burning only acetylene, which creates heavy black smoke. The tip of the torch kept sticking to the steel, creating a sooty rounded shape evocative of a veiled or hooded figure. He was struck by its haunting presence.

In these new rectangular steel paintings, he's been repeating this form, accumulating the smudgy shape in dense, tumultuous crowds compacted within a triangle rising from the lower section of each piece. Across the rest of the surface, he uses a sander to scuff the metal in undulating waves, creating the effect of a cloudy sky or vast ocean, infinite and serene. Through entirely non-representational means, these monochromatic works suggest congregations of people, whether sacred or profane, and the duality between heaven and earth.

"It's just a continual exploration of my process," says Moss. "That's what I love about steel. There's always a mood. They always change. You see different things." --Hilarie M. Sheets

Hilarie M. Sheets writes on art frequently for The New York Times and The Art Newspaper, among other publications.



LEILA HELLER.

Nick Moss: Playing With Fire

Christian Viveros-Fauné

In 1936 MoMA director Alfred H. Barr coined the term biomorphism to describe “curvilinear,” “decorative” and “romantic” forms in abstract art. The artworks he referenced rejected rigid geometries in favor of free-flowing forms that intimately recalled organic shapes. Bulbous, kidney-like and enigmatically related to the human body, these forms avoided figures and explicit narratives but appeared oddly familiar to exegetes and lay people alike. Like Rorschach blots and certain cloud shapes, viewers took one look and recognized them tacitly without having ever seen them before.

Similarly, the rounded forms that characterize Nick Moss’s new wall-mounted sculptures tease the human propensity to see meaningful patterns in abstract shapes. In his case, he has stacked colored lozenges—one squarish and larger, the second smaller and rectangular—one atop the other in a way that suggests naturally occurring geological formations, flattened saddles and heraldry displays. The fact that his artistic process swaps traditionally “soft” materials (canvas and wood) for “harder” elements (sheet and tubular metal) should alert the viewer to a second defining property of Moss’ art—he is literally playing with fire.

Moss’ art making gets its start in an unlikely precinct: with a trip to the metal supply shop. That’s where he regularly purchases his “canvases”—4x8 steel sheets that are either .14 gauge or .11 gauge thick, along with other elements like steel plate, flat-bar, angle iron, tubular square and rectangle steel. These are laser cut into the beveled, quasi-geometric shapes the artist favors. For his “brushes,” Moss avails himself of, among other high-powered tools, oxy-acetylene torches, a MIG welder, dual action sanders, flap discs (a type of sanding pad), band saws, metal chop saws, grinders, a plasma cutter and air tools. On arrival at his upstate studio, the transformation of life into art is completed: the artist’s studio becomes a welding shop, and vice versa.

To build his painting surfaces and their frames, the artist heats a blowtorch to between 5,000 to 36,000 degrees to solder his metal plate and supports together. Once that’s done, he grinds and sands away any traces of roughness from the resulting surfaces to achieve a finish clean and smooth enough to receive a design. After this vigorous preparation—which is not unlike the practice of a conventional painter gessoing and sanding his canvases—the artist-cum-metalworker gets around to preparing his colors. In Moss’s world, this means mixing and applying steel patinas. Different from applied coatings like painting and powder coating, these patinas are formed by a chemical reaction, which the artist subsequently blowtorches as mottled color directly onto the steel.

Green and gray, blue and gray, black and white, red and yellow, yellow and gray—these are just some of the resultant color combinations Moss arrives at through a strenuous process that, in canonical artspeak, is part David Smith, part Mark Rothko in its recombinations. Like Smith, the Michigan-born artist's welded sculptures consist of various elements and are distinguished by flecked patinas and machine-shop polychromy. Like Rothko, Moss's blocks of variegated color take on the form of simple expressions of complex thoughts. His floating zones of color suggest, among other natural phenomena, mass and light, landscape and sky, but also the expressive force of abstraction itself.

"I grew up in Michigan, in farm country, working 7,000 acres of land with massive steel machines," Moss told *Forbes* by way of explaining his penchant for industrial materials like fire and metal and muscular processes like welding and joining. "As a little boy I was taught how to weld, create equipment, design and build trucks to haul grain. Industrial contracting was my job in high school and a little after I was manipulating steel."

The New York-based artist's connections to his rural past remain embedded in the associations he himself assigns to his painting-cum-sculptures. Besides observing echoes of machine parts from tractors and harvesters in his work, Moss consistently spies other similarities between his art and the landscape of his youth—for instance, in the patchwork design described by aerial views of Michigan farmland. After eleven years of living and working in Manhattan, the city's urban fabric has also penetrated the forms he prosaically calls "Steel Shapes." To visitors to his studio he is liable to flash iPhone pictures of two-tiered window shadows on the floor of his Tribeca loft, or similarly shaped paving stones from nearby South Street Seaport.

In addition to his signature double-lozenge works, Moss has also devised a series of wall-mounted metal works he informally calls his "flame paintings." Made by blowtorching repeated teardrop shapes onto steel plates, the resulting panels resemble naturally occurring patterns: a crowd of anonymous people one moment, a coat of mallard duck feathers the next. Like Smith, Moss believes that the only difference between painting and sculpture is the addition of a third dimension. Like generations of abstract artists before him, he has turned biomorphic shapes into a compact yet enigmatic language. To quote Oscar Wilde, what fire does not destroy it hardens.

Christian Viveros-Fauné, Brooklyn, 2019



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