

# RESIDENT

November 10, 2018

## ARTIST NICK MOSS SOLO DEBUT EXHIBITION RIGOROUS PERCEPTION

By: Hillary Latos



Artist **Nick Moss** opened his debut solo exhibition titled *Rigorous Perception* at **Leila Heller Gallery** in Chelsea NY, with a private preview hosted by Leila Heller with **Ann & Keith Barish**. Featuring a past to present series of steel paintings, the exhibition presents innovative works from large sheets of raw material. Moss integrates his innate understanding of steel, using welding techniques with industrial tools to cut and manipulate the material as if it were paint on canvas. The exhibition will be on view through December 20, 2018.

Guests in attendance included curators, collectors and art world socials **Alexander Assouline, Alina Baikova, Edgar Batista, Jason Binn, Vikram Chatwal, Bob Colacello, Robert Curcio, Alexander Heller, Omar Hernandez, Stellan Holm, Rachel Hovnanian, Leon & Barbara Kalvaria, Y.Z. Kami & Daniele Dorili, Alex Lundqvist, Keytt Lundqvist, David Marconi, Jay McInerney & Anne Hearst, Yorgos Scarpidis, David Schulhof, Sarah Senbahar, Andrea Stark, Kim Taipale, Max Teicher**, among others.

*Rigorous Perception* at Leila Heller Gallery in Manhattan spans across two gallery spaces showcasing nine nudes, three abstract works, and four of Moss's earlier emoji and text works that respond to the process of working with steel, through a masterly understanding of a temperamental material that wrinkles, distorts and moves. The ever-changing canvas, when handled precisely with the weld, molds and warps, invoking a mood through the passage of light and time. Primarily using sheet metal, flat bar, angle iron, steel plate and steel tubing to fabricate his work by hand, Moss takes the exacting technique of Gas Metal Arc Welding to create a new, improvisational method. This produces unique line-work for the steel nudes, whereas the erratic, elusive approach to the abstract works is finished in patina and high gloss. By melting the surface at temperatures ranging from 5,000-36,000°F, the welding fumes produce a complex amalgam of particles and ionized gases, fusing multiple pieces to act as one cohesive body of work.

While replacing the paint brush with torches and welding guns, Moss applies an industrial approach to eliminate the canvas, substituting it with steel to present a new vision of one of the most captivating forms in art history, exploring the line between the classical and the imperfect of the female figure as both a symbol of vulnerability and power, simultaneously. The unusual depiction of flesh in steel further bends the line between hard and soft of the work and reinforces the complexity of the nude today, placing the customarily purified image on an untainted medium.

#### **TEXT BY LILLY WEI, Art Critic and Curator**

"I have steel in my blood," Nick Moss said, a statement that just might withstand a lab test. He grew up on a farm in Michigan, surrounded by industrial structures and implements made of steel, including the tractors and other equipment needed to work great tracts of land. Given his life-long relationship with steel, his familiarity with it, and his technical mastery of it, it seems inevitable that he chose it as his medium. Moss didn't want to make steel sculptures, as he refined his unorthodox process and explored imagery and narratives. And while the recalcitrant, exacting and potentially dangerous medium is not for the fainthearted, Moss found its challenges exhilarating. His production is all made by hand, all one-offs, and it is crucial for him that he executes his works himself.

Moss has substituted sheets of steel for canvas and welding guns for paint and brush, deploying them with the same deftness and delicacy as a painter. He also searched for ways to present his "steel paintings," ultimately devising an elegant structural solution. Learning how to appropriately control the flow of heat and gas was also critical to his equivalent of a "brushstroke" since temperature alters the quality of the line, from the granulated and rough to the incised and smooth.

Some of Moss's earliest art works in this show were abbreviations of common phrases, such as OMG, or emojis torched into burnished steel, referring to the supplanting of individual messages by terse, formulaic signs. These works were a critique of the "deterioration of language," he said, but while they lamented the loss of more personally meaningful exchanges, they were less scathing than ironic, cheeky.

Moss' nudes are provocateurs, a tribute to a motif/subject that has dominated Western art since prehistoric times. It is also an unapologetic paean to a certain construct of feminine beauty, notable in the full-breasted, curvaceous bodies made dimensional by strategically placed staccato lines that also made me think of forms

of ritual markings such as tattoos or scarification. The tilt toward glamour is most apparent, however, in the tangles of luxuriant hair that wrap the women's nakedness like a gift. A technical tour de force, the wildness of the swirls seem electrified, the raised, pointillistic nodes of steel dotting the strands adding an animating, extra scintillation as the light dances across the intricacies of their patterning.

The lustrous steel sheets that are the ground for his figures undulate slightly from the welding, no longer completely flat, giving off glimpses of subtly flickering colors as the ambient light changes. There isn't much distinction between flesh and steel in Moss's representations, but that makes you think all the more about their differences in reality, about the vulnerability and mortality of the former and the greater invincibility and endurance of the latter.

Moss balances representational steel paintings in this show with three steel works in a non-objective mode. His abstractions, unlike the deliberate execution of the nudes, are much more spontaneous. Created purely through process and dependent upon accidents, the clouded drifts of muted but luminous colors and incidents are spun off the interactions of various gasses and materials with the steel. They possess their own splendors, among which are an unexpected painterly richness and pictorial depth. One is in the shape of a tondo, a format he often uses, and might be a porthole into hyperspace. But all three evoke, among other readings, landscapes both natural and celestial, real and surreal, micro- and macro-worlds. They are alchemical visions in which the substantial deliquesces into the ineffable, when all that's solid melts into air.

Ambitious, idiosyncratic, Moss's projects don't look quite like anything else out there.

Rigorous Perception will open at Leila Heller at High Line Nine on Thursday, November 8th and will be on view through Thursday, December 20th, 2018.

## **ABOUT NICK MOSS**

Nick Moss (1985 – ) was raised in Metamora, Michigan. Having worked on an intensive crop farm and with an industrial contracting company, Moss studied welding and metal fabrication before relocating to New York City in 2007. In 2008, Moss joined Traeger Wood Pellet Grills and was given full control of creation, concept, and industrial design including re-engineering, where the product was made primarily of steel. By 2014, Moss moved towards pursuing his artistic practice, continuing to experiment with welding and steel which later developed into his unique process of art fabrication today. Moss makes all his work entirely by hand without studio assistance, through a process that's highly dangerous and requires dexterity and attention to detail while behind a full face welding helmet. Moss is based out of upstate New York.

@\_nick\_moss\_

## **ABOUT LEILA HELLER 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 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 practice of established artists.

[www.leilahellergallery.com](http://www.leilahellergallery.com)



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