

April 2024

Robert Moskowitz

The exhibition "Robert Moskowitz: Paintings and Drawings from Four Decades", which I curated for Peter Freeman, Inc. in New York, was announced with the following text: Robert Moskowitz, born in 1935 in Brooklyn, has created an oeuvre that is painterly through and through, and at the same time possesses immense pictorial power. The selection of paintings and drawings in this exhibition makes it possible to trace some of Moskowitz's motifs over an extended period of time.



In contrast to the imagery of Pop Art, Moskowitz's images have an utterly private character. Even the twin towers of the former World Trade Center, which he first painted in the late 1970s and revisited over the years, became a personal metaphor for him. Through his painterly treatment, Moskowitz reduces the image to its essential form as well as to its essential content, creating a particular kind of physicality. This can be seen, strikingly, in the relationship of the image, transformed into a silhouette, to the colour scheme and to the format of the picture plane extending horizontally or vertically. The image is embedded in the surface, waiting to be discovered by the viewer.



The principle of Moskowitz's work is not invention but variation. So once the motifs have been found, he repeats them in ever new forms over the years—be it on paper or on canvas. In the works on paper, the choice of medium—oil paint, pastel, graphite—and format creates subtle modulations of atmosphere based on the same image. These works are not preliminary studies for the large paintings, but were done in parallel to them. Regularly, Moskowitz pinned the drawings to the walls of his studio. The final wall of drawings displaying iterations of the Twin Towers, the Empire State and the Flatiron Building, which is exemplary due to its wide range of tonalities, has been reconstructed for the exhibition.



At the entrance to the exhibition, there is the figure of Atlas, who symbolizes being burdened with the weight of the world. In the room with the paintings, one wall each is dedicated to works from the 1970s, the 1980s, the 1990s and the 2000s. It starts with the Wrigley Building from Chicago, which Moskowitz painted from an advertising image, followed by the Red Cross he glimpsed in a film with the actor Bill Murray, whom he admires, the Tsunami wave and finally the man diving into the depths derived from a mural in Paestum. Moskowitz chose these images intuitively; the obsessive painterly treatment deepened both their physical presence and their enigmatic appearance. But the material beauty of the surfaces is mere illusion because, as Moskowitz said in an interview, the images are existential—"what the picture is saying is not beautiful. It's about being here."



On the day of the private view, March 14, 2024, the news arrived that Robert Moskowitz, who was suffering from a serious illness for years, had been admitted to hospital. Ten days later, he passed away. All of a sudden, the content of the pictures on show, the drama hidden within them, came to the fore even more clearly. A memorial will be held at the gallery on May 2, 2024. A publication with a new text will be published on this occasion.

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