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Marge Loudon Moody: Made in America 1983-2013

- *Tower Foyer Gallery, University of Dundee*
- *28 September - 16 November 2013 28 September - 16 November 2013*

This exhibition showcases work from artist Marge Loudon Moody, who graduated from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art (DJCAD) in 1972. She is currently Professor of Fine Arts at Winthrop University, South Carolina, having moved to the United States in 1983. Yet despite its title, the exhibition is not a retrospective in the usual sense, in that most of the works on display are recent (completed in the last 7 years) with the exception of *Still Life with White Teapot*, which was finished while the artist was a student in Dundee.

Still Life shows a bouquet of dying flowers on a tabletop, below what appears to be a hanging pair of sausages. The painting's simplicity and symbolic quality seems to echo the still life works from the 1970s of Peter Collins, who taught for many years at DJCAD; whilst the work is at home within the still life tradition, its allusive symbology points to the artist's subsequent explorations of personal experience.

In her more recent work, Loudon Moody borrows from an ample range of abstract painting styles to create dynamic works exploring the experience of place, all the while drawing from her own subjective imagination. The places that emerge in Loudon's paintings are not real locations; rather, the works seem to refer to those locations as starting points for the creation of autonomous painterly spaces.

The main wall of the Foyer shows seven paintings completed around 2006 and 2007. They belong to different series and as such reflect the artist's experience of different places: her studio, her home, locations throughout Italy. The square format of most paintings imposes a structural order to the dynamic spaces contained within. Here Loudon Moody has achieved a complex evocation of space, with the shapes, lines and fields of colour receding and surfacing between front and ground, creating a spatial play that inevitably draws in the viewer.

In her statement accompanying the exhibition, the artist refers to her painting process as one of looking for an “harmonious expression,” but hers is not the harmony of “quiet grandeur” that Johann Winckelmann wanted to see in classical art, nor that of British painter Ben Nicholson or American abstract lyricist Helen Frankenthaler, all three being artists whose personal experiences of place were also an impetus for their art.

Loudon Moody’s paintings brim with dynamism, giving the impression that the harmony that sustains them is always on the brink of dissolving. The colours, shapes and lines are in a constant state of transition, attesting to the ephemeral quality of our experience of place. In this respect, it is relevant that the artist works in series, acknowledging that a particular place or experience may allow for multiple possible manifestations.

The exhibition includes three paintings from Moody’s Italy Series that stand out among the rest for their vivid shades of ochre, red and yellow, suggesting an aggressivity rarely present in her other works. To my mind, these are the artist’s most experimental and suggestive paintings, differing markedly from her explorations of places such as her studio and home. This is apparent in their stylistic qualities but also in the conceptual tensions they bring into play regarding the experience of otherness; in her case, “Italy” is the generic name for that otherness, a place beyond the familiarity of studio and home. It signifies a location explored through a detached touristic gaze, which wants to capture the fleeting nature of a place in subjective experience, while disregarding its history and context. Moody’s paintings creatively engage with elements of that otherness and make it her own. In this, *Marge Loudon Moody: Made in America 1983-2013* is exemplary of the difficulties we all share in negotiating this kind of otherness.

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