

## “Marge Loudon Moody: ‘Moments Keenly Observed’, Drawing, Painting and Collage 2002 – 2007”

### **Introduction**

Author: Linda Pastryk

During the early 1980’s while painting in Edinburgh, Marge Moody began experimenting with abstraction. Situated in her studio, within a garden, she observed the garden’s layered, faceted reflections on the greenhouse glass. Mirrored on the glass, nature’s continuous motion superimposed shape upon shape, merged forms and flattened out dimensions. About the same time, the London exhibitions of Kurt Schwitters’ collages and of Georges Braque’s cubist paintings provided alternate sources of insight. Their focus on pure composition, apart from a literal description of the natural world, presented real possibilities in a different direction. For Moody, highly trained in design principles, the challenge was to faithfully express her interaction with the subject, but in a new abstract language that maintained compositional integrity.

Since that time, Moody has explored the possibilities of collage and abstraction. Because collage elements derive from ordinary items populating our daily space, Moody’s sensitivity to the colors, shapes, textures and configurations that surround her is particularly acute. The diversity of her personal background adds another dimension, since she has lived in Kenya, the northern UK (Scotland) and now the southeastern United States; each distinctive environment has only sharpened her observation of life’s ingredients.

### **The Italy Series**

Among her recent work is the Italy series – paintings and collages derived from her travels in Italy. Across each canvas, Moody probes and intuitively captures the sights, sounds, movement and emotions associated with her time there – a drive through a rainy landscape, an open air market.

Though these pieces are non-objective, their composition, title and occasional subject references coalesce into imagery suggestive of narrative. Here color, line, shape and texture broadly narrate the artist’s lived experience. Consciously and subconsciously, Moody registers feelings, impressions and memories as she builds her design. Though many of these pieces may appear freely expressed (e.g., *Hilltown*), they result from thoughtful, deliberate construction. Careful preparatory studies, in various media, advance each stage towards the finished work.

The titles of these works increase the breadth of context to explore. For example, the mixed-media painting, *Sancta Sanctorum* (Holy of Holies), derives from a modern text on Christian Rome’s sacred spaces and objects. The text’s description of a red, wooden reliquary, filled with stones from the Holy Land, prompts a reflection on “the precious” and “pilgrimage.” To what extent can this canvas act as a reliquary for collecting the precious and also record the journey of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century artist? Within the confines of the canvas subtly rests a photograph – its contours precisely re-shaped like the angles of a silver teapot. A closer look reveals a period furniture piece with exquisite inlay. The “rare” nests within the uniquely crafted – much like “holy” stones preserved in the reliquary.

Years of purposeful art-making have trained Moody's eye and hand to move adroitly from the study of life to its conceptual interpretation. The painting, *Marketplace*, depicts her encounter with an outdoor market – the food stalls, the assortment of shoppers and a swiftly moving cyclist in a red coat. Fragmented forms, densely grouped and asymmetrically configured, suggest an environment in motion. As viewpoints shift, silhouettes alter; light and shadow alternate.

A strong principle of contrast undergirds her compositions. In the painting, *San Clemente*, Moody dramatically counters the convex with the concave and the volumetric with the linear; the cool heats up the warm. Swinging out in a generous arc, a green segmented form – fulsome and plant-like – flexes towards the viewer. An accent of purplish-mauve sweeps upward and counters the momentum. Immediately, the viewer enters a shell of a form, faceted, in cool yellow (perhaps San Clemente's apse). The volume of a sphere offsets the linearity of a circle. And so it is throughout. Every visual element is balanced and harmonized. Resolution, but with vigor.

Color is a key expressive tool in this series, articulating the richness of inner and outer worlds. Whether Moody pairs complementary reds and greens or presents expanses of chromatic gray, we sense a reverence and a pleasure in viewing Italy. Shades of orange, enhanced by cool blues and lavenders, recall satisfaction at the variegated façades along Tuscan streets (*Elysian Fields*). In *Urbania II*, a field of chromatic gray, varied in tone, supports shapes of bright notes. Color shimmers beneath the gray; small, vivid accents peak to the surface and link with glowing counterparts. A sense of harmony prevails, punctuated by bursts of energy – activity and emotion – balanced with intervals of rest and equilibrium.

The longer one considers Moody's works, the more deeply the viewer appreciates their formal congruency, self-expression and distinct identity. In these canvases resides the richness of the lived experience – moments keenly observed and felt. As is the case with all art that enriches and enlivens, Moody's outward expression of private experience sparks the light and dark of the viewer's personal history. Within this encounter, the life of these images surges and flows.

**Linda Pastryk**  
**Art History Faculty**  
**Queens University of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC**

Linda Pastryk holds a Bachelor of Arts in Art History and French from Vanderbilt University and a Master of Arts in Art History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She teaches and writes in the area of the humanities at Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, North Carolina.