

## Frank Moore *Five Paintings*

November 2–December 10, 2022  
34 East 69th Street, New York



Frank Moore, *Wizard*, 1994 © Frank Moore

David Zwirner is pleased to announce *Five Paintings*, a selection of exceptional works by the late painter Frank Moore (1953–2002) drawn from an important private European collection. For this exhibition, five paintings and four works on paper will be on view at the 34 East 69th Street gallery. Made in the artist's downtown New York studio and in his upstate home in Deposit, New York, these jewel-like pictures are among the best known that Moore created in his brief lifetime and among the most documented—portraying entire ecosystems within their inventive frames, which serve to extend the artwork's confines beyond the support.

An essayist with a brush, Moore connected complex ideas in his works and illustrated a polymathic desire to elucidate the wonder and anguish of the world around him. He turned to painting as his primary form of expression in the late 1980s, considering it “an intensely sensual activity” that occupied both a limitless and bounded space: “When a painting is activated, my universe seems to cease at the framing edge.”<sup>1</sup> Moore committed himself to a rigorous, research-based studio practice that resulted in exquisitely rich allegories of contemporary queer life and fabulist modes of portraiture and self-portraiture. He also depicted his fascination with the natural world and alluded to the invasive aspects of the biotechnologies that were keeping him and others who were diagnosed HIV-positive alive. For him, painting was a way to both convey earthly pleasures and understand overwhelming ecological concerns such as the toxic impacts of fossil fuel usage, genetic engineering, and industrial food systems.

Using a variety of unorthodox application tools and brilliant pigments, Moore created seductive, scenographic compositions that were informed by his extensive studies in art history, philosophy, science, and spirituality. He alternately repurposed found frames or elaborately constructed his own that incorporated tokens from his personal life or elements from his myriad inspirations. These complete metaphysical realms are often characterized by conflicting emotions: rage and humor, desire and neglect, love and grief.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Moore, “Painting from Life,” in *Frank Moore*. Exh. cat. (New York: Sperone Westwater, 1995), n.p.

The five paintings in this presentation exemplify prescient themes that continue to reverberate today. *Wizard* (1994), once featured on the cover of *Art in America*, envisions an apocalyptic landscape full of bodies, medications, and chaos. Moore considered it one of his most ambitious works, made at the peak of the AIDS crisis. The painting places in the foreground the French virologist Jean-Claude Chermann who treated Moore and whose research led to the discovery of HIV and AIDS. Heaps of candy-colored tablets are joined by a blazing pile of coffins, each inscribed discretely with the name of someone Moore knew who perished from AIDS-related complications. Employing silkscreen printing to achieve a layered, collage-like effect, Moore added further dimension with *Wizard*'s intricate frame: he cast in lucite the HIV and AIDS medication he was taking and used pages from the bulletin *AIDS Treatment News* as its backing. Visually citing the Holy Grail and other bountiful treasures, *Wizard* is a Boschian summation of not only the collective tragedy of AIDS but also the pharmaceutical industry's monopoly on administering care.

One of Moore's three "bed paintings"—the other two are in the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York—*Lullaby* (1997) pairs the domestic with the pastoral to bridge the earthly and the heavenly. A herd of buffalo are shown roaming over a pristine white bed, tying together larger ecological concerns with the pharmacological anxieties that loom over a patient's bedside. However, like much of Moore's work, the subject matter is semi-autobiographical; the title points to "Home on the Range," which the artist's mother sang to him as a lullaby when he was a child. Another kind of self-portrait as well as a tribute to themes of rebirth and resurrection, *Spring* (1996) seems to depict the artist after medical treatment; delicate snowflakes are superimposed over his profile, and he exhales a flutter of winged insects and diaphanous butterflies. Related to Moore's group of paintings *Everything I Own* (1993–1994), which refers to the tradition of the Buddhist mudra, *Spring* likewise complexly visualizes the ethereal and the terrestrial in its symbolism.

*The Curators* (1996) questions what happens to an artist's legacy after one passes, a concern which preoccupied Moore after his HIV diagnosis. In what appears to be the crypt of an encyclopedic museum, the walls' bricks are carved with the names of Moore's friends, influences, and contemporaries. The work is enclosed in a black frame netted with painted white spiderwebs that also appear in the top left corner of the composition, there spelling out "PAY WHAT YOU WISH." Requiring a closer look, *The Curators* features a tautological exercise by Moore that makes reference to Belgian surrealist René Magritte: a painting in the bottom right corner pictures a meta version of the work itself, infinitely repeating within the frame.

To create *Nursery* (1994), Moore gathered and painted trash that he found in a local parking lot: cigarette butts, used condoms, drug vials, chicken bones, and matchbooks. Among the detritus, spring crocuses shoot up from the ground. Moore recasts the waste to compose a work that indicates a fresh sense of hope. A series of four watercolors, made at the time of the artist's Gianni Versace major commission, also features Moore's vivid coloration and fanciful interpretations of landscapes. Their cherrywood frames, carved by fabricator Michael Combs, allude to those of Victorian fairy paintings.

Born in New York City in 1953, Frank Moore spent his childhood on Long Island and summered with his family in the Adirondacks, where he developed a lifelong interest in nature and was exposed to Works Progress Administration-era artists. From 1971 to 1975, he studied painting and psychology at Yale University, and completed a residency at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1973. He variously lived in New York and traveled abroad through the 1970s, studying decorative arts, and began

working in the theater and performance scenes from 1980 onward. He collaborated with the choreographer Jim Self on the costume and set design for the Bessie Award-winning experimental film *Beehive* from 1985 to 1987.

Moore was diagnosed HIV-positive in 1987. After his partner, Robert Fulps, died in 1991, Moore joined Visual AIDS and helped design the internationally recognized looped red ribbon that continues to raise public awareness of AIDS to this day. In 2002, he passed away at the age of forty-eight from AIDS-related complications.

He presented his first solo exhibition at the Clocktower Gallery, New York, in 1983. Paula Allen Gallery, New York, organized solo presentations of his work in 1988, 1989, and 1990. In 1993, he presented his first solo exhibition with Sperone Westwater, New York (subsequent solo presentations followed in 1995, 1998, and 2003). Three of Moore's paintings were included in the 1995 Whitney Biennial, curated by Klaus Kertess. He received an Academy Award in Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1999. Three years later, Sue Scott organized a midcareer retrospective devoted to Moore at the Orlando Museum of Art, Florida, that traveled to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo. In 2012, the Grey Art Gallery at New York University organized the comprehensive survey exhibition *Toxic Beauty: The Art of Frank Moore* that was paired with a smaller show at NYU's Fales Library, which houses the artist's papers. In 2021, David Zwirner opened a presentation of Moore's work, organized by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, critic, and curator Hilton Als, as part of *More Life*, a focused series of curated solo exhibitions shown on the fortieth anniversary of the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis.

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