ugly, where I could not give all I needed to give. It simply was not how things should be, not just for me, but for everyone. So I decided to act and think as if I were beautiful. I did not tell anyone of my decision. But within two weeks people started telling me that I had physically changed. I used this feedback, this sign, to deepen the reality shaping. This new reality opened up new possibilities for everyone.

2

If you were to cross UC Berkeley’s Sproul Plaza in the late 1970s, there’s a good chance you would have encountered Moore sitting by himself in his wheelchair, a long pointer attached to his head of unruly brown hair. From a colorful board of letters and words on his lap hung a sign that read, “Talk to me.”

He explained:

My body gives me a tool that other artists spend years to create. Most artists are not as lucky as me. They do not have the built-in advantages and shields that I have. They need to resist the real world, the normal world, more than I do. They need to be more sneaky to avoid being seduced by the business and politics of art.

3

In 1978 Moore converted a storefront space on Bancroft Avenue into The Theater of Human Melting, a performance and workshop site where he developed performances, wrote screenplays, and mentored students in his philosophies of connection. The performances were participatory, durational, challenging events that synthesized his work in poetry, performance, painting, and collaboration. These works also included paintings—on canvases as well as bodies—to create an utterly immersive experience.

The impetus for Frank Moore / MATRIX 280 was the recent acquisition by BAMPFA of two of Moore’s paintings: Mariah (1977) and Patti Smith (1979).

Although Moore actively rejected categorizations of all kinds, we have decided to focus on his lesser known contribution to painting as a means of introduction to his large and complex archive (housed at UC Berkeley’s Bancroft Library). And not incidentally, painting, a distinctly physical medium, affords us the opportunity to contemplate the essential questions that all of Moore’s work proposes about our bodies in relationship not only to objects and materials (canvas, paint, a computer keyboard), but also to each other as subjects and viewers, artists and models.
The exhibition includes twenty-nine paintings on canvas and paper that Moore executed from the mid-1960s through the early 1980s. Although the artist was often engaged with abstraction, many of Moore’s paintings are figurative, depicting friends or collaborators or drawn from the contemporary pop culture lexicon. Never one to be confined to categories and always on the lookout for new means of connection, Moore was an early adopter of digital painting technologies, eventually forgoing paint and canvas altogether and using programs such as Corel PaintShop Pro to make his work.

Although Moore is credited as the director, the video Let Me Be Frank was produced posthumously by his family as the opening sequence for Moore’s complete creative enterprise, complicating and conversing with Moore’s body of work. The video was produced posthumously by his family as the opening sequence for Let Me Be Frank, a series of videos based on his autobiography, Art of a Shaman. This segment serves as a provocative, boisterous, and joyful introduction to connections in a world of increasing fragmentation and isolation.

Vincent Fecteau and Keith Wilson, Guest Curators

“The MATRIX program is made possible by a generous endowment gift from Phyllis C. Wattis.”

Checklist

All works by Frank Moore and from the collection of Michael LaBash and Linda Mac, Inter-Relations, unless otherwise noted.

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