

**Moya McKenna: Ideas once thought and then forgotten**

*Untitled (Cosmic burst man)* is a recent artwork by American Tom Friedman; a bust of a man with dark apertures in place of eyes, mouth and nostrils. In a neat spatial inversion, the viewer peers in and unexpectedly sees the night sky. It's not an artwork that begs detailed interpretation – ideas are suggested (about infinity, about the experience of staring into space, perhaps about mortality) but are left open-ended. In this way, Friedman's work provides perfect material for Moya McKenna's paintings.

This reference is among a handful which visually repeat throughout Moya's work, often over years. Others include a cheetah's head licking an unseen companion, Whistler's mother sitting in profile and a work by Yayoi Kusama drawn from a photograph Moya took in Japan a few years ago. Each provides a different emotional and formal texture, retaining something of their original context yet providing a unique armature for each individual work. A fine control limits this selection, reflecting, as Moya noted during my recent visit, a desire to decide 'what enters the studio', and by extension her paintings. Pushing backwards and forwards between these images, the things they suggest and the undefined spaces they inhabit seems to provide the axis on which her new work turns.

Moya says that to paint these works she needed to first understand space in a way that her earlier paintings allowed. These earlier works drew on constructed studio tableaux and collages, and over time moved from describing the 'literal' space she had set up in front of her, towards that imagined, or sensed, in the paintings themselves. Her recent group of paintings can be seen to complete this trajectory – the way their spaces are constructed appears prompted by an internal dialogue no longer beholden to the logic of how things should be. Simultaneously 'finished' and open ended, their revisions suggest both a future and a past: the way they could have been underlies how they are. In part they work because they hang together so tenuously; shift one or two things and they could unravel.

— Quentin Sprague

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