

Experience, Repeat, Recall: Memory as an Artform

In Search of Meaning: Memory Becomes Us is an evocative multilayered exhibit of humanity and a homecoming for Patricia Moss-Vreeland as she returns to the Esther Klein Gallery twenty-years past her original debut displaying her researched-based artwork at the Science Center of Philadelphia— A return so appropriate for Moss-Vreeland since pattern and repetition are at the center of her visual practice, as are the elements at the core of our cognizant recognition as humans in time and space.

Multidisciplinary in her approach Moss-Vreeland thematically ties bookmaking, prints, painting, drawing, olfactory installations, poetry, and film to her passion for the inter-workings of the brain. Partnering with scientific experts in the field, she explores how we remember and make meaning of personal and communal experiences through pathways of creativity.

A TEDx speaker, published author, and multidisciplinary artist, Moss-Vreeland has held a research-based visual practice for over two-decades focusing on memory. Her works are found in a number of prestigious collections including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, Norton Museum of Art, and the Holocaust Museum Houston.



Upon entering the exhibition, the viewer is first greeted with the ghostly encounter of Amtrak's 30th Street Station in *Arrival and Departure*. As if a dream, flashes and bits, recall the experience of lived daily commuter culture. We are invited to recall the mundane, seemingly insignificant and hurried moments of the day. To quietly stop the rush, recall, and be in the moment of a memory.

Arching a deeper entrance into the exhibit space as if the *Gate of Ishtar*, *Rhapsody* an installation is to the center and *In Search of Meaning* is on the right. *Rhapsody* consists of a photographic mural, wallpaper design, and photo collage overlaid with poetry. In the small black and white photo, her eldest son as an infant, stands alongside her husband's grandmother seated in a chair. This cropped photograph is laden with symbolism for the passing of time and memory. The elderly woman is nearly cropped out of the picture frame, fading out and looking into the distance. In contrast, the cute and pudgy boy is full of life, wonder, and his mischief is captured gazing out into his bright future. Moss-Vreeland's familial ties are peppered throughout the exhibit.

The artist refers to the parallel universe often and many times her picture-planes manifest a sense of a multiverse. As in the photo mural of the transverse birds, Moss-Vreeland describes them as representative of herself and her science research partner, Dr. Dasa Zeithamova—"the birds face each other, on the same plane, in corresponding universes," she states. This idea of alternative but comparable worlds is intensified by her collage pieces that lend to disparate layering. Such as

In Search of Meaning the large work aside the didactic exhibit panel that juxtaposes a brain scan with a drawing of a figure who is rendering geometric shapes and patterns evoking references to innovation in both science and art.

Other works are layered in a style that evokes archeological stratigraphy, with each “strata” laden with its own unique narrative to be unearthed. *A Parallel Universe; Memory, Emerging Patterns; My Dream; and Reconstructing Memory*, are all examples of this approach. Texture, variety, and elements from nature run through-out the mixed-media digital collages. The register-style compositions are without monotony; Moss-Vreeland infuses variation within both methodology and materials: some bands are more sharply focused, while others are hazy, some fields are so textured they look like they would be rough to the touch, while other sections reflect ripples that almost seem wet.

Memory and Place also employs a registered composite composition and provides the impression of summoning the ancients. This work recalls steles such as the *Palette of Narmer* which would be equally as ceremonial. There is a spirituality present. The atmospheric seascape on the top register, the patchwork of more organically drawn foliage on the second level, simplified contour drawings conjuring *Venus of Willendorf* upon a chalkboard on the third, and a bleeding wash-pigment overlaid a grid on the bottom all mapping the course of the natural environment. *Re-emerging Patterns* by its nature of being a scroll also recalls the mysteries of the ancient past.

The memory of women is another compelling recurrent theme in the exhibit. As her husband’s grandmother is referenced in *Rhapsody*, her mother’s influence is suggested by her still life painting, *The Ritual of Memory and Object*. Moss-Vreeland extracts this painting from her memories of her mother’s habit of setting still lives around the house when she was younger. “Creativity guides the ways in which we remember”, Moss-Vreeland states, “and we are in the process of rewriting memory all of the time.”

The water carriers balancing bowls on their heads in *WeWomen* speak to a remembrance of a simpler (or more difficult) time. As do the female laborers sewing wings in *The Ordinarity of each day became heroic*. This is a commanding mixed media piece that dignifies woman’s work and demands respect for the undertakings of quotidian tasks that woman endure. A surrealist arrangement of wings stylistically reminiscent of *Victory of Samothrace* surrounds the picture plane with three women slightly off-center that are carefully drawn in graphite. Seemingly, a European spin on Yolanda Lopez’s *Guadalupe series*, a painted tryptic that also gave homage to the regular woman of society that really upheld it and lacked recognition.

Most of us may only think of the past when we refer to memory, but Moss-Vreeland also employs ideas of memory when working with ideas of the future. This is especially the case with her works that deal with environmental concerns such as *Fading Farm*. These works appeal to a collective memory of place as a call to action for the care of our natural world. Pipe lines, nuclear power, and the agricultural industry are all noted with jarring proximity. A half-erased structure lacking pigment to the right of the picture plane, reminds us we must care for these things in the present if we would like the natural environment to be healthy in the future. And as Moss-Vreeland states, “our imagination moves us forward.”

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