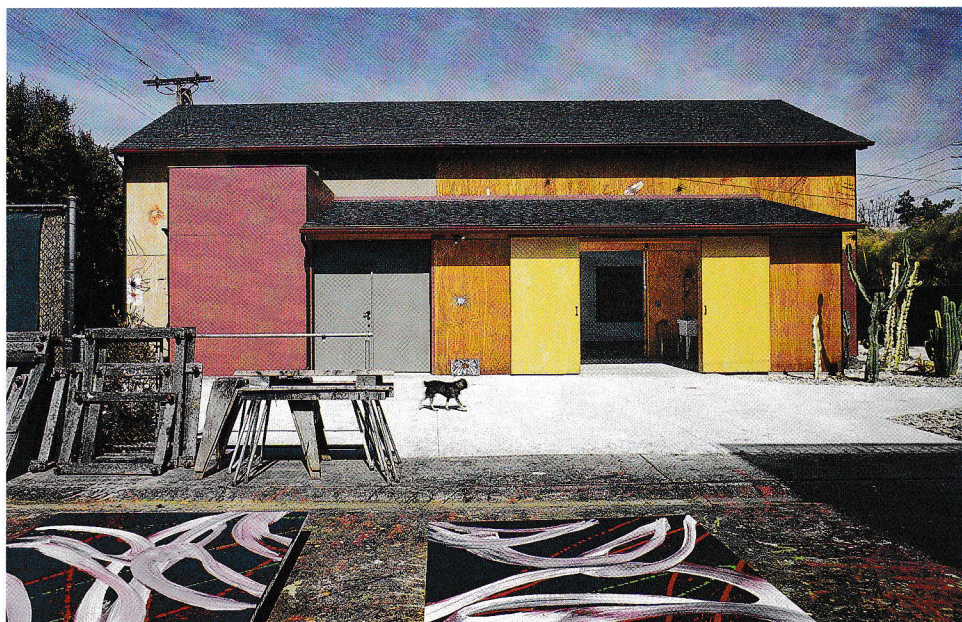




THE ARTIST'S WORK OVERFLOWS INTO A SECOND STUDIO—
DESIGNED BY ARCHITECT STEVEN EHRLICH—IN VENICE, CALIFORNIA



Ed Moses

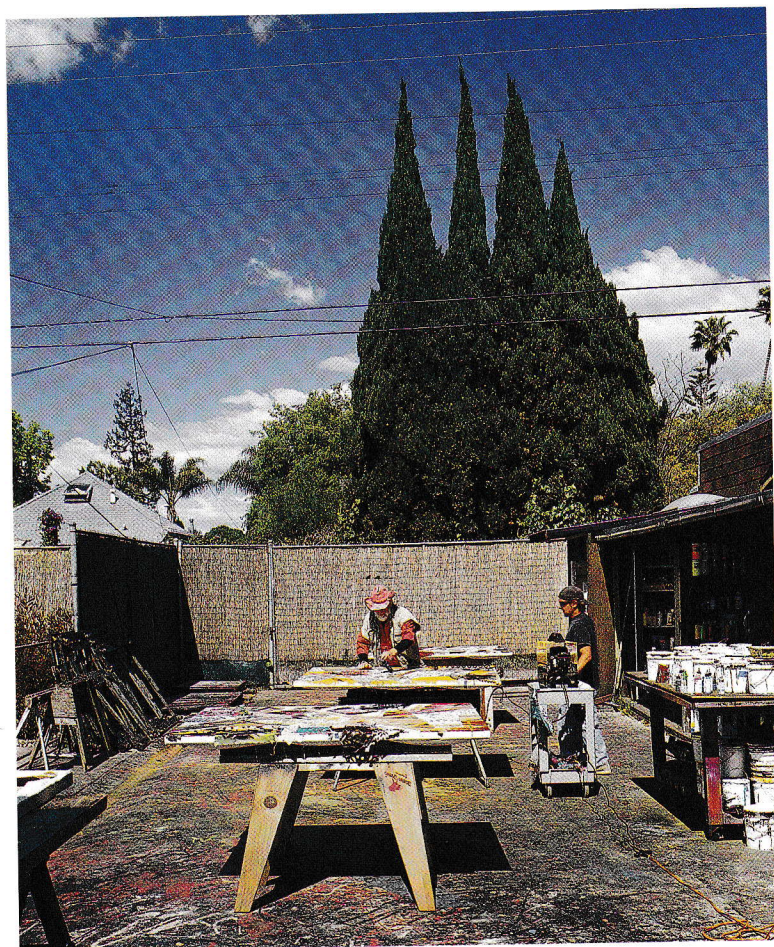
looks around his compound of buildings in Venice, California, and says, **"I can never have too much space."** Never mind that in 1987 architect Steven Ehrlich designed a vast studio for him. Two years ago the painter bought the neighboring property and asked Ehrlich to build him another.

Not that Moses doesn't need the space. Renowned for his dedication to pure, powerful abstract painting, Moses is considered by many to be one of Los Angeles's most prolific and enduring artists. A Long Beach, California, native who first showed with the storied Ferus Gallery in 1958, Moses was given a retrospective at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 1996, and his paintings are represented by the prestigious L.A. Louver Gallery.

Ehrlich has designed a number of buildings in Venice and has become friendly with many artists along the way, including Moses. "Art gives me another way of looking at something," says Ehrlich. After he completed Moses's first studio, he collaborated with the artist in 1990 on the abstract pattern of the facades of a Los Angeles building called the Shatto Recreation Center. To enliven the masonry building, Ehrlich asked Moses to compose a pattern of concrete block and brick for the exterior walls. Moses's paintings also hang in the distinctive glass-and-steel house that Ehrlich designed for himself in Venice.

If the architect has a passion for art, the artist is fascinated by architecture. "Ed is always happy when he's building something," Ehrlich says. Moses, barrel-chested and bearded, explains that for his first studio he drew a sketch of what he wanted on an envelope. Ehrlich and Moses worked together to refine the design, which included a clerestory. Over the years Moses has added storage space and a spa, among other things. For the second studio, Moses told Ehrlich, "Just make something like the other studio but with skylights and

opposite: Ed Moses in his Venice, California, studio with *Moo Verk* (left), 2002, and *Sister "Of"* (right), 2002. **above:** The minimalist structure was designed by architect Steven Ehrlich. "I just threw out an idea of a simple barn-like structure, and Ehrlich elaborated on it," says Moses. The building's birds-eye maple doors open onto a courtyard, which is arranged with works in progress.



above left: The paint-splattered concrete courtyard is where Moses (center) produces his works with the help of two assistants. **above right:** "I stenciled spiders and drew lines around on the plywood before it was erected," Moses explains. **opposite, left:** One of four painting storage areas with an early cardboard prototype of a Frank Gehry chair. **opposite, right:** The studio entrance and a second storage area.

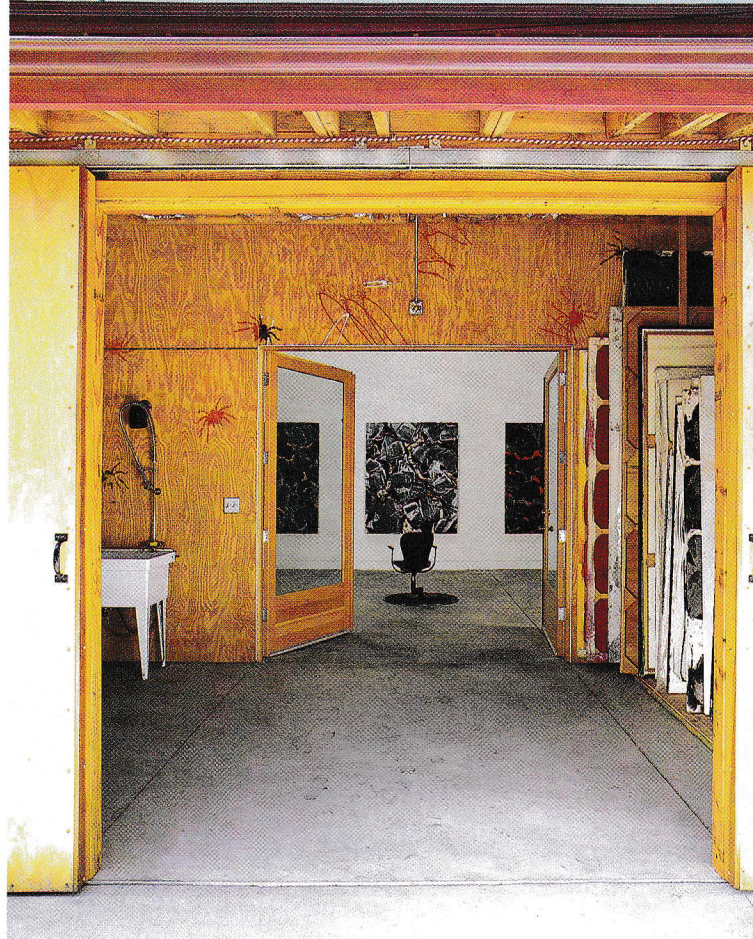
without the clerestory." Ehrlich obliged, but he points out that the second studio is more of a pure volume with a simpler palette of materials on the interior. "It's not about architecture," he says. "It's about creating a space he can work in."

Both studios have a barn-like industrial aesthetic on the outside and an art-gallery-like sensibility on the inside, and are separated from each other by a paint-splattered concrete courtyard and a few hearty cactus. Nearby is Moses's modest circa 1918 Craftsman-style bungalow, "built when the area was mostly bean fields," says Moses, and where he lives with his two pugs, Ubu and Jack. The new studio is clad in rough-sawn plywood, some of which Moses decorated with spiders, stenciled in black or red, and drawn lines of paint. (The artist used the spider emblem in his work about fifteen years ago after his teacher in Buddhism told him that if spiders scared him, he had to make friends with them.)

When Moses bought the house next door in 2003, he left it in place and built the new studio in the large back yard. "It was built for about one hundred dollars a square foot," Moses says, "so it cost about one hundred forty thousand. In 1950 I paid twenty-five dollars a month for rent in Venice, and that was too much. I had to work part-time at the liquor store."

The 1,100-square-foot studio has enclosed storage space built onto the front. The sliding entrance doors are defined by their bird's-eye maple material. A mezzanine drawing studio has a small balcony. Moses does not occupy the studios for painting but for viewing. "He uses them to look at his paintings," Ehrlich explains, "which is part of his process."

The paintings themselves are done outdoors in a large concrete courtyard. To create them, Moses eschews the old-fashioned paintbrush. Instead, after he hoses down a canvas that has been stretched over a wood panel, he uses paint rollers to mop on the base color just before the canvas is dry. Next he introduces linear elements onto the wet surface.



Before it dries, he sometimes hoses off the canvas a second time, leaving traces of the lines. Then he masks out irregular shapes and draws within them or lays on stencils and sprays paint over them. When he removes the masking, the painting is completed and ready for stretcher bars. "I haven't used a paintbrush in years," Moses says.

The point, says the artist, is "to keep the paintings close to the belly of the beast"—that is, to avoid control so the result is a surprise, "a way of tricking me." Moses subscribes to the ethos of the 1940s Abstract Expressionists, who sought an unimpeded flow of activity. He gets up every day around 6:30 A.M. and starts to work an hour later before his two assistants arrive. "I'm an explorer," he says. "I muck around. I go from one painting to another." He works on six to eight paintings a day. "I keep two or three a week if I'm lucky," says Moses. "At the end of the year I get rid of a bunch. If I do three hundred fifty paintings a year, two hundred fifty are destroyed. I shred most of them, because I don't want one out there that's an 'almost,'" he says.

To determine which are best, Moses hangs the paintings under museum-quality lighting on the clean, white walls of his studios. By approximating the viewing conditions of an art gallery, he is able to see the paintings in a fresh, impersonal way.

"It's a lot about process," Moses says. "I don't visualize and execute. Most abstract painters discuss this process of building up and taking off. Every breath is brand-new. Don't think of the future, don't think of the past. The only factor is now." ➔

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