

## William Sidney Moïse

Painter

American

Born 1922 Carlinville, Illinois

Died August 6, 1980

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William Sidney Moïse was born and raised in the small town of Carlinville, Illinois. His upbringing and environment was rich with the traditions of the arts: his three sisters were involved in professional theater, a brother-in-law was a commercial artist in New York, and he is a descendant of the distinguished southern artist Theodore Sidney Moïse, whose portrait of Henry Clay hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Moïse attended the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee and studied English Literature since art courses were not offered in the curriculum. He graduated Cum Laude in 1943. In 1946, Moïse was accepted for study at Cooper Union Art School in New York. He graduated with a Fine Arts degree in 1949 and taught for a short time at the Hamilton Farm School.

While working towards his masters degree in Art Education at Columbia University in 1950, Moïse taught at the Downtown Community School. Upon his graduation in 1952, he moved to Hancock, Maine and accepted a position teaching art in the Mount Desert Island public school system.

Moïse resigned from his teaching position in 1954 to accept a research grant with the Wilhelm Reich Foundation. While working at the foundation, Moïse became influenced by the Dr. Reich's theories on life-energy and its relationship to creative processes, linking art with science. In his writings, Moïse often describes his creative methods as experimentation and asks artists to "consider [their] paintings as scientists think of [their] laboratories", each being environments in which to conduct experiments. "Experimentation is designed to coax and lure vague hunches into greater clarity. Experimentation seeks to explore them, to see if they work, grow and develop. It attempts to explore the direction suggested, to discover whether it is fruitful and unfolding or a dead-end. Experimentation is a means of investigating the unknown."

In relation to Dr. Reich's ideas of life-energy as being conducted through art, Moïse is in favor of automatic processes of creation that allow the artist to express subconscious feelings, sensations, thoughts and ideas. To connect himself further with nature, Moïse uses natural light and organic forms as vehicles for his expression.

Concerning painting, Moïse believed that, "A work of art is first the expression of the human being that created it. Significant painting is the soul deep revelation of the essence of that particular human. As obvious as this is, it is too often overlooked and the artist is assigned to some mystical pedestal as being the oracle of this or that great social movement or some abstract symbol of the times."

"There is a feeling of alert relaxation when painting, a smooth fluidness of hand, mind, and body, and eyes all working in easy orchestration; a feeling of the work painting itself, with you being only an instrument, a tool putting on and mixing paint; a body-knowing feeling that this color goes here, this line there, this mass playing over here; all without the slightest doubt, without even a thought of it being good, bad or indifferent." Moïse has stated, "Several months ago I was attracted by a motif of black hens against white snow. Unthinking but excited, I plunged into the work by rapidly painting in the strongest darks. As it progressed I found myself intrigued with the slashing intense darks as they lay against the white canvas. The excitement and fascination with this dark against light continued in painting after painting for many weeks, through various other motifs. I had no idea where it was leading or what was developing."

While color initially was the sole attraction for Moïse, it gradually became apparent that structure and its subjective and visual exploration still uniquely filled with energy and stemming from a somewhat mystical program, was at the core of his fascination. He said, "Where before I was interested in softness and merging color, my interest was now with strong statements and contrasts."

Moïse's definition of a work of art is a fascinating metaphor. He likens art to a birth process. When successful a work of art has several distinguishing qualities. One of these is originality. When an unknown becomes known we call it originality. Today's known was yesterday's unknown. Another quality is communication. The painting has a life of its own. It is a record, a tape of the entire experience involved in the creation of the work. If successful, the work can be tuned in by the observer and the experience played back visually. It exists in time and communicates. Aliveness is also one of the qualities. It is the feeling that the spontaneous has happened; that "happenings" have occurred in the work. According to Moïse, "The unified crystallization, characteristic of a work of art, results from the interplay of the conscious and sub-conscious during the process of its creation."

Still, Moïse believed that painting is a growing process and it doesn't just come instantly. He believed that it was at times painful and most of the time not at all fun. Yet, as he often set off across a snow-covered field on snowshoes to find the perfect subject to paint, using an old green bottle for turpentine and sawed off brushes so they would fit into his fishing tackle box, he would paint his chosen subject - the beauty in nature as if he were dancing. His methods disguised his frustration with painting for he was a choreographer who applied paint, with wide, gestural, graceful strokes. The surface came alive with a palette knife or more often than not, with his fingers, serving to connect himself with the canvas and the whole idea of painting just as he was inextricably connected to his natural surroundings and the emanating life-energy from nature.

In 1958, Moïse returned to Maine, maintaining a teaching and portrait studio in Bangor. In 1970, he wrote *The Taste of Color, A Touch of Love*, publishing 1000 copies himself in 1970. Affluent summer visitors as well as local art lovers collected his paintings; his work was presented to Governors, Vice Presidents and embassies. In 1972, movie producer Joe Levine, heading a group of four investors, purchased nearly all of Bill's work (greater than 400 paintings), with a few favorites left in his possession. The paintings chosen by one of the four investors are now in the collection of the University of Maine Museum of Art.

In 1979 an interviewer asked Moïse what, besides painting, compelled his interest? "Women and tennis," he grinned. Bill Moïse died unexpectedly on August 6th, 1980, at the age of 58, during a game of doubles tennis.