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## Eclipse Ends for a Rising Star

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But now, in another change of luck, the 55-year-old painter earns a comfortable income selling his canvases and has become one of those rare living artists to have his work featured in a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art.

"It's both difficult and educational to see your life in front of you like this," Mr. Moskowitz said of the exhibition of 83 paintings, drawings and collages that traces his career from the late 1950's to the present. His works are characterized by playful, dreamlike images that tread a fine line between abstraction and representation. The show, which can be seen through May 1, was organized by Ned Rifkin of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, and was exhibited there and at La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art in California last year. Assessing the Twists and Turns

Mr. Moskowitz lives and works in a 5,000-square-foot loft in TriBeCa with his wife, Hermine Ford, also a painter, and their 23-year-old son, Erik, a painting student at the School of Visual Arts. The other day in his studio, he reflected on the twists and turns in his career.

"Up until your 40's, you're still learning," the artist said. "Most people don't really do mature work until then. I agree with Auden that all you can hope for is good influences up to that point."

By the time he had turned 40, Mr. Moskowitz's influences included Abstract Expressionist artists like Adolph Gottlieb, his teacher at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, and his father-in-law, Jack Tworok, a painter; the Surrealist painter Marcel Duchamp; the photographer Walker Evans, with whom Mr. Moskowitz worked; Alfred Hitchcock, and Samuel Beckett. But the paintings he was doing were not finding a receptive audience, and he was devoting much of his energy to work outside his studio.

Mr. Moskowitz was born in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn and illustrated technical manuals for the Sperry Gyroscope Company during the late 1950's while studying graphic design at night at Pratt. He was derailed from his intended career as a technical illustrator by Mr. Gottlieb, whose painting class at Pratt persuaded him to become an artist. Collages With Window Shades

In the early 1960's, Mr. Moskowitz burst on the New York art scene with a series of collages using window shades that seemed to place him at the heart of the growing Pop Art movement. As the art

historian Robert Rosenblum wrote in 1983 of Mr. Moskowitz's early works, "They seemed to push both the basic language of painting and the fundamentals of image-making to a rock-bottom economy, where suddenly the two worlds were forever fused - a flat painting equaling a flat window shade."

But this early brush with the limelight was short-lived for Mr. Moskowitz, a man noted for his low-key manner and strong sense of privacy. In 1964 he left the Castelli Gallery because he felt the dealer was no longer interested in his work and he wanted to explore what he called "a slower kind of painting."

"It wasn't a good place for me to be because I was learning and experimenting rather than doing resolved paintings," he said. "I was never a Pop Artist. The window shades weren't like the Brillo boxes or Campbell Soup cans. The Pop imagery was jazzier and more specific than mine in drawing from popular culture."

Mr. Moskowitz spent much of the next decade doing bleak, enigmatic paintings of corners of rooms. "The corner paintings were considered Minimalism in that there wasn't a lot going on with the canvases," he said. "But I had images, while the Minimalists were abstract. The corners came out of a book on decorating I'd found in a used-book store. I wanted to make them look like rooms you could go into. But I found they became closed and too perfect, so I started to violate the surfaces." These violations first took the form of tiny blotches of paint. On later canvases, they became geometric shapes and eventually quirky but more recognizable images, like a smile and a duck's head. 'I Needed the Money'

The late 1960's and 1970's, however, were difficult years, Mr. Moskowitz acknowledged. He had only a handful of gallery shows, and they were poorly received. He now feels this was because his paintings were "different from most work being shown at the time, and they weren't aggressive in grabbing people's attention." He made his living driving a taxi three nights a week, while making canvas stretchers for other artists and teaching

often uninterested students during the day at the Maryland Institute of Art in Baltimore and the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan.

"I needed the money," he said, "but it was more visually stimulating and I learned more driving the taxi than teaching. You meet these amazing people, and it's very voyeuristic."

Mr. Moskowitz's fortunes started to improve in the late 1970's, when his work was exhibited at the Clocktower gallery, an alternative space just down the street from his loft, and in a now-famous group show called "New Image Painting" at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Included in the Whitney show was his diptych of the World Trade Center reminiscent of works by Georgia O'Keeffe or Charles Demuth. It was one of his many paintings of the period of skyscrapers like the Flatiron and Empire State Buildings in New York and the Wrigley Building in Chicago.

Another stylistic shift occurred around 1982, when Mr. Moskowitz began to experiment with flat, silhouetted images of sculptures like Rodin's "Thinker," Brancusi's "Bird in Space" and Giacometti's "Elongated Figure." "I wanted to see what would happen if you took sculpture and tried to paint it," he said. Creating a Sense of Great Space

In much of his work, however, Mr. Moskowitz has attempted to capture a feeling of immensity - either with tiny images in the midst of huge canvases, large subjects like skyscrapers and icebergs, or oversize close-ups of a bowler's arm in motion. "Scale is definitely an issue for me," he said. "The scale brings you closer or pushes you back from the image." Mr. Moskowitz will talk about the ideas behind his work in general terms - he says, for instance, that he uses colors and images as metaphors for people and relationships - but he does not like to discuss the meaning of particular works. "I make a painting first, and later figure out what it means," he said.

Although he has regularly shown his work at the Blum Helman Gallery in recent years, he has

avoided contractual ties with any gallery. "I accumulate a certain amount of work over two or three years, and then think about having a show and trying to sell the work," he said. Many of his large canvases line the walls of his spacious studio, which is connected by various passageways to his living area, his wife's studio and his son's studio and apartment.

Throughout the ups and downs of his career, Mr. Moskowitz said, the opinions of critics and the vagaries of celebrity have been unimportant. "I try not to read criticism of my work," he said. "The good criticism gives me an ego boost I don't need. And the bad criticism I usually just don't agree with, and it can be very destructive. When you're younger, maybe there's something magical about celebrity, but I'm not taken in by it."