

art on paper

May–June 2003

NEW YORK

Robert Moskowitz: Recent Work.
Lawrence Markey.

Michelangelo's *God Creating Adam* is the Sistine Chapel's logo, reproduced to the point of corniness on mugs, magnets, even the serving cups of one of Rome's best gelaterias. No mean feat, then, for Robert Moskowitz to particularize those well-known hands as he did in a recent show at Lawrence Markey, which included twelve pastels and two paintings. In Moskowitz's pastel versions, the hands are more separated than in the original, or they appear singly; their presumed connection seems less a matter of destiny than pure chance. Isolated and abstracted, the pastels depict the totemic appendages in deep, solid blue and black, surrounded by the artist's own finger- and handprints, a wry acknowledgement of human imperfection.

The other thematic figure in the exhibition was the Paestum diver. In the original *Tomb of the Diver* fresco, which dates from the 5th century B.C. and is located in Paestum, Italy, a man is shown in mid-air, suspended in his jack-knife plunge from this life into the next. In comparison to the other images in the fresco panel—a tall structure, a tree, and a body of water—he cuts a puny figure. Moskowitz shows a more imposing diver; dislocated, the figure appears alone, with the corners of these pieces occasionally filled in or the edges thickened with a stripe. The man is shown whole, or fragmented (his back and head, or his torso and thighs). Moskowitz's drop-like finger marks and smudges feel watery here; as in the Michelangelo pieces, they allude to human frailty, to mortality as a beautiful flaw.

The works on paper have a nearly off-putting austerity, which is subdued by Moskowitz's nimble emphasis on the tactile. The pastels defy the gravity of their weighty themes, expressing instead a thoughtful, playful lightness. In his new work, Moskowitz atomizes two different



Robert Moskowitz, *Diver*, pastel on paper (39-1/2 x 27-3/4 in.), 2002. Courtesy Lawrence Markey.

suspensions, moments sustained: between action and consequence, beginning and end.

—Megan Retner