

76 GRAND STREET NEW YORK NY 10013



KRISTIN BAKER

SURGE AND SHADOW

MARCH 15 – April 21, 2007
18 WOOSTER STREET

Surge and Shadow, an ambitious exhibition of new work by Kristin Baker, opens on March 15th at Deitch Projects. In this new body of work Baker expands her dialogue with the history of painting beyond the New York School to encompass Nineteenth Century Romanticism and History Painting. Baker forges 21st century paintings from an abrupt collision of 19th and 20th century ideas of painting. In works like *Flying Curve*, *Differential Manifold*, she furthers her exploration of the structure of painting to approach the sculptural.

Just as abstract expressionism pursued a way to suit the literalism of a gesture with the eternal evocativeness of abstract form, Baker combines gestural fragments into an abstract, plastic composition. The New York School selected materials and application methods that suited their contemporaneous goals, and likewise does Baker. As Frank Stella painted right out of the can, admiring the beautiful synthetic palette of industrial paints of their day, Baker uses the new rainbow of industrial plastics, metal and synthetic polymers. To create a feeling of the human hand as a transcriber of the psyche, abstract expressionists poured, threw, or brushfully pushed their colours

around; Baker's updated method of brushless paintings that incorporate plastic paint, PVC support and metal hardware allow her to make contained gestures while capturing the immediacy of the ab-ex style.

Baker's works are not traditional paintings, as her materials consist of plastic polymers, Mylar sheets, PVC, and metal. Even in application Baker uses industrial tools like squeegees or trowels; never brushes. The more sculptural pieces—which can only be described as three-dimensional paintings—are made from the plastic paint residue extruded from her mixing buckets; a microcosm of her large paintings condensed into a nugget of plastic. This new body of work expands upon her vocabulary of collision and explosion, cars, chaos and speed, to break new ground.

Picking up where the New York School left off, Baker's methods and content encompass Pop and Minimalism. Racecar crashes and dirty orange traffic cones mix with the more extreme paintings of Robert Ryman as inspiration. Her commitment to a literal use of materials demonstrates her affinity with the minimal tradition. One can even

see how her process and materials might evoke Warhol's famous declaration "I am a machine." While she maintains a trace of the artist's hand, she does so in a contained, mechanized way; creating painterliness in a literal, minimal form—gesture as "specific object". While her content often comes from both art-historical sources and more pop sources like NASCAR Racing, the sharp PVC edges of her pieces enhance their reading as literal objects; a surface on which forms of colour play.

She also introduces another uniquely contemporary experience in her new pieces: digital culture's effect on painting and seeing. The planar, quasi-opaque polygons she uses suggest the 3D CAD rendered universe of architecture, digital animation, and video games—where angular forms are filled in with even, simple textures to create volumes; landscape, or spaceship. Her explosions feel frozen in ecstatic obliteration, and at only digitally obtainable hyper-resolution. A tumbling car disseminates across time and space in an almost cubist fashion, captured by multiple camera angles to create 360° time-elapse footage.

Specific pieces are infused with other more references to the history of painting. In this body of work, one will sense a feeling of the sweeping dramatic symphonies and tragic wreckage of Turner and the Romantic painters of the early 19th century. Her crashing colours gain impact from the heft of her materials and technique, unleashing, according to the Yale University Art Gallery's Jennifer Gross, a "visual force field that absorbs the viewer in the passion of the moment." One work is specifically based on Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa*, with its wide parallelogram of compositional complaint, building up and to the right into a pinnacle of plangent protest. Baker's

version, *The Raft of Perseus*, imagines the raft uninhabited, the disintegrating structure dissolving into colored skeins of sea and sky. History painting meets abstract painting and the collision is sublime: by taking away the human element, she makes the subject of this hopeful/hopeless struggle *painting itself*.

One of the most interesting dialogues that Baker creates in this new body of work is with Marcel Duchamp. She engages Duchamp's *Large Glass*, or, *Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* and the iconic *Tu M'*—two works that signify to most artists the *end* of painting, not a platform for the remarkable painterly innovation Baker displays. By emphasizing the hardware endoskeleton of *Flying Curve, Differential Manifold*, and by creating a transparent "canvas" in *Warn and Torn on the Off-Coming*, she highlights the planar reality of each form and its respective, distinct materiality. As Duchamp in *Large Glass* created a complexly ambiguous grouping of mostly abstract forms to suggest the mechanically amalgamated negation of bodily incarnation, so Baker conjures an ethereal futuristic monster of cold form in motion. Her own mechanical technique oddly resembles that of *Large Glass*, and the combustion suggested by both is palpable.

Kristin Baker graduated from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and received a M.F.A. from Yale in 2002. Her work was presented in a solo exhibition at the MNAM Centre Pompidou in 2004. Deitch Projects presented her first solo exhibition, *Flat Out*, in September of 2003. A book of Kristin Baker's work with an essay by Jennifer Gross is being published to accompany the exhibition.

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