

ARTSCENE

CLAIRE ANNA BAKER

April 2013

By Andy Brumer

What you see is what you get as far as the quality of five extraordinary abstract paintings by L.A.-based artist Claire Baker is concerned. The materials and elaborate process of the works' creation remain hidden from view, making the results at first appear matter of fact. Indeed, one might initially identify these large and colorful works as oil or acrylic paintings, when in fact Baker used ink applied onto stretched polyester surfaces with a large custom made palette knife in creating them. The effect, however, is anything but industrial, slick or reflective. It turns out that polyester absorbs ink far more uniformly than canvas does paint. This produces paintings of great warmth and depth that also possess a quality of vibrant "otherness" that attracts and holds viewers' rapt attention.

Visceral and transcendent by turns - as the exhibition's title "SunBody" suggests - these pieces also stand as the culminating step in an alchemical process of distillation and intense direct observation.

"Continuous Ends," for example, presents a sweeping painterly event, which began as a sculptural model made and referred to by Baker as an "environment." It's constructed out of found objects and common materials. The artist then executes several drawings of this environment, which along with the sculpture itself form a dual or a compound source of inspiration from which her finished work will emerge.

Indeed, the paintings unfold via a kind of shamanistic and dialectical dance of glances at these drawings and objects, followed by and/or interspersed with Baker's swift applications of ink onto her polyester surfaces. Yet unlike Jackson Pollock, who released his splashes of paint in a thoroughly improvisational (though equally spiritualized) manner, Baker knows pretty much what her finished painting will look like once she completes her preliminary process of observation.

The energy and identity of these pieces, then, owe as much to Baker's brilliant mind and mindful eye as



she dashes into, through and around the positive and negative spaces of her twin models. They own an equal debt to her considerable and natural gift of composition. As the images, colors and the gestalt that holds them expressively together release themselves from Baker's hand motions and gestures, the viewer simply sits back and enjoys a symphonic unfolding of remarkably fresh art.

"Anti-Shock" suggests a Rorschach test, or the drooping/dripping Dali-esque x-ray of one person's leg tenderly bumping against the fleshier more realistically depicted limb of another. "Strings of Desire" launches viewers into a soft and swirling pastel-tinted stratosphere that supports the hurtling suggestion of a meteoroid or space capsule, with the entire painterly field dynamically underscored by a soulful, sharp calligraphic smear in transparent yet dark black ink.

Each painting in the show repeats this process of creation, with Baker's visualized-in-advance and ready for action ink-loaded palette knife honing in on representing different sections and perceived angles of her model.

This is Baker's first solo show. While the chestnut "emerging artist" comes to mind perhaps too easily for someone just turning thirty, the sophistication, originality and maturity this work herald a talent that has very much arrived.

March 16 - April 27, 2013 at Edward Cella Art + Architecture, Miracle Mile.

Image: Claire Anna Baker, *Wick*, 2013, Ink on polyester, 72 x 37 inches (183 x 94 cm).

Brumer, Andy. "Claire Baker," *ArtScene*, April 2013, < <http://artscenecal.com/archive/782-claire-baker>>.