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AROUND THE GALLERIES

'Yep,' it's fun all over the place

By David Pagel
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Bridging cool Pop, hot Surrealism

Pop Art put cartoons front and center, but paintings based on comic strips were not the first to use radically simplified imagery to give form to the highs and lows of modern life. Artists as different as Giorgio de Chirico and Philip Guston boiled down reality to the basics in their haunting, often harrowing images of urban isolation and tortured soul-searching.

At High Energy Constructs, **Hilary Baker**'s crisp little pictures of eyeballs, spiders, citadels and nuclear cooling towers build on this tradition, bridging the gap that once separated the hot drama of Surrealism from the cool nonchalance of Pop. Baker's best works are the simplest -- close-ups of brick ruins silhouetted against cloudless skies, or seascapes whose surfaces are made up of irregularly faceted patterns.



Hilary Baker's "Leak," with its windowless tower, little puddle and shower of black raindrops.

"Stellae With Two Moons" and "Sea of Crises" are nearly symmetrical images, their iconic format mitigated by their intimate dimensions and everyday atmosphere. "Leak" is equally still, its windowless tower in a desolate landscape precisely balanced against a shower of black raindrops and a mysterious little puddle.

The palettes of these paintings are as fined-tuned as their compositions. Baker mixes yellow and green like no one else, creating a rainbow of shades that seems as tasty as sorbet and as toxic as antifreeze. She makes gray look sexy and beige exciting.

She's not always successful. When the compositions get too complicated, the mystery disappears and the paintings have the presence of mere illustrations. This often goes hand in hand with colors that work at cross-purposes, diminishing the impact of the whole. But when Baker keeps palette and picture simple, there's no end to the fascination her works gently deliver.

High Energy Constructs, 990 N. Hill St., #180, Chinatown, (323) 227-7920, through Aug. 19. Closed Sunday through Wednesday.