

From Where I'm Standing

Hilary Baker



HARRIS GALLERY | THE UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE

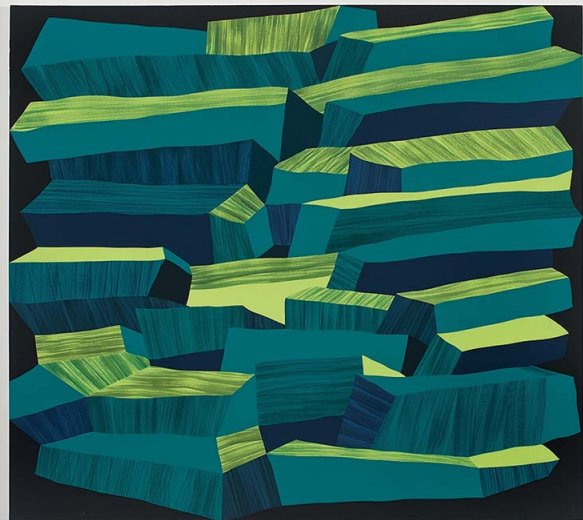
From Where I'm Standing
Hilary Baker

April 5 – May 19, 2016

Gallery Hours M-Th 11-4PM or by appt

Compressed, rigorous, even seductively dour, Hilary Baker's singular paintings have been playing the long game for over forty years. Prodigious in her practice, Baker remains consistently attentive to her intuitive and analogous formal logic as it echoes and ricochets from painting to painting. Nothing is random. The architectural environment of her work sets a proscenium for Baker-esque theaters of anxiety, mordant wit, and unblinking clarity.

A native and life long resident of Los Angeles, Baker's relationship to her source material is a distillation of Modernist design principles and post-nuclear noir. Baker's images succinctly condense information reconstituted from acute observation of the constructed industrial landscape, the historical lineage of abstraction, and mid-century graphics. Her paintings feel specific and convinced of their fact as pictures -- they become articulated moments of affirmation, demonstrating right relationships. Yet her tough-minded palette and titles such as "Arlington," "Atwater," "Monrovia," and "Normandie" implicate a Didion-esque unease -- our collective memory a few steps removed and lost in translation.





Baker's paintings engage illusionistic spaces that are frontal and often confrontational. Forms frequently appear as if they are above us, and honed attention is paid to locating the viewer in gradations of space. The iconic icy blue watch tower or water tank of "Atwater" is both looming and precarious, its triangulated supports explicitly perched on tippy toes at the very bottom edge of the painting, teasing out tension with shrewd economy. But the stacked elongated girders or jackhammered masonry rubble of "Barre" negotiate a closer distance. The simple, pared down shapes conjure an austere sense of sculpture. Conversely, the crisp graphic precision of Baker's paint handling with its reductive shorthand, layers the work with the character of elegiac cartoons -- slightly sinister scenarios of construction projects abandoned or gone awry. Like disaster tourists, we pick our way through elegantly reductive prismatic chunks. Baker's boulders beg the question of how urban space is experienced within the paranoid subtext of post 911 Stone Age dystopian settlements. Baker World is quarried from the strange, poetic, darkly humorous, and grim all at once.



While Baker has always employed associative elements, her iconography has simplified. With fewer forms and symbols, and with the confidence of a painter at the height of her expressive powers, she has come to fully exploit the evocative means intrinsic to paint itself. Baker stretches lean skins of paint across the surface, pulling from the pigment porous expanses of luminous color. Eschewing painterly drama, the smooth flatness of Baker's paint appears to effortlessly vaporize the pigment, beaming us up to her evocative and peculiar universe. With exceptional brevity, gained from a lifetime of painting, she deploys her curiously synthetic palette of garish reds, sallow greens, dyspeptic ill-humored yellows, and electric blues into richly idiosyncratic sequences of acrylic paint. No one painting today mobilizes color better than Baker. She is the dark horse of nuanced dread, and like the highest form of jazz, takes the less traveled, but arguably more sustaining road of dissonance.

Julia Couzens 2016

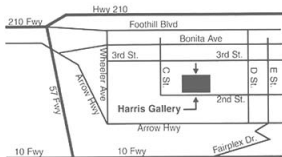
above: 'Peak' 2007 acrylic on canvas 36 x 40 inches

cover: 'Atwater' 2015 acrylic on canvas 40 x 36 inches

inside center: 'Barre' 2012 acrylic on canvas 36 x 40 inches

inside right: 'Barbagianni' 2015 acrylic on canvas 24 x 24 inches

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