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Review

Tim Bavington's power rock goes acoustic at Mark Moore Gallery



Tim Bavington, "Get Happy!," 2009-15, synthetic polymer on canvas, from his exhibition at Mark Moore Gallery. (Mark Moore Gallery)

By David Pagel on August 7, 2015

Fifteen years ago, when Tim Bavington started exhibiting his blurry stripe paintings, he packed loads of visual dissonance — and jolts of emotional turbulence — into their fuzzy bands of synthetic color by using an airbrush to make hard-edged compositions.

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His choice of tools was akin to a carpenter using a wrench to do a hammer's job. The main difference was that Bavington's hazy stripe paintings, all based on rock songs, did not make a mess of the job. They looked better and sexier and more attuned to the times than anything else out there.

At Mark Moore Gallery, the England-born, Las Vegas-based artist has again shuffled the deck of our expectations by taking a power-sander to the beautifully atmospheric surfaces of his canvases.

This roughs up the supple surfaces of his works. But rather than eliminating subtlety — and the sophistication that goes with it — the sander allows Bavington to create another kind of delicacy: a nuanced softness that is as surprising today as his airbrushed stripe paintings were 15 years ago.

It's as if Bavington's rock 'n' roll paintings have gone acoustic. Their electrifying energy and eye-popping, hip-shaking, mind-blowing color-combinations have given way to a gentler — but no less resonant — approach.

The colors are softer, less sizzling, more tactile in their sensuality. The weave of the canvases, more visible than ever, fractures each band into innumerable flecks. Their appearance comes across as the visual version of static.

The two square paintings, based on album covers from the 1980s, include those ghostly circles that eventually form on well-used LPs. In Bavington's hands, this wear-and-tear raises questions about painting's relationship to time, particularly art's power to defy history.

Put simply, you can buy a used album. But we do not talk about used music. We may get tired of a song. It may be boring, stale and clichéd. But even bad ones live only in the moment they are played.

Bavington's power-sanded canvases make the same claim, and more, for painting. We do not talk about used paintings. Drive a new car off the lot and you know what happens to its value. But great paintings do the opposite. The more they get used, the more vital they become.

That time-defying, Dorian Gray newness belongs to the art, not to viewers. Like Oscar Wilde, Bavington turns the tables to make us see what that means.

Mark Moore Gallery, 5790 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (310) 453-3031, through Aug. 29. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.markmooregallery.com