

Last Chance: Nathan Baker at Kavi Gupta

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January 26, 2014
Blouin ArtInfo



What happens when paint is permitted to literally pass through the canvas, when the canvas allows the viewer to see how paint functions? Baker's 14 paintings—one large and 13 smaller works— are all on synthetic organza, a fine-textured transparent fiber used mostly for bridal wear, which the artist has stretched on self-made wooden frames. When turned into a canvas, the sheer material acts like a sieve. Baker has pressed mixed oil paint through it, creating swirling abstract compositions that look like experiments with an iPad drawing program. The finger-width squiggles, of mostly vibrant colors mixed with black, trail through and around the organza, inviting the viewer to investigate its transparency.

Upon closer inspection, the plump lines break into scores of tiny pixel-like squares of paint on the viewer's side of the canvas—resembling the effect of play dough pushed through a colander. You can't help but get a little excited and curious, wondering how these small snakes of paint can stay suspended and whether they will eventually fall off. After all, the permeable fabric looks so delicate and weightless. Despite the works' free-floating feeling, they are contained within a frame, and so tether themselves to one of painting's conventions—the framed canvas. The clearness and flexibility of the materials, however, show how artistic language goes beyond formal constraints, offering propositions whose syntax is *sui generis*.

Incidentally, the clarity of medium and support in these works lays bare the active role such elements of artistic grammar play—paint has its own lexicon, within and without the canvas. Baker's works invite exploration and questioning of painting's

traditions, and also intrigue us by the sheer ambiguity they engender. We can see through the works, we can see how the paint is manipulated, how fragile and comical it can be, but even with this transparency, we still don't know how to speak its language.