

Kavi Gupta BERLIN is proud to present Participle, a solo exhibition of new work by Nathan Baker. Comprised of a handful of new paintings, Participle furthers many of Baker's aesthetic aims of the past few years.

"The prisoner was burning."

"Burning what, a cigarette? An effigy? A random bit of parchment that contained his unwilling confession?"

"No, he himself was on fire."

"Oh. Is he still?"

The participle is a word that partakes in the nature of a verb, noun, or adjective; it is an adaptive grammatical agent that decides what it wants to be depending on the context in which it operates. It is occasionally active, but cloaked as passive, and ultimately ambiguous to this distinction.

"I'm not sure, I can't smell him anymore. What I do know though is that there are paintings in here that move and shift, and lay on top of one another. There are these weird plops of paint that seem like they're floating around inside of a frame and I can't tell what's keeping them there. Sometimes the color bleeds out of them and makes it seem like they've died, suspended in space. Like some sort of Astral graveyard."

"Are you trying to tell me that they're paintings of space?"

The participle infers participation but only in a self-reflexive sense - it chooses when, where, and how to participate with the other words on a page similar to painting's aleatory and indeterminable functions in the context of a broadly conceptually and formally varied historical canon.

"No, they are not paintings of space. They're also not un-like other paintings that you've seen, but they do indeed seem to behave differently."

Baker ludically uses the participle as a variable of functionality, opting for delimitation through a gerrymandering self-imposed structure, ultimately exercising a self-reflexive agency to determine a mode of 'participating' in an ever unstable and erratic discourse.

"They're awkward."

"Agreed – it's hard to tell exactly how they function; they're making fun of themselves as much as they are being themselves. They make me self-conscious."

"I'm confused..."

The exhibited works are constructed with a minimum of materials. Using his own meticulously built stretcher bars wrapped with finely woven synthetic organza, Baker works from behind the surface, drawing out loose schematic line compositions of oil directly from tubes of mixed paint, offsetting the line's weight with occasional and somber turpentine washes. The works are modest and refined compositions that embody an ideal of ultimate ambiguity yet, in the context of this self-imposed structure, an exacting specificity.

"That's starting to make sense, but I'm still..."

The work's organza surface is hardly a plane on which the paint is applied. Rather, the ultra-light fabric holds the paint in a stasis of process. As Baker pushes the oil through and out onto the viewer's side of the surface, the organza plays the role of a finely gridded sieve, extruding the paint en masse at the most minute scale, with every line—every stroke caught in the middle of the action—the work is a frozen blink at a field that conflates the boundaries of how painting acts simultaneously as representative of gesture, object, and sign.

"...the paintings are playing."

Nathan Baker (b. 1979 in Grand Rapids, Michigan) lives and works in New York and Berlin. Select solo exhibitions include 'Terminal Palace' (2010) at Galerie Im Regierungsviertel in Berlin, and 'Seminal' (2009) at Kaune, Sudendorf in Cologne. Selected group exhibitions include 'Travelin' Light' (2011) at the Grimmuseum in Berlin, Liège Biennial -'Balance and Accident' (2010) in Liège, Belgium and 'Ich habe Stimmen gehört' (2009) at Galerie Im Regierungsviertel in Berlin. Baker is a recent graduate of Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts.