

Kristin Baker
Deitch Projects

By JOYCE KOROTKIN

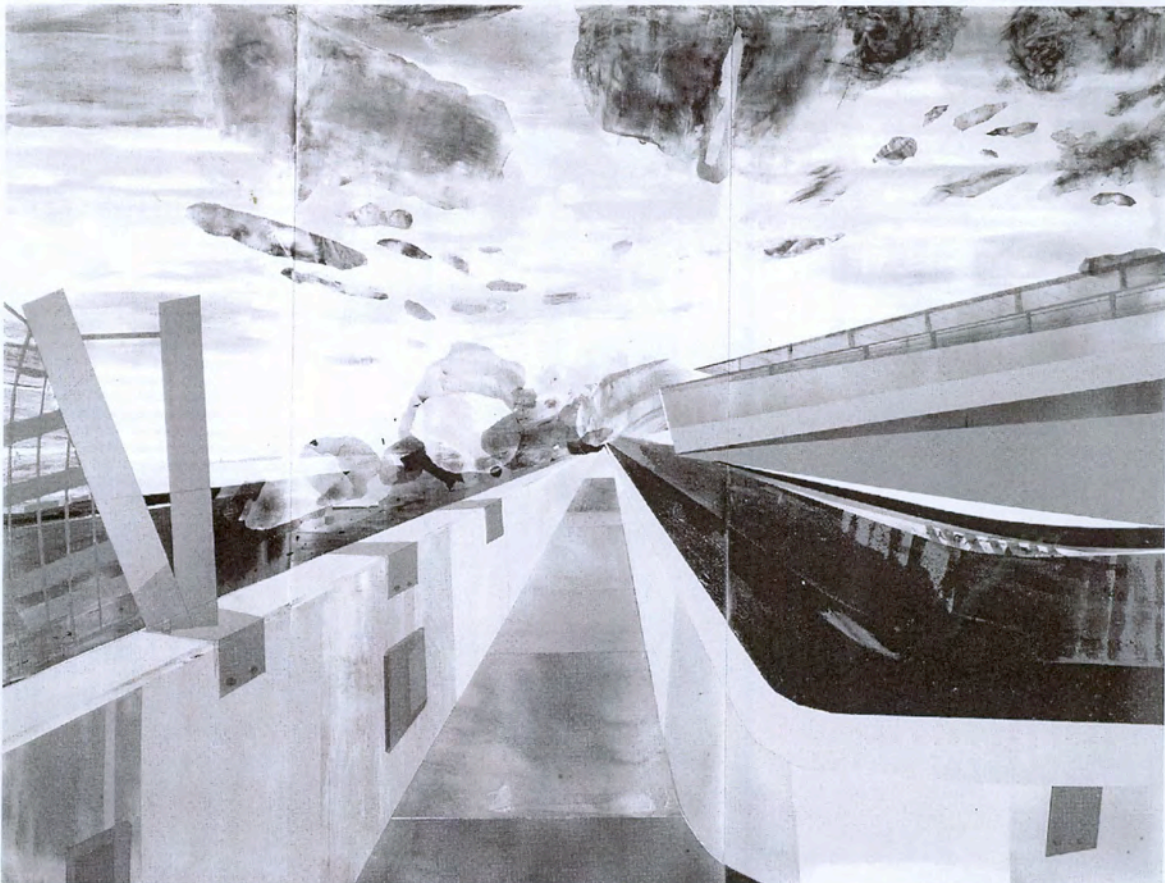
Racetracks, racecars, dizzying chaos and the spectacle of high-speed crashes fuel these paintings, which Baker bases on racecar iconography; color rather than cars collide, and speed is measured in great swaths of paint and gestural brushstrokes that zip across the "track" of the painting's surface. They are as abstract as they are representational, a confluence between the two that has increasingly become a feature of contemporary painting. A carefully controlled chaos reigns, serving as a kind of metaphor of the tension between success and disaster on the break-neck speed of the racetrack.

Baker works large, creating psychic space that allows the viewer to veer crazily between respite and confusion, movement

and the sudden explosive stasis of crash site. The paintings are glossy, stemming from the artist's use of industrial materials; plastic paints applied to sheets of PVC bolted to metal backings. The work thus edges away from the exclusive safe province of art as imitation of life, becoming more integrated with the physical proximity of the world that it depicts.

Racetracks are, in a sense, like the Coliseum of ancient Rome where bloody spectacles were staged for entertainment, a correlation that is not lost on the artist. One watches with baited breath for the thrill of the chase, the adrenaline rush of the victory, and the secret, illicit anticipation of the gruesome road-kill crash that has its own peculiar attraction/repulsion dynamic.

By freeze-framing the explosive moments of triumph and tragedy, Baker holds the viewer in thrall, skewered on the cusp of macabre anticipation. ♡



Kristin Baker *2 Track Miles Per Hour*, 2003. Acrylic on PVC 8 x 12 feet. Photo Credit: Tom Powel Imaging, New York
Courtesy: Deitch Projects, New York