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W web exclusive

Kristin Baker
Flat Out
Deitch Projects
October 2003



Kristin Baker, "2 Track Miles Per Hour" (2003), Acrylic on PVC, 8 x 12 feet
Photo by Tom Powel Imaging. Courtesy of Deitch Projects.

I remember working at NASCAR one summer in Daytona Beach with my sister. The smell of charred rubber, beer, and white trash filled the arena. I never thought I would relive those memories in downtown Manhattan.

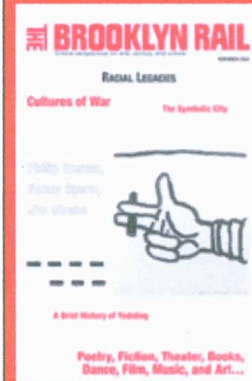
Flat Out is a show about fast cars, tight curves, and explosions. Kristin Baker has created a full sensory environment. Walking into Deitch Projects, I was suddenly projected into the pit. Busted orange cones lined the lower walls leading into the main arena, where billboards towered above the marred remains of NASCAR and Grand Prix. I could smell the Castrol oil. Compared with the works displayed in Painting Report at PS1 last year, which were overshadowed by Al Held's massive sci-fi landscapes, the paintings at Deitch demand to be reckoned with.

Baker is one of a group of geometrically and geographically driven artists delving into the explosion of form—Julie Mehretu, Franz Ackerman, and Matthew Ritchie all come to mind. In fact, one could place the paintings in Flat Out within a recent group show entitled Global Navigational System at the Palais de Tokyo this past summer. Baker navigates abstract geometries through her flattened and fractured translations of race car disasters.

Using race car driving as a direct connection to painting, Baker emphasizes the idea of control versus chaos. The press release claims that her work is a study of "how close one can get to over-stimulation without an aesthetic crash." Although the works themselves do not break any boundaries, in paintings like "2 Track Miles Per Hour," the stimulus is intense and ever-present. Staring at the colorful collage set off against a backdrop of shiny PVC, I was seduced. The works themselves project perspectival cues, thereby moving the viewer into a three-dimensional space. But it is her layering of materials that make the paintings both multi-dimensional and illusionistic projectiles. With a giant explosion set bang in the center of the painting, I couldn't help thinking of one of those cameras in the cars

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behind the accident, filming the disaster. The painting seems to emit an endless replay of the spectacle, the viewer serving as the commentator.

In the smaller room adjacent to the "main arena" is a collection of studies and drawings hung salon style, unframed and clinging to the wall with cloth tape. There is a drawing of an empty bandstand that caught my attention. The drawing, rendered in graphite on Mylar, is quiet when compared to the paintings, depicting a scene long after the racing has ended. The empty bandstand brought me back to the giant blank white billboards in the other room, and I thought, so this is Baker's contemporary landscape! The billboard, like the stands, embodies our timeless infatuation with spectacle.

Overall, the show left me longing for a Bud Light, a pack of Winston's, and a trip to the go-kart lanes. I couldn't help but feel the fiberglass on my skin, the broken shards still on my trousers and shoes. I left feeling I had seen something extraordinary, and devastatingly beautiful—literally.

—Victoria Keddle

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2nd Place—Best Public Affairs Article: Meghan McDermott and Knox Robinson, eds., "The New Skool Goes to Bed Stuy" (March-April, 2003)

2nd Place—Best Editorial Commentary: Williams Cole, "For the Dismissal of Objectivity in News" (Aug-Sept., 2003)

3rd Place—Best News Story: David Vine, "Billions for Brooklyn—No Questions Asked: The Borough's New Power Brokers" (Winter, 2003)

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