

Tim Bavington

at MARK MOORE, 3 June–8 July



Tim Bavington
Science, 2000
Acrylic on canvas
on mahogany panel
24" x 96"

Tim Bavington's stripe paintings look so right it's easy to miss just how wrong they are. In terms of immediate visual impact, their palettes dazzle; their compositions pulse; and, the more closely you move toward their surfaces, the more they appear to be mirages. This allows their conceptual edginess to sneak up silently and stealthily—before blindsiding you with its obviousness—and then disappear, just as swiftly, into the background. In terms of technique, Bavington's physically resplendent images couldn't be more wrongheaded. Painted with an airbrush, they embody a logically impossible proposition. Using a spray gun to make a hard-edged abstraction isn't all that different from using a screwdriver to do a hammer's job: While you may manage to pound the nail in, the results won't be pretty. In Bavington's hands, however, the wrong tool delivers the right stuff, transforming a type of painting that had reached a dead end thirty years ago into one rich with possibility.

The London-born, Las Vegas-based artist's Los Angeles solo debut consists of five paintings, four from 2000 and one from 1998. The earliest, *Sweet Gene (large)*, is a proportionately and coloristically accurate enlargement of *Boudoir Painting*, a 1965 canvas by Gene Davis (1920-1985). Bavington's version of Davis's self-proclaimed bedroom painting resembles an out-of-focus photograph, the crisp lines of the original having given way to the blurry imprecision of a reproduction. But *Sweet Gene* is also sexier than its forebear. Paying risky homage to a hero whose work has

not been revered for many years, Bavington's spray-painted re-make suggests that when it comes to art, historical accuracy is a fallacy—or at least an inadequate goal. Fidelity to objective details is far less interesting—and artistically truthful—than bringing the spirit in which something was done into the present.

Taking this idea and running with it, his new paintings dispense with specific referents all the better to amplify their own visual effects. Titled after a song by the Small Faces, *All Too Beautiful* describes itself. This small canvas, whose deeply beveled stretcher bars create the impression that its surface floats far off the wall, is structured like a tightly cropped photograph, its compact dimensions laying out an exquisite slice of a gold, orange, and pink rainbow. At two-by-eight feet, *Science* presents scores of vertical bands whose rich yellows, oranges, and browns have been meticulously aligned with their corresponding shades on the gray scale. Forming a thin horizontal stripe along the painting's bottom edge, this colorless cross-section of its lush spectrum recalls the cultural moment when color television sets became affordable and living rooms everywhere exploded with the glow of Technicolor.

Bigger still is *Lazy Sunday*, a similarly composed electronic candy cane of a painting whose sizzling yellows, scorching oranges, bubblegum pinks, and screaming magentas make *Science* look muted, its measured pace a far cry from the giddy supersaturation of this nearly six-by-ten-foot painting's high-keyed palette. Finally, *Acquiesce II* is a mural-scale extravaganza whose vertical bands bounce your eyeballs—along with your solar plexus—back and forth between icy blue and blazing crimson, jittering (with fitful purposefulness) across all sorts of weird tertiaries, including lavender, ocher, taupe, olive, aqua, silvery gray, and chocolately brown. Despite the dozens of unnamable colors whose fuzzy penumbras spill over into one another, Bavington's masterful abstraction never loses control, its bands always maintaining a rhythm as wildly vibrant as it is smartly orchestrated.

In a sense, Bavington does for stripe painting what *Playboy* did for pornography. Preferring the suggestiveness of the airbrush to the explicitness of the starkly depicted close-up, his soft rendition of hard-edged abstraction leaves room for the imagination. And his art does even more than the magazine, whose subject is already sexy. Making stripe painting look sexy again is no mean feat—whether you prefer it soft-focus or hardcore.