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Sometimes artwork is all about the framing

Kenneth Baker

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The contemporary painter who wants her work to look tuned in but not derivative, worldly but not ironic, may have to work between styles, as Londoner Katy Moran does.

IMAGES



Anthony Meier gives the Bay Area its first look at Moran's art, which has garnered international attention despite its self-effacing temper. Moran's "Whistan" (2008) might be taken for an example of thrift-store abstraction, or an outsider artist's ardent failure of a still life, did it not also recall the mannerism of postwar Parisian painting. Even the signature winking from the bottom right corner helps postpone certainty about the work's sophistication or about the terms of its sophistication.

But not even the luckiest amateur could have tied this canvas off as Moran did, with the languid strokes around its perimeter that gather warm and cool hues together to produce a kind of footlight effect within the picture space.

Other pieces, such as "I'm a Believer" (2008) and "Pug" (2008), venture a kind of abstract Surrealism, but not without reminiscences of Georges Mathieu and even Raoul Dufy (1877-1953).

Like other painters who work between styles, such as Amy Sillman and Daniel Mendel-Black, Moran discovers aesthetic possibilities that seem infused into Western painting by its history. Consider the lilt of her brush marks. It gives her figures, and entire pictures, a hovering quality that nicely evokes her art form's odd position in the contemporary world: adrift from the machinery of the common culture, kept aloft by the painter's will, by commerce, by the conviction of viewers, or some combination of these.

Katy Moran: Paintings. Through Oct. 3. Anthony Meier Fine Arts, 1969 California St., San Francisco. Hours: by appointment only. (415) 351-1400,

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