

REVIEWS Apr 1, 2019

Sarah Cain

LOS ANGELES

at Honor Fraser

by Jennifer S. Li

Sarah Cain: *modern love*, 2018, acrylic, gouache, bracelet, chain, and mixed mediums on wood, 65 by 48 inches; at Honor Fraser.



In Sarah Cain's exhibition "The Sun Will Not Wait," hypnotic candy-colored abstractions appeared in multiple guises. Thirteen mostly large-scale paintings on canvas featuring gestural marks, geometric shapes, and various objects—beads, photographs, small trinkets—hung on the walls. A site-specific floor painting in the main gallery (*the sun will not wait floor*, 2019) offered an expansive patchwork of various hues, while a stained-glass piece installed in the skylight of a small side room (*the sun will not wait skylight*, 2018) cast shifting, kaleidoscopic color into the space. The exhibition was physically and perceptually immersive, revealing new dimensions to viewers as they moved through it.

Though Cain's paintings appear abstract, she weaves in references to her life and interests. Several works in the show were oblique portraits of women she admires: *R-E-S-P-E-C-T* (2018) pays homage to the recently deceased Aretha Franklin, framing washy sprays of acrylic in pastel and neon hues with a neatly rendered border of white. In *Martha* (2018), a tribute to her mentor, the painter Martha Lloyd, Cain layers two canvases: a stretched one featuring staccato blue and red brushstrokes, and, hung from the top of this, a loose one spray-painted in a similar palette and cut into undulating strips, which have been gathered at the center, suggesting a curtain or, perhaps, a ponytail. A small trapezoidal canvas inspired by Ruth Bader Ginsburg, *RBG* (2018), is simultaneously formal and playful: bands of color radiate out from a ladylike string of beads placed on the canvas to evoke the Supreme Court justice's signature jabots.

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There were occasional missteps here: *keep it safe and legal* (2018) is a superficial political statement, the artist alluding to the debate over abortion by covering a ground of interlocking geometric blocks of color with pink plastic hangers. The result is formally inelegant and flippant. By contrast, the show's most successful paintings possess a diaristic quality, as if giving the viewer a fleeting glimpse of some intimate aspect of the artist's life. Two such paintings incorporate photographic snapshots. The title of *Welcome to planet motherfucker* (2018) derives from the vandalized bridge seen in an old photograph pasted atop the painting that was taken in Cain's hometown, Albany. A punkish riot of purple, pink, and orange spray paint, the canvas is surrounded with a thick black chain, the combination evoking memories of seething teenage angst. In *modern love* (2018), a photograph revealing the bare legs of Cain and her partner as they lie in bed is perched on the upper edge of the canvas, as if resting on a windowsill or mantelpiece. The canvas sets an elusive smattering of objects, including studio detritus and a color wheel placed inside a hula hoop, against a field of pink and purple drips and scribbles.

Throughout the works in "The Sun Will Not Wait," Cain unabashedly embraced elements that are typically derided as "girly." The paintings abounded with saturated rainbow hues, costume jewelry, and exuberant decorative patterning, the artist forcefully rejecting the equation of femininity and frivolity.