

Richard Baker

Skidmore Contemporary Art, February 9-March 16

FOR YEARS, Richard Baker has funneled his passions for art, music, and business into a prolific career as a television and movie producer. But another “visual arts chapter,” as Baker calls it, has emerged in his professional journey in recent years. It is color-focused, intuitive, and inspired by scenes close to home—a vibrant, painterly homage to Southern California that permeates the Los Angeles artist’s third solo show at Skidmore Contemporary Art. The exhibition, entitled *Luminosity*, opens with an artist’s reception at 4 p.m. on Saturday, February 9, and includes 16 new, mostly large-scale oil paintings.

Although a few of these pieces depict the figurative-based, outdoor leisure activities that have peppered Baker’s *oeuvre* since he began painting seriously six years ago, a majority of his show highlights the hillside vineyards of Sonoma’s Russian River wine region and the sun-drenched desert landscapes of Coachella

Valley, where he has a winter home. The artist is fond of saying that he paints his life: he’s well acquainted with, and quite passionate about, all of the subject matter he photographs as references for his paintings. “I try to recreate visual experiences that strike me, and I respond most to strong light, contrast, vibrant colors, and geometry,” he says.

It makes sense, then, that Baker should fix his gaze on scenes with dramatic, almost palpable patterns of light and shadow. His surfaces reveal thick layers of paint—applied *alla prima* in striking, impressionistic arrangements of color—that create the illusion of depth. Light-refracting clouds impart mass and texture; undulating valleys, winding roads, and rocky canyons invite viewers to speculate about their vanishing paths and hidden corners. And that’s Baker’s intention: “I picked atmospheric motifs that were suitable for a larger-format presentation,” he explains, “so that the viewer

could get more immersed in the scene.”

Some of the artist’s canvases measure up to 45 by 60 inches—a major shift in scope from his previously smaller-scale works. Sizing up, for Baker, has been a welcome change, offering him more creative leeway to push value contrasts liberally while whittling his imagery down into even more simplified blocks of color. “The larger scale has allowed me, and even required me, to free up my brush strokes and be more gestural and expressive,” says Baker. “It was a very liberating experience, and I’m very happy with the results.” —Kim Agricola

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www.skidmorecontemporaryart.com

See more work at www.southwestart.com/events/skidmore-contemporary-feb2019.



Eastbound, oil, 45 x 60.



Hillside Vineyard, oil, 36 x 48.