

W

INSIDE
SPECIAL
ART ISSUE
DVD

W Contents

Volume 35 Issue 11 **November '06**



Clockwise from above: Artist
Kristin Baker in her Williamsburg,
Brooklyn, studio, page 198;

THE ART ISSUE

Jeff **Koons** Brice **Marden** Adam **McEwen** Bruce **Nauman**
Richard **Prince** Stephen **Shore** Mario **Sorrenti** Juergen **Teller**
Richard **Tuttle** Andro **Wekua** Lisa **Yuskavage**
and the art world's next generation of stars



Talent Show



Kristin Baker in her Williamsburg, Brooklyn, studio with works in progress.

"I'm interested in catastrophe versus beauty and how you sort of need one to have the other," says Baker.

KRISTIN BAKER

With her adrenaline-fueled paintings inspired by speedway races, Kristin Baker has become best known as the artist obsessed with race cars. After all, the semi-abstract acrylics at her first solo show, at New York's Deitch Projects in 2003, depicted Formula One and Nascar events and had titles like *Big Bang Vroom*. On opening night the petite, athletically built blond even zoomed around SoHo in a red 1968 Cobra.

"Both my parents are really into car racing," says the 31-year-old Stamford, Connecticut, native, whose father, a successful businessman, is a former amateur racer. "When we weren't at the local track, we were watching racing on TV."

But a cursory look at Baker's current works in progress reveals that her art—which has the feel of cut-paper collage and bears the influence of Futurist masters like Umberto Boccioni—has developed beyond the subject matter that landed her a place in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Centre Pompidou. Most obviously, right in the middle of her Williamsburg, Brooklyn, studio, there's a billboard-size curve of clear Plexiglas, on which she's hoping to start painting this week. Because the Plexi—a new material for Baker, who usually works on PVC—is transparent, "it will seem like the structure is holding up floating paint." And although the piece's shape echoes the bend of a racetrack, the painting itself, she says, will have only what she calls "maybe a slight reference to racing imagery." Upon completion, the freestanding work will be the centerpiece of a solo show in March at Deitch, where her paintings sell for \$35,000 to \$85,000.

Baker, who has a master's degree in fine art from Yale,

says she has steadily moved further away from overt references to cars and racetracks, "partly because during the time I was making that work, Nascar itself suddenly became something people were talking about," a coincidence that she feared was becoming "a distraction" from her art. And at any rate, the aspect of car racing that inspired her artistically, she explains, is its "spectacle and catastrophe and drama."

Several of her more recent works, therefore, have been inspired by historical masterpieces depicting catastrophic events, such as *Wind Over Matter* (2004), now in the Guggenheim's collection, which is a reinterpretation of J.M.W. Turner's *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons*. "I'm interested in catastrophe versus beauty and how you sort of need one to have the other," she says. This fall some of her newer works will be on view at the Saatchi Gallery in London in its "USA Today" show of new American art.

"I felt she was one of the first painters in a long time to go beyond Abstract Expressionism in American art," says Alison Gingeras, now an adjunct curator at the Guggenheim, who included Baker in a 2004 show at the Pompidou. "Kristin keeps trying to innovate and develop her own language, which is often, to me, a sign of an artist's staying power."

Baker says that automotive races are still very much a part of her life, if not as much her art. "I still love going to races, and this summer my boyfriend and I went to the Grand Prix in Canada," she says. The demands of her work, however, always come first. The car she drives every day to her studio, after all, is a station wagon. "I wish it was sportier," she says. "But I need it to cart around stuff."

—CATHERINE HONG