

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

KENNETH BAKER *Galleries***Brennan's casualness can unnerve**KENNETH BAKER *Galleries*

Jackson Pollock and others inspired by his drip painting technique taught us long ago to enter into artworks and find meaning there by imagining how they were made.

In recent work at Romer Young Gallery, Brooklyn painter Patrick Brennan triggers that reflex and then, in a playful spirit, frustrates it. We can sense, like breezes, the confident intuitions guiding Brennan's work, but never map them.

"Fireworks" (2014), a painting in acrylic and silk on canvas, appears so suffused with accident as to make us wonder where, short of the abandonment of effort, a decision took hold.

One decision stands out: the collage of a

swatch of wrinkled silk on the small, stretched canvas before the pink blotches and dribbles of bright green fell. The silk takes these colors, and some of the violet-black beneath them, in a way different from the canvas. Its pigment-soaked wrinkles make a micro-mountain range of what looks like jittery drawing.

The casualness of Brennan's studio process might seem to mock such fine discriminations. But similar details of varying finish, surface texture and color quality modulated by material or absorbency take on more weight the longer a viewer looks.

Various contemporary artists have expressed resignation or defiance or despair at finding

themselves working at a historical moment when it seems that every creative move has been made and remade already.

Brennan works as if he finds a comfortable openness in this situation. Rather than try to fend off the inevitable appearance of allusion, he welcomes it. Three works on adjacent walls will remind educated viewers of Henri Matisse's cutouts, Dada collage and even Russian constructivism, in addition to Pollock.

Brennan's art prizes the pleasures of making and looking above those of judging and ranking. No wonder this strikingly relaxed work frequently sets people on edge.

Romer Young Gallery

Above: "Fireworks" (2014), acrylic and silk on canvas by Patrick Brennan.