

Nicholas Baker- Maffei at Sideshow Gallery

Couched in the artist's pleasure, Baker-Maffei's eight paintings, spanning from 2000 to the present, are testaments to the creator's mood—whether sexual, intellectual or technical. There is a delight in each of these works that make them vibrate on the walls like abstract records of some sensual epiphany.

Two large paintings—*Chein Chaud* and *Penetrations & Clouds*—encapsulate the issues at work in his process, which he says in his artist statement are guided by desire. They both hang on the same wall and make the other works in the gallery appear rougher in their more centralized sparseness.

In *Chein Chaud*, French for hot dog, the layering of vibrant brushwork with a semé of quirky wiener forms provides the groundwork for experiments with color and composition. The various elements are intriguing in themselves but the work

never allows his brush to overpower the design elements that obscure some of the joy evident. The sprayed on central form is a surprise that does an effective job of softening the form but doesn't do enough to eliminate the graphic quality.

Penetrations & Clouds is a more sophisticated layering that perfectly learns from the lessons of 1970s abstraction and updates it to the digital era. It is an amalgam of seemingly hallucinatory forms that are at first obstructed by the overall graphic composition; each underlying element emerges slowly making it a very sophisticated visual. The painting is a mature meditation on disparate elements and only seems to work because of his innovative touch. The way that the forms gently shift across the surface is something that I can also describe as erotic.

When Yoko Ono asked Timothy Leary the qualities he most admired in a man, he replied, "Intelligence, Self-Confidence, Humor." Baker-Maffei demonstrates all three.

—Hrag Vartanian



Nicholas Baker-Maffei, *Penetrations & Clouds*, 2001, oil, acrylic on board, Sideshow Gallery