

## Sculpture and Painting on the Line: Analia Saban at Sprüth Magers

Dispatch from London

**Analia Saban: Interiors at Sprüth Magers**

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Analia Saban, *Draped Marble* (Fior di Pesco Apuano), 2015. Marble slab on steel on wooden sawhorse, 99.1 x 177.8 x 91.4 cm.

Courtesy of the artist and Sprüth Magers.

The tradition of paint on canvas can act as a provocation to contemporary artists, who may do without either the liquid (e.g. Binky Palermo's cloth) or the ground (e.g. Lynda Benglis's pours). The Los Angeles-based Argentinean Analia Saban doesn't just challenge the conventional role of paint and canvas, she also undermines the "on" with her hybrid painting-sculptures. Her first London show, at Josh Lilley in 2010, featured *Acrylic in Canvas with Ruptures* (2010): paint was stored in bags of canvas, with some of it bleeding through laser-cut holes while most of it dried into sculptural substance. Saban explained then that she wasn't looking to oppose painting but to enable the viewer to appreciate the elements in a different way by demonstrating how much information and structure they hold. "It's a dialogue," she said, "not a fight." Saban adopts fresh strategies for each project, but her questioning yet playful way of thinking remains a connecting thread.

Saban's latest solo sees her upsize — indeed, she shows across all three floors of the gallery's quasi-domestic space — but without reducing the commendably perverse metaphysical wit with which she pushes her materials further than they can be expected to go. The townhouse location plays into the theme of "Interiors," such that Saban gleefully ignores distinctions between not just painting, sculpture, and photography, but also furniture and design. This fertile show contains, by my count, nine different strategies for making a painting of sorts, none of them what a traditionalist would expect.

*Claim* (from *Chesterfield sofa*), from 2014, looks at first sight like a settee with a painting resting on top of it. A closer inspection reveals that the painting is joined to the chair, and that the chair is actually part of the painting: Saban had a custom-made couch covered in canvas, leaving enough fabric for the excess to be pulled clear over stretcher bars. This teases any collectors who might want a painting to match their furniture, as well as challenging any po-faced definition of the difference between art and design — and their relative values. And what's the painting *on*? A chair?



"Analia Saban: Interiors," installation view, Spru?th Magers London, 2015. Photograph by Stephen White.

*Draped marble (Fior di Pesco Apuano)* (2015) sees a substantial block of stone draped over a wooden sawhorse as if it were a towel or, in Saban's skewed world, perhaps an abstract painting hung out to dry. (What's it on? The line.) Here the refusal to accept conventions takes on the natural assumption that marble is inflexible, and slyly suggests through the historical resonance of its central material that the art of the past can also be interpreted more flexibly than we might assume.



Analia Saban, *Bulge (Vertical) #1*, 2015. Encaustic paint on walnut stretcher bars, 34.3 x 26.7 x 15.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Spru?th Magers.

The two *Bulge* paintings here, both from 2015, are a spin on — perhaps even a deconstruction of — Saban's earlier acrylic-in-canvas works. The wall seems pregnant with a protruding bag of paint; but there is no canvas or other container. The skin results from using encaustic, which dries to a solid and glossy finish. That evocation of the body, by the way, can also be traced through Saban's work. There is a palpable physicality to her processes, distancing her from drier conceptualist approaches.

Saban has also won an award as a photographer. That may seem a strange way to introduce a series in which she paints on canvas — but, of course, her 2014 *Markings* series doesn't do that in a straightforward manner. Saban took photographs of variously colored paint cans stored on shelves, had them developed as large C-types and then poured boiling water on the surface so she could scrape away parts of the images. She then used those scraps of color to make an abstract collage attached to the photograph. These diptychs, then, make a photograph of paint, and then paint with the photograph. Paint, once more, is Saban's subject and object, but not in any orthodox sense her medium.

Saban, then, is a humorous conceptual artist who plays around with the structures of representation. If that sounds like a description you could apply to John Baldessari, fair cop: Saban happily identifies herself as a former student and still assists him, though as she explains, "There were no rules there — he is not at all dogmatic, and was always pushing me to do whatever I wanted."

"Interiors" is most enjoyable, but is there also a serious point beyond the ingenious fun? I'm inclined to read Saban as opposing categorization: the sheer number of ways she finds to confuse the distinctions between mediums accumulates into an argument that the very idea of such classifications is unstable and inappropriate. And if that's true in art, might it not read across into life? We should be far more reluctant than we are to pigeonhole people according to superficial characteristics. I emerged from Saban's show thinking: we must be pluralist, multi-cultural and non-judgmental. Art may not change the world, but it's nice to think that, if it could, it would be for the good.