

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

KENNETH BAKER *Galleries*

## Sculpture redefined in ribbon

As if finding words for your experience of artworks were not difficult enough, basic terms long in use such as "sculpture" and "painting" have lost all precision in the past half century.

Although liberating for many studio practitioners — and even more so for those who work in public spaces — this loss of definition leaves more and more unprompted spectators bewildered.

The Mirus Gallery's "Off the Wall," a selection of contemporary "sculpture," usefully dramatizes the challenge of recognizing credible work under a heading so baggy.

To my eye, Southern Californian Matt Hosey's wall pieces, such as "Lattice" (2012) and "Arris" (2012), qualify as sculpture on at least two grounds.

First, they suggest, but do not depict, ruins of architectural ornament. Sculpture's marriage to architecture lasted from antiquity through Art Deco, or whenever architects began to mask buildings' functions by giving them sculpture-like forms overall. See Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind, among other perpetrators — even the Frank Lloyd Wright of New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Second, Hosey's pieces strut their uselessness through his keen but unfussy attention to their details. Their merger of strict geometry with a rough circular-saw attack suggests a convergence, possibly inevitable from Hosey's generational vantage point, of minimalist and

**Off the Wall: Contemporary Sculpture:** Through June 1. Mirus Gallery, 540 Howard St., S.F. (415) 543-3440. [www.mirusgallery.com](http://www.mirusgallery.com).

**Darren Waterston: Ravens and Ruins:** Paintings and works on paper. Through May 18. Haines Gallery, 49 Geary St., S.F. (415) 397-8114. [www.hainesgallery.com](http://www.hainesgallery.com).

post-minimalist aesthetics.

But perhaps Hosey's works' strongest claim to sculpture status is their insistence that no mere concept and no alternative materials could stand in for their exact physical reality.

Aaron Moran's assemblages of reclaimed, painted wood assert themselves in similar terms, though more weakly. Ditto Duncan Johnson's 2004 eccentric honeycombs of wood that look as if a creatively precient artist of the late 1940s might have made them.

German artist Bartek Elsnér's cardboard simulations — of a surveillance camera, a bomb and a TV set with shattered screen — seem intended to reduce these potentially destructive instruments to fragile, unthreatening form. Yet even the hint of that intent ironically magnifies again the reality of their threat.

But for me the great discovery of "Off the Wall" is the work — on the wall — of New York artist Vadis Turner. Her "Cake Mold" (2011), a characteristic work, judging by what we see here, impersonates an



"Cake Mold" (2011), ribbon and clothing by Vadis Turner, is a discovery at the "Off the Wall" show.

abstract painting heavy with impasto, using ribbons and other textile bits.

Turner slyly translates expressive exertions associated often with macho abstract painting into the anxieties of personal adornment that the culture at large encourages us — women especially — to experience.

In doing this, she achieves a sort of social satire, possibly with a vein of self-criticism entwined in it, while fully satisfying a viewer's hope of seeing something generously, attentively and unpredictably invented.

Turner's work looks both relaxed and urgent, educated, funny and painstaking, a mingling

place in nature.

To visitors who have not seen Waterston's art evolve — this show is his eighth at Haines — the casual surrealism of a picture such as "New World" (2012) may look easy.

But Waterston manages detail and atmosphere so that we see at one moment, or from one viewing distance, an abstract painting with a peculiar scar-like reminiscence of Clyfford Still (1904-1980) and at others, the hallucinatory incitements of sci-fi illustration or even of Ming landscape fantasy.

Under the general title "Ravens and Ruins," Waterston also presents a gouache-on-paper bestiary in which the overlapped black silhouettes of recognizable creatures suggest grotesque hybrids. These figures allude to the fanciful inventions and exaggerations of medieval bestiaries, but in our minds, they bring up a different menagerie of possibilities — the potential corruptions of genetic engineering and ecological havoc.

Waterston has mastered a peculiar idiom that merges antiquarian and futuristic aspects. The impossibility of insight into the future now seems as onerous as forebodings we can formulate. Waterston gives form to that bleak mood, offering only the aesthetics of his work in recompense.

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of aspects very rare in contemporary art.

Katie Fisher's polyurethane-frosted clumps of found objects share something of Turner's comic exuberance, but they seem more to be ruled by creative anxiety than to reflect upon it.

For Hosey's and Turner's works alone, "Off the Wall" should not be missed.

**Waterston's forebodings:** Former Bay Area now New York painter Darren Waterston's recent work at Haines shows him updating old-fashioned techniques for generating images from spills and blots of pigment. He uses them to evoke present-day nightmares about the future of our