

Los Angeles Times

Review Amir Nikravan paintings at home in intellectualized hall of mirrors



By **LEAH OLLMAN**

Paintings by Amir Nikravan are at Various Small Fires. (Various Small Fires)

Amir Nikravan's paintings occupy the preternaturally calm eye of a cerebral storm. They spur a heady buzz of questions, yet are rather quiet, visually. They exist for the sake of contradiction and complication.

Painterly illusion has always been a conceptual exercise, long before that particular approach to art-making was granted a capital C. Fooling the eye into perceiving three dimensions on a two-dimensional plane is a mind game, backed by extreme technical finesse.

The L.A.-based Nikravan plays it deftly. His recent canvases, at Various Small Fires, are flat but read as textured, as covered with impastoed brushstrokes in an all-over flurry or criss-crossing bands, as fields of webbing in shallow relief.

Monochromes in shades of slate and iridescent cobalt, the pieces are impeccable, uncanny, elusively beautiful, close cousins to Tauba Auerbach's spray paintings of a few years ago that mimic wrinkled and folded surfaces.

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Nikravan's process involves laying fabric over a built-up (via paint, gesso, concrete, gravel) surface, vacuum-packing it, spraying it and then stretching the fabric over a slim panel of aluminum.

The resulting works are media hybrids, monoprints of sorts, with sculptural origins and the disarming appearance of photographic traces. They are about about-ness. For all of the physical, performative aspects of their making, the works end up hanging in an intellectualized hall of mirrors.

Any sense of touch is purposely lost in translation, the heat of gestural painting quenched in an ice bath. Elegant and confident, the works elicit an appreciation concomitantly cool.

Various Small Fires, 812 N. Highland Ave., (310) 426-8040, through Nov. 8. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.vsf.la

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