

Dancing with brush strokes



"Shape Shifters", 2012, Oil on canvas, 48 x 50 inches

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Maggi Brown is a painter's painter: Her shimmery abstract work bends and stretches ideas of surface, space, gesture, and color. She builds up, scrapes down, and writes over. Her lively show at Barbara Krakow Gallery features paintings dancing with brush strokes that riddle with surface and language. Traces submerge and emerge. Not knowing what's coming or going, the viewer stands on unsteady ground.

In "Whiteout," Brown activates the canvas with pale, wet strokes - powder blue, dusky pink, shades of white. More color lurks beneath, with the white and blue jittering on top, all within a creamy edge scrawled over illegibly with graphite, like an exhortation containing all the wild activity within. That same unreadable cursive loops and tangles across other areas, digging into the paint, at once penetrating and writing over, hinting at written meaning and evading it.

"Shape Shifters" has smudges and flecks of sky blue and spring green frolicking over the canvas, with the green coalescing in three hot vertical passages. Again, Brown takes a dry stylus to wet paint, carving something akin to text out of it in emphatic murmurs. The edge between language and image, just as these paintings slither along another uncertain edge between what's on the surface and what burbles, or seethes, beneath.

**Maggi Brown
New Paintings**

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,
10 Newbury St.,
through July 23rd.
617-262-4490,
barbarakrakowgallery.com

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