

Art in America

January 2014

SAN FRANCISCO
ANOKA FARUQEE
Hosfelt

New Haven-based artist Anoka Faruqee's latest body of work (2012-2013) continues her long-standing interest in pattern. Her recent exhibition at Hosfelt featured 13 moiré paintings---intricately detailed canvases whose bright colors and seemingly vibrating designs are as disorienting as they are eye-catching.

Found on items ranging from fabrics to dollar bills, moiré patterns occur when two or more sets of lines or dots are superimposed over one another, their elements intersecting in ways that produce undulating visual effects. Faruqee has created an alluring body of work that uses color to exaggerate these mysteriously beautiful moirés. In 2013P-29, concentric orange arcs evenly distributed across the canvas appear to dissolve into ripples against a blue bull's-eye pattern; in 2012P-49, irregular waves of red-orange and purple expand and contract in a design reminiscent of thermal imaging.

To make each painting, Faruqee used special tools to rake paint across the canvas, applying colors in multiple layers. She then sanded down the results, leaving behind a smooth, glasslike surface. The technique enhances the illusion, erasing signs of the order in which the colors were applied and amplifying the visual cacophony of the composition. From afar the eye ricochets across the picture plane, bouncing between various lighter-hued passages in a seemingly endless loop. Up close, the complex process of layering, along with the hand-wrought nature of the compositions becomes more apparent.

Faruqee's paintings are indebted to the history of Op art, recalling the charged visual play of works by Victor Vasarely, Jesus Rafael Soto and Bridget Riley. Yet, as the exhibition title, "Substance and Accident," suggests, her project also departs from that tradition, veering away from Op's desire to eschew any trace of the artist's touch and demonstrating something more gestural and human. While Faruqee seems to strive for a mechanical precision, she also makes a point of highlighting the organic nature of her process. In addition to leaving behind drips and slips of the hand, she refrains from masking or sanding down the edges of the paintings, allowing thick globs of medium to build up at the peripheries. The irregular borders that result contrast with the paintings' otherwise sleek surfaces, and offer a glimpse into the messiness of her working method. (It should be noted that this quality is largely lost in reproduction, where the works appear far more polished than they do in person.)

Though it initially seems contradictory to the meticulous nature of these images, Faruqee's emphasis on the painterly process in fact gets to the heart of her interests. Serving as more than just optical games, these paintings show the artist embracing the fallibility of materiality---be it the unpredictability of her medium or the inevitability of human error. It is the oscillation between the handmade and the machinelike that makes the canvases accomplished and compelling works of art rather than simply visual novelties.

-----Karen Rapp

*Anoka Faruqee
2012P-49, 2012
Acrylic on linen
on panel, 34 x 31
inches*

