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Pioneers in Shadows

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Scaling Braque and Takenaga

By [Mario Naves](#)

The paintings of Barbara Takenaga, on display at DC Moore Gallery, are easy to admire and hard to love. Straddled between these polarities is Takenaga herself, an artist cruising on pictorial stratagems and touched by personal tragedy. The relationship between the two curbs our judgment of the work.

Immaculately contrived and spectacular in effect, a Takenaga abstraction would enhance any mantelpiece over which it hung. Undulating patterns, typically comprised of dots, expand over the surface of each canvas.

Takenaga's methodology is impressive: The deliberate application of myriad blips of acrylic paint endows the pictures with a steely, photographic shimmer.

Funneling op art's sensory overload through a stately vein of mysticism, Takenaga propels us to the outer reaches of the galaxy even as she recalls the microscopic doings of subatomic particles. Linear perspective establishes zooming, heady spaces; atmospheric perspective, an unearthly glow. There's a cartoon element involved as well. The works' rhythmic verve and rubbery plasticity brings to mind Kenny Scharf's goofball riffs on Hanna-Barbera cartoons.

Reading the catalog, we learn that Takenaga's recent pictures are influenced by events considerably less sunny: the death of a sick parent. "There is," critic Nancy Princenthal writes, "nothing literal" about the connection between a mother's dementia and her daughter's "twilight palette." All the same, it's there, "run[n]g deep below the surface like a big, dark shadow." There's no doubting that Takenaga has evoked something elemental, hard and true from her unearthly runs of black, gray and white. (When saturated colors do make an appearance, a palpable diminution of feeling takes place.)

It's to Takenaga's credit that her art pinpoints, with uncanny specificity, "that sense of fading—shiny, hazy shifting" typical of a person afflicted with dementia. What Takenaga can't entirely enliven (or redeem) is the dulling prerequisites of formula. A canvas like "Doubleback" (2011) would benefit from the aforementioned mantelpiece—seen on a piecemeal basis, Takenaga performs wonders. Seen en masse, you realize just how mechanical wonders can be.

Barbara Takenaga: New Paintings

Through Nov. 12, DC Moore Gallery, 535 W. 22nd St., 2nd Fl., 212-247-2111, www.dcmooregallery.com.

The French painter Georges Braque (1882–1963) exists in the popular imagination primarily as an adjunct to the life and art of Pablo Picasso. The role they played in the advent of cubism, arguably the 20th century's most important and far-reaching art form, guaranteed that their names, if not fortunes, would be bound together like mountaineers.

That was Braque's estimation of the relationship he and Picasso played in upsetting and, by fiat, extending pictorial tradition. Picasso drummed up a different analogy, likening Braque (or so legend has it) to being his "wife." It's easy to glean the Spaniard's condescension—we know his take on women. The shadow cast by Picasso's bullying genius is all but obliterating. Getting a sense of Braque as Braque has been difficult.

Georges Braque: Pioneer of Modernism, an exhibition at Acquavella Galleries on the Upper East Side, should contribute much to our understanding of the painter's accomplishment. The show isn't definitive—it skips out entirely on the last 13 years of Braque's art—but what it lacks in breadth it gains in concentration.

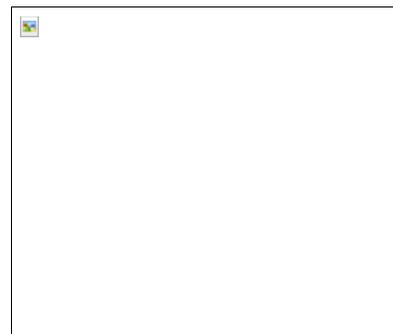
Borrowing key works from major institutions—among them MoMA, The Met, Pompidou and The Tate—along with paintings, drawings and collages from private collections, Acquavella has orchestrated some kind of coup. In doing so, it has performed a mitzvah for New Yorkers devoted to the vagaries of modernist art.

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JULIA MORTON'S NOW ON



From the early fauvist landscapes to the invention and refining of cubism to the darker, more equivocal works of the 1940s and '50s, Pioneer of Modernism elaborates upon Braque's oeuvre with surprising depth. He emerges as a gentle temperament with tenacious gifts, a painter given to poetic and often moody reveries.

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That, and he's a stick in the mud—a loner given to duty rather than pleasure, to musty habits and overheated tropes. "Studio V" (1949–1950) pulls apart the conventions of cubism in the service of dry melancholia; "Studio IX" (1952–53/56) does something similar, albeit in a more scattered manner. In both cases, gravity stifles vitality, leaving the viewer with masterworks burdened by modesty.

Vulgarity isn't necessarily a coefficient of great art, but it goes some way toward explaining Picasso's genius and the more politic nature of Braque's. Pioneer of Modernism is an event, absolutely, but one whose upshot doesn't quite overturn the received wisdom.

Georges Braque: Pioneer of Modernism

Through Nov. 30, Acquavella Galleries, 18 E. 79th St., 212-734-6300,

www.acquavellagalleries.com.

Exhibition Openings

Blue Mountain Gallery: Nancy Beal: "Recent Paintings." Opens Nov. 1, 530 W. 25th St., 4th Fl., bluemountaingallery.org.

David Nolan Gallery: Richard Artschwager: "Weave." Opens Oct. 27, 527 W. 29th St., davidnolangallery.com.

First Street Gallery: Nancy Balliett: "Then & Now." Opens Nov. 1, 526 W. 26th St., Ste. 209, firststreetgallery.net.

Gallery 307: Flo Fox: "Photographs 1972–2011." Opens Oct. 27, 307 7th Ave., Ste. 1401, carterburdencenter.org.

James Cohan Gallery: Byron Kim. Opens Nov. 4, 533 W. 26th St., jamescohan.com.

Lesley Heller Workspace: Tom Kotik: "Tone." Opens Oct. 26. "Head Case." Opens Oct. 26, 54 Orchard St., lesleyheller.com.

Minus Space: Gabriele Evertz. Opens Nov. 5, 98 4th St., Rm. 204, Buzzer #28, minuspace.com.

Noho Gallery Chelsea: Jiwan Joo: "Labyrinth as Puzzle." Opens Nov. 1, 520 W. 25th St., nohogallery.com.

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