

Review: Thomas Fougéirol slathers on thick paint and lets gravity do its thing



By DAVID PAGEL OCT 26, 2018 | 12:05 PM



Thomas Fougéirol, "Untitled," 2017. (Lance Brewer /)

Thomas Fougéirol lays paint on thick and then lets gravity do its thing — more or less.

A lovely back-and-forth between artistic intention and come-what-may happenstance unfolds across the variegated surfaces of the French artist's 37 oils on canvas and panel at Praz Delavallade gallery.

Fougéirol's abstract paintings come in three sizes. All start out lying flat on the floor or a tabletop. Yet each group is made differently.

The smallest ones, 25 of which line a single wall in their own gallery, consist of a viscous layer of paint, in one or two colors. While still wet, Fougéirol manipulates the paint with a variety of palette knives, sometimes running comb-like tools through it and at others scooping and digging into, as if it were mortar or soil.

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Then he puts down his palette knives and picks up each painting. Sometimes he simply props it at an angle and lets the paint slide down the surface until he likes what he sees. At other times he really goes at it: tipping, shaking and wiggling a work so that the wet paint shimmies and jiggles every which way. Patterns that recall geological processes — or melting ice cream — take shape. Atop still other paintings, Fougeirol sprinkles dry, powdery pigments. Then he shakes the painting or bangs it against a tabletop, sending the pigment flying. Sandstorms come to mind, as do hurricanes. All sorts of imagery is evoked, including lunar landscapes, beach sand, X-rays, photograms, cake frosting, form-fitting clothing, billowing curtains and molten lava.

To make the nine medium-size paintings, Fougeirol began just like he did with the small ones but stopped after slathering on a thick layer of paint and combing or troweling horizontal furrows in it. He also limited his palette to white to emphasize the shadows cast by the ambient light in the nooks and crannies of his textured monochromes. Many resemble Venetian blinds that have taken on lives of their own — each slat dancing to its own tune.

Three largest paintings, measuring approximately 6-by-5 or 5-by-4 feet, are supersized renditions of the little ones. Their expansive surfaces amplify the visual and physical impact of Fougeirol's ingeniously hands-off process. In addition, the powdered pigment that has been freely scattered across their surfaces are bits of studio detritus, including scraps of paint, broken glass, shattered mirrors, even a flattened bottle cap. These elements detract from the *laissez faire* ethos of Fougeirol's other works not because of their size or rubbish-bin origins, but because they feel as if they have been too carefully composed, too tastefully arranged.

In art — as in life — micro-managing is no substitute for letting it rip.