

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Colorful stripes to music,
like a rock 'n' roll EKG

Mark Moore Gallery

TIM BAVINGTON: *Translating guitar solos, melodies and bass and treble lines into color.*By **DAVID PAGEL**
Special to The Times

Seven years ago, no one who wanted to be taken seriously as an artist would think of making stripe paintings. Such pretty designs belonged on shopping bags or dusty canvases packed away in museum storage bins.

Tim Bavington changed all that. Sprayed with an airbrush, his fluorescent-hued panels were so vivid, sexy and luminous that no clear-eyed viewer could dismiss them for being frivolous or decorative.

The 37-year-old artist did for stripe painting what Playboy did for the nude pinup (and what Minimalism did for sculpture): make it more beautiful by stripping away unnecessary details. And Bavington had to work harder than Hugh Hefner. Where the publisher began with gorgeous models, the young painter started out with a style that was assumed to be dead and buried.

Today, stylish stripes are everywhere. Flashy colors are all around us. And Bavington, who was born in London and lives in

Las Vegas, is at it again.

At the Mark Moore Gallery, five new mural-scale paintings abandon the playfully exuberant palette and luscious rhythms of his earlier works for colors that aren't afraid to wrap themselves around the dark side of life. Bavington's compositions jolt and jar far more often than they serenade. If it was nutty for him to start making stripe paintings in 1997, it's equally nutty, and even more ambitious, for him to transform this cheery, light-hearted style into paintings with real grit and substance, not to mention the capacity to make you shudder. That he succeeds so splendidly is a testament to the wisdom of marching to the beat of your own drum — even if the song's also on the radio.

Music lies behind Bavington's new paintings, which translate guitar solos, melodies and bass and treble lines from tracks by such bands as the Darkness, Oasis and the Stone Roses into vertical bands of color that bleed into one another. "Full Fathom Five (Elephant Stone)" consists of five long horizontal canvases stacked atop one another (like a Donald Judd wall sculpture) to form a 10-foot-tall vertical field. Its supersaturated array of browns, grays, aquas and lavenders, punctuated by queasy olive greens, fleshy salmon pinks and overripe pumpkin tints, should turn your stomach. But in Bavington's hands, these questionable tertiary colors resonate.

"Roll With It" preserves some of the giddy optimism of Bavington's earlier, less complicated paintings, but not without exposing their sunny outlook to the toxic atmosphere of his mature works. Drawing on Karl Benjamin's fabulously indescribable palette from the 1950s and on Monique Prieto's recent demonstration that formalist painting is no stranger to anxiety and dread, Bavington delivers a powerfully original remix that's accessible and sophisticated, immediate in its eye-grabbing appeal and long-lasting in its emotional affects.

Mark Moore Gallery, 2525 Michigan Ave., Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, (310) 453-3031, through May 15. Closed Sundays and Mondays.