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Art in America

ROSY KEYSER

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Rosy Keyser: *Periscope, Studded with Singing Water*, 2017, oil, acrylic, spray paint, and paint additive on canvas, 87 by 69 inches; at Maccarone.

To enter **Rosy Keyser**'s twelve-painting show at Maccarone's Boyle Heights space, one had to pass a story-high Carol Bove grid **sculpture** in the gallery's side yard. The sculpture formally

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echoed neighboring buildings' paned factory windows and wrought-iron door grates, attuning this viewer to the three-dimensionality and underlying rectilinear structure of five paintings on view that Keyser made using wood-bead seat mats of the sort used by taxi drivers. The beaded cushions as well as bundles of string are variously twisted across exposed stretcher bars in these works, spilling into the viewer's space. The pieces are almost entirely absent canvas (the woven support appears in only one) and, like much of Keyser's previous works, can be considered both paintings and sculptures. In some, like *Oh Gary Snyder, Where'd You Go?* (all works 2017), Keyser painted the beads individually, building up geometric patterns or expansive **monochrome** passages. In others, such as *Pieces of 8*, she brushed paint straight across the mats, treating the surfaces as akin to the subtler texture of a canvas's warp and weft.

A series of canvas-based works called "Periscopes" suggests that Keyser may be moving away from messy, loose gestural abstraction and toward more controlled brushwork. In *Large Blue Passport*, which could be regarded as a transitional work, a black circle floats atop a chaotic field of bright blue and gray zigzag brushstrokes, cut off by the work's left edge. The circle motif reappears in the "Periscopes" but amid more structured compositions rendered in relatively subdued hues. Each features a centrally placed ring supported by a vertical armature, the apparatus suggestive of a pictorial realm subject to the forces of gravity. The rings read as lenses or peepholes. Some have darker-hued, crescent-shapes at their sides that indicate other circles behind them and thus convey a depth into which the optical devices might help us see. In works like *Periscope*, *Cormorant's View*, painted lines or brushy passages continue through the circles undisturbed. In *Periscope #1*, however, a black stroke morphs into a beige stripe only to come out the circle's other end in hazier bluish form; such deliberate inconsistencies recall science class demonstrations of visual distortions—as in the "broken" straw in a glass of water—and play with glib assumptions that seeing is knowing.

One of the "Periscope" paintings, *Periscope, Sizzine Breath*, takes its curious nomenclature from an Elizabeth Bishop poem that performs ekphrasis—or the act of vivid description, especially of a work of art. Yet Keyser's works prompt us to do more than recount what we see. They ask us to observe, just as a periscope permits a view of that which is otherwise out of sight, the conditions of *how* we look at a painting.