

# ARTslant



[freedom is a prime number](#)

Sarah Cain

Honor Fraser

2622 La Cienega Blvd., Culver City, CA 90034

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## Abandon Everything Again

by Jared Baxter

There's something to the way the show's title elides its source, a quotation from Roberto Bolano's *The Savage Detectives* that originally reads "Freedom is *like* a prime number." It's a subtle change from simile to metaphor, a near-subliminal attrition that renders the phrase both more direct and abstract.

This shift, of course, has much to do with Sarah Cain's work, whose fearlessness in the face of excess is closely tied to her insistence on the expressiveness of color and form, however esoterically these may translate into the linguistic operations of criticism, reflection, or conversation. In any case, it seems safe to say that a premium is placed on the indivisible.

Yet this cipher-like wholeness is belied, at first blush, by the exhibition's emphasis on holes, such as those in Cain's paintings on dollar bills, just wide enough to barely expose the eye of the pyramid, which also seem to tunnel through time, calling to mind a previous generation of critics' attention to an artwork's so-called material support with a decided irony.



**Sarah Cain**, *crying in public* 2012, Acrylic, shoe laces, bracelet, thread and gouache on canvas 67 x 22 x 2 inches; Courtesy of Honor Fraser.

Certainly, a playful renegotiation of the legacy of modernism is nothing new in the arc of Cain's now decade-long career, though a number of the pieces represent new directions. The signature installation, *so there, it's air*, 2012, includes a canvas mounted in reverse, whitewashed and uncut, as a kind of visual blockage, interrupting the flow of the paint on the wall behind it and suggesting the existence of a surface internal to the work.

The adjacent and eponymous *freedom is a prime number*, 2012, builds on the sense of the metaphysical created by this concealment. A canvas sporting a branch, a necklace, and five pieces of red string, the work is a painting to the extent that one is willing to believe in it as such, which may well be the same as one's willingness to believe in painting full stop. The very absence of paint, rather than shifting the register of the work to low-relief sculpture or Donald Judd-esque "specific object," fulfills the sense of the canvas as body suggested by its anthropomorphic adornment, testifying by its very presence to a history that it carries inside itself, imbued with a shamanistic allure.



**Sarah Cain**, *the exes*, 2012, Acrylic on canvas and stretcher bar, 103 x 103 inches; Courtesy of Honor Fraser.

By contrast, *the exes*, 2012, moves in an opposite direction. Gathering the visual motifs of the backwards canvas and diagonal crosses diffused through *so there, it's air* into a single object, the work performs a kind of crossing out magnified by the queasily decorative impression created by the ill-matched plaid of its colors. Linked through its title to the ugliness of the work of moving on from past relationships, its imbricated Xs mark the place of the painting's own undoing, the canvas reversed and tilted to manifest the sign of its cancellation.

As such, *the exes* is exemplary of what's best in this exhibition. True to her Biblical namesakes, Sarah Cain arrives at painting through its betrayal, humbling the seriousness of the medium and its supports and laughing at the weight of its history, in order to imbue it with the aliveness of a language.

—[Jared Baxter](#)

(Image on top: **Sarah Cain**, *Installation view*; Courtesy of Honor Fraser.)