
ARTFORUM

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Justin Adian

SKARSTEDT GALLERY | 550 WEST 21ST STREET



Justin Adian, *Slow Goodbye*, 2015, oil enamel on canvas on ester foam, 24 1/2 × 25 1/2 × 4 1/2".

Justin Adian's show "Fort Worth" presented sixteen works that were made using a technique he has employed since 2007, and that has come to be his signature and calling card: The artist places hunks of foam on shaped wooden stretchers, stretches canvas over the foam, and applies oil enamel paint to the canvas surface. The results—puffy, shiny, asymmetrical—have a crisp, graphic appeal. They stand out from the wall with pleasing aplomb, like pop-surrealist upholstery, or comics come to life.

They are also possessed of a zany, cartoonlike expressivity; Adian can coax quite a bit of energy from relatively simple means. His cushions are best at capturing a sense of weight and mass: All but one work here consisted of at least two separately wrapped foam pieces pressed against one another, and there is something expressly relatable, even satisfying, about the way the pieces smooch together. This sense is strongest when the pieces don't meet each other perfectly. In *Outfeel* (all works 2015), for example, the folds of the canvas bring to mind buttocks seated uncomfortably in a

chair. Likewise, in *Slow Goodbye*, where a light-blue shape awkwardly presses up against a curved section of pink, the site of contact, of pressure, is palpable—it can be felt.

Unsurprisingly, the works have plenty of erotic undertones. The angular yellow form of *Playback* could be a necktie or a tongue, and the seam wending its way up the torso-like *Zipt* is certainly suggestive as well. Some works, such as the hokily landscape-like *Storm Front*, adhere too closely to the pictorial, yet *Zipt* is an exception, flaunting its contours like curves through a skintight dress. Adian does little to stave off abjection: Although the bright colors and anarchic shapes of his work may fill us with feelings of fun and cheer, the scrunched-enamel medium is sickly sweet; in the folds and seams, bacteria might teem.

Adian's materials and palette bring to mind artists such as Claes Oldenburg and Ellsworth Kelly, and no doubt his work appeals in part owing to the way it comes prepackaged with the unmistakable "look" of postwar art. Indeed, in much the same way that certain contemporary-painting practices are said to yield zombified simulacra of high-modernist formalism, Adian might be charged with plundering what came next: the shaped canvases and "specific objects" of the 1960s. Is it painting or is it sculpture? That such a question could be unanswerable was once a really big deal; quite incredibly, in 2015, it still gets invoked in reference to Adian's work.

Which is fine: An object need only be interesting, and Adian's work doesn't require the aura of long-bygone provocations to sustain its charge. In fact, if he evokes the '60s, perhaps the proper antecedent is not Kelly et al., but the loosely defined category of "Pop abstraction," which includes figures such as Raymond Hendler and Nicholas Krushenick (and, later, Jonathan Lasker), who sublimated AbEx viscosity in the cartoonish graphic shorthand of mass culture. (The figurative grotesqueries of the *Hairy Who* seem relevant as well.) Resurrected here, the style feels contemporary enough: Adian's plump, priapic part-objects may invoke the body, but it's one that's wrapped in synthetic fabric and bulging at the seams, a body designed only to consume and be consumed.

— *Lloyd Wise*