



ARTNEWS

'I'm Interested in the Cosmetics of the Body': A Talk with Justin Adian

By: Bill Powers

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Justin Adian photographed in his Brooklyn studio in 2015.
VINCENT GAPAILLARD FOR W MAGAZINE

Justin Adian is a New York-based artist who was born in Fort Worth, Texas. He has had solo exhibitions at Skarstedt Gallery and Almine Rech Gallery, among other places. His work can currently be seen in the "Puff Pieces" group show at Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York through August 12.

Bill Powers: Is it true that you work with boat paint?

Justin Adian: I like it because the gloss tends to be brighter, especially this Dutch paint I use. It's very shiny.

BP: So how did you end up in this summer show with Lynda Benglis, Sam Moyer, and John Chamberlain?

JA: I was asked to be in a Rizzoli book called *Feelings* last year and the book's editor, Loren Olsen, curated the "Puff Pieces" show, but with a tighter selection of artists. Plus, Rachel Uffner is the first New York gallery I showed the foam pieces at.

BP: Do you remember when you started making puffy paintings?

JA: It was seeing John Chamberlain's soft sculpture, and then finding a piece of foam outside my studio in Chinatown and trying to rework it. That attempt failed, which is when I realized that my language was painting so I stretched a piece of canvas over it.



Justin Adian, *Orange Crush*, 2015, oil enamel on ester foam and canvas.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SKARSTEDT

BP: What's the allure of John Chamberlain?

JA: His work is made under the auspice of destruction and yet they're very pretty. His approach to sculpture is casual at first glance, but misleadingly so.

BP: You have a new sculpture in this show that extends from the wall down onto the floor.

JA: It's the same foam I normally use only fibreglassed. I always have foam on the floor around my studio and I like how it relaxes or reclines almost like a person. The title is *Blue Lean* which is a reference to drinking cough syrup.

BP: To me, that piece looks like a John McCracken sculpture on coffee break.

JA: Or maybe it just woke up.

BP: There's another piece of yours that's backlit with fluorescent spray paint. Who do we credit with popularizing this technique in contemporary art?

JA: I started thinking about backlit [works] when I saw Robert Irwin trying to get light out of paintings. I only saw the Rauschenberg cardboard backlit pieces after the fact.

BP: What are some of your other titles in the Uffner show?

JA: There's a pink and blue painting called *Second Cousins*.

BP: The way the two elements touch is like they're kissing.

JA: *Second Cousins* is the closest you can get where it's acceptable to fool around while only being slightly taboo.

BP: Sometimes you employ musical references in your titles.

JA: Yeah, the little green and black painting is *Black Summer*, after this Danzig song "Dirty Black Summer."

BP: Then the largest painting in the show is called *Interlude*.

JA: Which refers to the space between the two pink brackets.



BP: You met Dave Hickey recently on a trip to New Mexico?

JA: He wrote the essay for my *Fort Worth* catalogue published by Skarstedt. Dave said how my paintings can look like something out of *The Flintstones* so I titled this piece *Yabba Dabba Doo*.



Justin Adian, *Sea Breeze*, 2016, oil enamel on ester foam and canvas.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SKARSTEDT

BP: I always thought your work had a prehistoric vibe. And sometimes the way you let the canvas wrinkle can feel like skin.

JA: Maybe skin under something—like hot pants—skin being constricted where the canvas acts as clothing. I'm interested in the cosmetics of the body.

BP: But then you also think of the wrinkles as composition?

JA: They make lines on the interior of the painting, so yeah.

BP: Do you think there's a distinct flavor to Texan artists?

JA: There's either stark Minimalism or else humorous gestures. I think Rauschenberg's hilarious. He's from Port Arthur, the same town as Janis Joplin.

BP: During Frieze New York, you had some works on paper in the Skarstedt booth. How do you make them and how do they relate to the paintings?

JA: I've been making them for 10 years or so. I pour latex on glass, let it dry, then peel it up and adhere it to paper or canvas board. I think their relationship to the paintings is about color and how two or more things touch.

BP: You recently told me about a late-'70s Wim Wenders movie, *The American Friend*, where Dennis Hopper plays an art dealer. Any other good art movies I should check out?

JA: I don't really like movies about artists or the art world. *Female Trouble* is a pretty good depiction of an artist, I guess.