

ArtReview

Justin Adian *Fort Worth*

Skarstedt, New York 10 September - 24 October

By Iona Whittaker – ArtReview December 2015

These paintings by Justin Adian, part of a series he has been working on since roughly 2010 (all works here are from 2015), are pitched at an unusual point between the look of Minimalism or hard-edge painting and an evocative ripeness that is Adian's own.

The paintings – for this is what they are according to the artist despite turgid volumes protruding some 7-12 centimeters from their surfaces in a sculptural fashion – are made by enveloping foam shapes in heavy canvas and slapping oil-based enamel paint on them. Most of the works marry two components together, though one (*Slip It In*) has seven parts, another four (*Fortune Teller*). Their flat colour unbroken shapes and level depth is reminiscent of the work of artists who have influenced Adian, among them Ellsworth Kelly. A subtle balance is struck between individual shapes, which have been carefully cut and thoughtfully combined, and the more organics puckering of canvas over bodies of spongy material. The paint, applied last, in the main creates

smooth, glossy surfaces, but it has also been allowed to pool slightly and congeal in some of the seams where two shapes nudge against each other, creating minor elastic textures in the cracks. One has the impression of works that are principled, but not purist in their execution.

Even without prior knowledge that this series is inspired by the artist's Texas hometown, which lends the show its names, the paintings collectively deliver an atmosphere of place or locale. This might be traced to different aspects of the show. The works, in the way that they bring different shapes into relation with each other, adhering physically, so as to seem both intimate and pleasantly incongruous (in a manner almost anthropomorphic in some cases, and often emotive when seen alongside their titles, for example *Slow Goodbye* or *Outfeel*), an amount to conversant community of forms. In terms of colour and texture, the show has undertones of machinery, perhaps shiny automobiles, or blatant signage. There is a feeling of continuum between the works, which were

designed specifically for this gallery space and show, as if each were a moment in a broader narrative.

Adian's practice to date has drawn inspiration from books and music as well as stories or specific memories of his own life. A solo exhibition at Skarstedt in London last year was accompanied by short stories he had written. The works show in New York lack such an accompaniment, but when combined with their titles, they retain a certain air of unselfconscious, lo-fi poetry that upholds a consistent character. Names such as *Orange Crush*, *Shoot Out* and *Valley High* are almost Pop – certainly not esoteric – and convey a sense of freedom beyond the works' careful formal decisions.

It is clear that Adian finds fulfillment in the continuation of this long-running series. Although the works presented here were completed within a short period one has from them a sense of nourishment and purpose, rather than quick assemblage. *Fort Worth* is a show that instills confidence.



Fortune Teller, 2015, oil enamel on ester foam and canvas, 137.8 x 133.4 x 7.6 cm. Courtesy Skarstedt, New York