

Sven Lukin

GARY SNYDER PROJECT SPACE

Featuring eleven radiantly colored, eccentrically shaped three-dimensional canvases mostly from the 1960s, this exhibition offered something of a retrospective for the Latvian-born, New York-based artist Sven Lukin. The works—hybrids of canvas painting and relief sculpture—with their brash primary hues, reduced forms, and caricature-like, almost anthropomorphic curves, assume a position somewhere between Pop and Minimalism.

A playful untitled construction from 1965, painted in bright ceruleans, cadmium yellows, and reds, is a strange sliver of a shape that suggests what could be a carpet, a cartoonish, tongue, or a flattened tail, slithering down and onto the floor before curling back toward the canvas's lower edge. It evokes both Roy Lichtenstein's painted gestures and Robert Morris's cascading felt pieces.

Even when they don't protrude from the wall and engage their surroundings, these canvases are animated by their bold, brushstroke-like gestures, as in *Snug* (1968–2010), a pink flesh-colored, calligraphic band that springs from one corner of the gallery and slides in a diagonal to touch the cement-gray floor. Such shapes also play out to humorous effect in *Disneyesque* (1970–71), where a folded loop sits atop a square pedestal. By fusing Pop-like imagery with a Minimalist formality Lukin creates what comes off as a charming visual pun.

It sometimes feels in these works as if Lukin were joking with the sculptural concerns of his peers. Yet his paintings, visually exuberant and rigorously crafted, reveal a sincere effort to capture the experimental spirit of the time—a transitional moment when artists were challenging the relationship between printing and sculpture. They took work from the walls to the floor, used unconventionally shaped canvases, and rendered painting three-dimensional. And many of these “experiments”—as put forth by Lukin—still manage to look adventuresome.

—Greg Lindquist



Lemon Peel, 1953, oil on canvas, 43 x 38 x 6 1/2 inches