

ART IN REVIEW

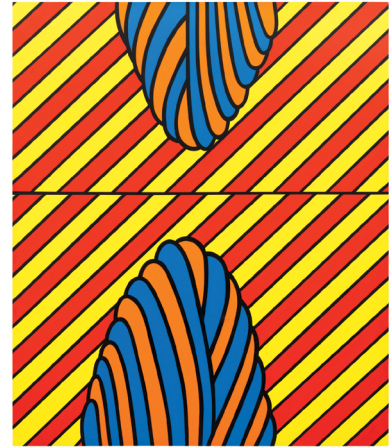
Nicholas Krushenick: ‘A Survey’

By KEN JOHNSON

Gary Snyder Gallery
529 West 20th Street, Chelsea

Through Oct. 29

The Bronx-born Nicholas Krushenick (1929-99) triangulated an eccentric sweet spot of his own in the field of painting in the 1960s: an exuberant fusion of Pop, Surrealism and abstraction. This compact retrospective presents paintings and drawings from 1961 to 1998.



Son of King Kong (1966)

Krushenick avoided explicit representation, but there is an often weird sense of narrative animation in his tautly frontal compositions of flat, primary-colored shapes defined by black cartoon lines. In “Son of King Kong” (1966) two bulbous orange-and-blue-striped shapes, like the heads of giant snakes, approach each other from above and below on a horizontally bisected background of diagonal red and yellow stripes. Whether they will kiss, bite or explode when they meet, we cannot tell, and the suspenseful tension is delightfully alarming.

Many pictures seem to channel the social strife of the 1960s. In “Fire Fade” (1971), zigzagging stripes around the edges of a vertical canvas form a maw filled with sharp white teeth. The picture distills the rage that for a time engulfed our national psyche. More often, Krushenick parsed the elemental structures of his medium. For example, “Outspan” (1968) spoofs Minimalism: a red rectangle bordered by a narrow band of yellow has its lower right corner torn away, revealing a red-framed white rectangle. Beneath the surface lies not meaning but just another surface.

With inexhaustible inventiveness and varying degrees of complexity and simplification, Krushenick continued to experiment with formal and metaphorical possibilities until the end of his life. His marvelous, underappreciated oeuvre cries out for a full-scale museum survey.