

james pinson / Edouard Pruhlière

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For many years now the French artist Edouard Pruhlière has made a generic type of painting. In France such a genre is often referred to as 'volumetric painting', in the US it is sometimes understood as 'painting in the expanded field'. Despite some notable exceptions, this phenomenon has been mainly a Franco-American affair, taking place between New York and Paris. Both cultures have long traditions of working the boundaries between specific mediums: in France with the Affichistes, Supports/surfaces or Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Toroni and Niele Parmentier; in the US the heritage of Minimalism and contemporary artists such as Jessica Stockholder, James Hyde and Polly Apfelbaum. The contribution of Pruhlière's work within this context has been significant, and not just because he is a French artist who lived for many years in New York.

In his recent show, what's at stake in the work is familiar to territory for Pruhlière. It is, nominally, painting. When hung on the wall, much is made of the relationship between the canvas and the stretcher. The canvas is often folded and then screwed onto the support, emphasising the thickness and materiality of the canvas. Most often, and typically with Pruhlière, the stretcher is emphasised as a three dimensional structure. The canvas is invariably subservient to the support and finds its position and role within this configuration. On the canvas, in both of these cases, paint is dripped and congealed and the colour is bright, if not fluorescent. All this is within Pruhlière's standard repertoire, although he seems to be placing fresh demands upon the three dimensional works. They are more like assemblages, often evoking the feel of a Rauschenberg 'combine', rather than a picking at the seams of painting, as in his earlier work. There is a sense here that the ground

rules of the three-dimensional work has changed; it is less about painting cross-dressing as sculpture and more about collage and montage. This points to an interesting crisis that is present both in Pruhlière's work and the genre in general. The appeal is the inventiveness that is brought to bear on the three-dimensional characteristics of the support. However, such an intense formal preoccupation could create the feeling that the wheel is being perpetually reinvented. The weakness of such work, and especially here, is the nominal treatment of paint as a cursory regime of mark making and gesture. It feels as though painting itself has slipped too easily into being nothing but the icing on the cake.

James Pinson