

ARTFORUM

John Armleder

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In the judgment of Clement Greenberg, decoration was the specter haunting modernist painting, while Minimalism was nothing more than “good design.” Such quips from modernism’s self-anointed sentinel provide a fitting frame for John Armleder’s ongoing series of “Furniture Sculptures,” 1980–2012. Coupling generic abstract paintings with found furnishings and industrial objects, these works cannily inhabit the looming, intractable tensions lurking at modernism’s core. As if we needed a reminder, Armleder’s pairings reveal how readily international abstraction’s utopian projects deflate into neutral scrim for offices and living rooms; how closely the functional forms of home decor approximate Minimalism’s reduced aesthetics; and how thoroughly notions of autonomous media are abrogated by the easy slide of painting into sculpture and sculpture back into painting. Sardonic and serious in equal measure, the series’ import inheres not in the originality of its questions, but in its ability to layer many of them within each piece.

Take *Untitled (FS 203)*, 1988, where two ten-foot-tall canvases flank two steel spoilers. Unprimed, the canvases are bare save for the single, thick stripe of black paint traversing their bottommost edges. Even and textureless, the paint’s application mimics that of the adjacent white wall. Arching lithely over the viewer, the spoilers recall Donald Judd’s dictum that an artwork “need only be interesting,” their shiny, slightly stained surfaces seducing more than the canvases’ grainy weave.

Not all of the series’ iterations are so conceptually full. *Goldfish*, 2008, an untouched Ludwig Vistalite drum kit modeled in translucent orange, too neatly adopts the celebratory attitude of Jeff Koons’s commodity sculpture. Failing to engage the gallery’s architecture, it empties into a one-liner. Yet Armleder’s readymades by and large avoid such missteps. A worn wooden table affixed to the ceiling at a diagonal tack, *Furniture Sculpture 18*, 1980–2012, transforms a neighboring fluorescent light fixture into a luminous Dan Flavin. Slipping between the aesthetic, the ornamental, and the absurd, the work finds Armleder at his best.



John Armleder, *FS 1*, 1979, chair, paint, 35 x 35 x 19".

— Courtney Fiske

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