

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



Gene Beery, *Advertisement*, 1970s, acrylic on canvas, 20 × 21 1/4”.

SAN FRANCISCO

Gene Beery

CUSHION WORKS

3320 18th Street

October 26–December 14, 2019

In “New Mythic Visualizations,” Gene Beery’s first solo exhibition in the Bay Area since the 1970s, the Californian artist’s signature non-sequiturs and declarative truths, attenuated by his satirical drawl, are featured in a central black-and-white multi-panel arrangement of recent paintings. “SOPHISTICATION IS DEATH,” reads one, in biting all-caps, while another simply offers, “A PIPE,” in just off-center ligature, a quip at that

Modernist master whose readymades lurched from conceptual rebellion to rarified artifacts of high culture. Curated by Jordan Stein and Nick Irvin, the exhibition also includes three videos filmed at Logoscape Ranch, Beery’s home of forty years in the remote foothills of the Sierra Nevadas, and exhibited here for the first time. In *Burning Cardboard*, 2000s, he sets ablaze a pile of paintings made on flattened boxes, as his simultaneous humming crescendos to a high-pitched wail. The sole survivor of that immolation is on view here: *THE BURDEN OF VULNERABLE BEAUTY*, 2000s.

Beery’s language paintings are not unlike the aesthetic and linguistic immediacy of a graphic T-shirt gone rogue, a parallel the artist draws by enclosing a number of his visual texts in gesturally outlined blouses and cotton tees. Eschewing the preciousness of a single painting, Beery works with juxtapositions, creating the effect of textual animation and allowing his critical edge to quietly bleed in after first read. His is a vision that witnesses and remembers the dissonance between one’s presentation of self, and how that self is re-ceived in the (art) world—a sensibility possibly learned during his stint as a guard at the Museum of Modern Art in the early 1960s, alongside colleagues “Bobby” Ryman, Dan Flavin, and Lucy Lippard. Near the show’s exit, a painting featuring a pop-color palette (an influence, perhaps, of Sol Lewitt, Beery’s first patron and a former MoMA night clerk himself), announces, “GENE B. BEERY . . . SINGULAR + TITANIC . . . BUY SOME TODAY!”

Theadora Walsh, “Critics’ Picks: Gene Beery.” *Artforum* (December 2019), accessed online.