

# ARTFORUM



View of “Lukas Geronimas,” 2015. From left: *Custom Dust Drawing (Reclining Nude)*, 2015; *Custom Table 2*, 2015; *Custom Shelf with Narrative*, 2015; *Untitled*, 2015.

## Lukas Geronimas

DAVID PETERSEN GALLERY

“Geatest Show on Rearth,” the title of Lukas Geronimas’s summer solo exhibition, appears to contain typos but doesn’t. “Being a Rearthling is Geat,” wrote Geronimas in the show’s press release, which doubled as a travelogue about the artist’s recent road trip from Brooklyn to Minneapolis. Despite the title’s allusion to P. T. Barnum’s circus spectacle, the exhibition insisted on the allure of the emphatically unspectacular. A tabletop propped up on sawhorses, an empty bookcase, and an array of objects enshrined in Plexiglas were poised between sincerity and affable irony, offering humor with a dose of institutional critique. Here, objects that initially gave the appearance of mundane utility revealed themselves to be artworks worth lingering over.

The question of why we prize the things we do resonated throughout the show. *Untitled* (all works 2015), a collection of semi-useful-looking objects with neatly jointed limbs in snugly fitted Plexiglas vitrines, amplifies the staged preciousness of the traditional art object. Folded up, their functionality abandoned, the objects become a spatial puzzle of symbolic value. As if to underline this point, the sculpture includes

Christina Schmid, “Reviews: Lukas Geronimas at David Petersen Gallery.” *Artforum* (November 2015), accessed online.

an actual puzzle, its pieces painted in checkerboard black and white and glued to a loom-like contraption, the assemblage encased in glass. Only three small items from the assemblage escape the transparent, custom-fitted toms. Two suggest an obscure mechanical purpose. The third, a painted wood chunk, bears a cartoonish carving, vaguely familiar in the way of an emoji—a grumpy snake face with an empty black speech bubble floating above it.

The look of comic distress reappeared in *Custom Shelf with Narrative*, which consists of a gray metal shelf (bearing spray-painted outlines of eyes and a sad mouth) leaning against a wooden construction supporting three other shelves. Though custom-made, like its show mates *Custom Table 2* and the three *Custom Dust Drawings (Reclining Nudes)*, *Custom Shelf with Narrative* steers clear of precious materials and embraces a DIY aesthetic. Geronimas enthusiastically repurposes “custom,” upending the term’s high-end connotations and revealing the humor in our culture’s endless quest for manifesting individuality at every turn. He pokes fun at the customized but never exempts himself: On his road trip, the artist purchased a custom-printed T-shirt of Disney’s Little Mermaid showing off tattoo sleeves—a goth Ariel. The image, included in his road-trip saga, bears an odd affinity with the reclining nudes of his sawdust drawings. Together, they parsed connections between the mass-produced, the sentimental, and the rarified.

And popular culture showed up once again in *Custom Table 2*, into whose surface doodles and sketches have been carved in relief. While some recall art-historically significant sculptures from Greek antiquity, others are cartoonlike: a chubby-cheeked boy face, an IKEA-motif heart with outstretched arms and puckered lips. Rubbed with graphite powder, the table at first glance looked sleek, but upon further inspection was found to have a scarred surface. It would be impossible to draw anything on it that would not be marked, in some way, by what is already there. The table thus becomes a metaphor for the ubiquitous flotsam and jetsam of visual culture. In the past, Geronimas has covered bathtub forms with similar reliefs, as if to suggest the way a body soaks up this farrago of images. The narrative-rich sculpture inserts popular culture’s irresistible memes within the context of art.

Far from jaded, Geronimas jumps into the ring of the art-world-as-circus with gusto, insinuating that the art industry’s transformation of the everyday into the prized and precious is not so different from the customization of mass-produced objects into personalized artifacts. The parallel is not devoid of hiccups, most evident in the title’s renegade *r*. This fake stumble was planned and playful, even affectionate. Thus, comfortably comprising the residue of the ordinary, piles of sawdust and tabletop doodles, “Geatest Show on Rearth” evidenced a unique sensibility: Geronimas played with the idea of spectacle, but the exhibition retained an undercurrent of almost campy absurdity. As if endlessly malleable, the work shown here passes through but does not settle into any one context or conversation; it remains customizable, oddly slippery. The objects seem to be in transit, flickering among the institutional, the critical, and the sentimental.

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