

Around The Galleries

Sofer hedonism takes shape

David Pagel

Museum retrospectives are best when they let you see what great artists were up to before they got great, often stumbling through awkward phases that shed light on their breakthroughs.

“Tony Berlant: Works from 1962-1964” cuts to the chase by zooming in on the years leading up to the artist’s discovery of printed tin as his main material. Over the last 48 years, the 70-year-old artist has transformed cut-and-nailed tin into fluid fusions of abstraction and representation, unexpectedly elegant compositions that maintain their clunky materiality.

At L.A. Louver Gallery, eight wall works, made of clothing, paint and wood or metal, surround a single free-standing sculpture, made of the same materials. The wall pieces belong to a body of work that has not been exhibited since Berlant’s 1963 solo debut, at David Stuart Gallery.

All are blunt and mean business, like a snub-nosed pistol or tugboat. To the snappy graphics of advertising, they add the heft of flesh and the necessity of engaging the world concretely — not idealistically or generically, but face-to-face, up-close, in person.



Tony Berlant, *Susan*, 1964
cloth, polyester resin, acrylic and enamel on plywood
48 x 36 in. (121.9 x 91.4 cm)



Tony Berlant, *See*, 1963
cloth, polyester resin and enamel on plywood
48 x 38 1/2 in. (121.9 x 97.8 cm)

Berlant’s house-shaped sculpture, titled “Sandy,” wraps this point-blank immediacy around a toy-like form that doesn’t let you stand still. It’s a pivotal piece that marks the beginning of a career that has never rested on its accomplishments and never forgotten where it started.