

ARTFORUM

John M. Armleder

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View of “John M. Armleder,” 2017.

John M. Armleder’s slickly designed *Furniture Sculpture 230*, 1989—made up of three antique-looking chairs on a monochromatic platform—evokes the culture of neoliberal professionalism via high-end decor. Flanking this work are several pieces that span a long career of formal upheaval. Among them are *Untitled*, *Caput Mortuum* (*Untitled*, *Dead Head*), 1968, and *Haejanguk*, 2016. They seem to have been capriciously produced and are quite different: The former is a minimalistic gouache drawing; the latter, a volatile splattering of paint, sequins, and glitter.

The element of chance in Armleder’s work—initially inspired by John Cage—and its proximity to luxury household commodities produce and expose a contradiction. Of course, Armleder is famously interested in the contexts in which art is displayed. “The artist has a very restrictive understanding of his own work because he’s so close to it,” he said in a recent interview. “So what binds it all together? It’s obviously time, space—areas. And all that would be wiped out by new time, new spaces.” So is there a radical autonomy exercised by the work? Not quite—significance arises when the form is conversant with its context. The yuppie culture of the 1980s embodied in Armleder’s chic appointments collides with the radical, painterly formalism around them. The effect is ironic and playful yet pointed: Fine art as commodity, regardless of its politics, is at least partly implicated in the indiscretions of financial markets—art is, after all, one of the most potentially lucrative luxury assets. The idea is hardly unique to this gallery space but is nevertheless teased out by Armleder’s collisions.

— Tyler Curtis

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