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Tony Berlant

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ART IN REVIEW

Tony Berlant

*Lennon Weinberg
560 Broadway, at Prince Street
SoHo
Through May 20*

Sometimes an exhibition's strength lies in the simple thrill of watching an eccentric technique jump higher and higher hurdles. This is the case with the new work of Tony Berlant, a Los Angeles artist who has specialized for more than 30 years in nailing pieces of found factory-made painted tin to three-dimensional objects (little house shapes, for example) and reliefs. The results have always had a bristling hand-crafted feeling, like armored quilts.

As time passed, Mr. Berlant turned to flat rectangles, fusing obsessive physicality with smartly tricked out pictorial illusions. His latest efforts, among his biggest and best, include "Red Hot Honey," whose swirling, galaxylike sense of infinite space is alternately confirmed and contradicted by the individual bits of tin.

In addition Mr. Berlant is finding ways to introduce a sense of the artist's hand, using blotchy factory rejects to suggest artistically puddled paint in the white-on-white "Crosscurrent" and making transfer drawings with still-wet sheets of tin, as in the black-and-white Pollock-like tangles of "What Kind of Bird Am I?"

It should be said that Mr. Berlant has picked up a lot from other artists, among them Frank Stella and Sigmar Polke, but he has assiduously cultivated the part of his work that is his own with sophistication, intelligence and restraint.

ROBERTA SMITH