

ARTFORUM

Gina Beavers
By Elisa Schaar
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For five years, New York-based artist Gina Beavers has been scrolling through Instagram hashtags such as #foodporn, #sixpack, and #makeuptutorial, and working up the images she finds with bulky layers of acrylic so that her bulging, brittle, broad-brush paintings have a material heft that belies the intangible form in which she first encounters her sources. Recently, Beavers appears to have cut back on her fervent social-media consumption. Maybe she's been spending her time watching television sports instead. For her show titled "Tennis Ball Yellow"—referring to a fluorescent color specially designed in 1972 to improve the ball's visibility for fans watching from home on color TV sets—Beavers made paintings of sports balls, paint boxes, and various combinations of motifs both old and new.

The balls, formed from papier-mâché, a new material in Beavers's relief-making repertoire, literally popped out from light-pink canvases lined like sports fields. In *Yoga ball/8 ball/bowling ball/golf ball* (all works 2017), they ranged from larger-than-life golf and billiard balls to an almost actual-size yoga ball so bulbous one might easily bump into it. The golf ball was split in half vertically so that the viewer could only really pick it out by moving to the sidelines, so to speak. In contrast with objects made to glide smoothly into and through the

image world of the internet, Beavers's papier-mâché ball paintings push for the embodied experience of an actual encounter.

While these works are blatantly sculptural—a way of getting around illusionism that is either clever or cheap, depending on how you look at it—with the paint boxes Beavers insists on being a painter, though not without poking fun at herself. (And not without fictionalizing: One of these works is called *Watercolor palette*, though she does not actually use watercolor.) Paint boxes were conceived to facilitate transport, but that would not be true of Art class palette, which is just over six feet tall. By rendering the paint boxes in relief, each paint pan painstakingly built up with acrylic and all of them smudged as if from heavy use, Beavers wittily put into question the claim that with the advent of the commercially produced paint box, the practice of art had been reduced to that of choosing ready-made colors.

“Tennis Ball Yellow” also included paintings with the square format and Instagram imagery familiar from her earlier work. But here, she mixed different kinds of subject matter together, as in *Lip balls*, in which basket-, soccer, and tennis balls seem to be bubbling out from a pair of pillowy, pouting grass-green lips, thus kicking against beauty standards placed on women and gender stereotypes associated with sports and makeup. Instead of being hung on the walls, these paintings were displayed as the four side faces and flatbed tops of plinth-like cubes placed on the floor. This installation allowed viewers to see the paintings and their protrusions from different angles—not the full-frontal view typical of art displayed on Instagram.

In an accompanying statement, Beavers mentioned that a working title for the show had been the number of New York's depression hotline, because “making these works was like dialing that number and feeling better every time.” Her colorful, bulging paintings are the opposite of depressing in every sense of the word. Beavers pores over the medium of painting and its current, broader cultural contexts with unexpected optimism. How far can the practice be pushed today, and how should female artists position themselves? Painting has never been a level playing field, and in New York in particular it was always supposed to be “ballsy.” Beavers's paintings come to us at a moment when, amid anxiety about increasing technologization, a throwback to outdated models of masculinity is evident. At the same time, more than a few paintings these days are made for the sake of being consumed on screens. Beavers's work runs counter to both digital efficiency and old-school studio mythology. She playfully challenges how we see and what we assume.