



Sergej Jensen, *Little Nazi Blush*, 2018, acrylic on sequin fabric, 50 × 35".

Sergej Jensen

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Like Broadway stars reduced to singing in two-bit saloons, sequins have suffered a fall from grace. Long before they became the provenance of prom queens, musicals on ice, and Las Vegas magicians, they occupied a loftier sphere of the fashion heavens. Tutankhamun sashayed into the afterlife fully spangled. Medieval merchants jangling along the canals of Venice called the precious metal trimming *zecchino* (“golden coin”), which became *sequin* in France. There, the tiny ornaments festooned tony waistcoats, opulent ball gowns, and delicate fans. In the United States, Jazz Age dance floors glinted with flappers flapping in dazzling gelatin disks.

The artist Sergej Jensen obliquely invoked this history and mined related lodes of personal adornment and material extravagance in his latest exhibition. Abstract acrylic paintings on sequined fabric—and sequined fabric on abstract acrylic paintings—comprised most of the

show. These large, unabashedly formal works, all made in 2018, evinced the surprisingly rich variety of textures and optical effects one can produce by combining paillettes and paint. In *Smoky Teal*, clear sequins covered a blue-green canvas, catching the light and shattering it. Splintered glare spots became bright cascades of tinsel that danced in time with the viewer's movements. In *Little Nazi Blush* (reportedly named for the fabric's vaguely fascist pattern), Jensen muted the defining reflective quality of the sequins, instead foregrounding their scaly presence by covering them in a brushy coat of beige. In another piece, this one untitled, the artist made an oscillating pattern of metallic threads connecting hundreds of matte-white sequins the unlikely focus. These works, low on obvious spectacle, reward patience. Their insistence on the overlooked properties of their materials recalls some of Jensen's earlier, more austere efforts, such as the lackluster frayed blanket he exhibited on the floor at White Cube's Hong Kong space in 2014. With time, even the least attention-grabbing paintings in this show revealed some secret element. Discovering the unsung, oddly elegant attributes of plastic sequins—details impossible to appreciate when they are in motion—felt akin to encountering some dangerous animal under heavy sedation. In their usual state of glitzy agitation, sequins deflect careful scrutiny even as they scream, "Look at me."

For all its formal intrigue, the exhibition could have felt thin on conceptual heft if it weren't for two markedly different works that gave the others some grit. *Bling Stripes I* and *Bling Stripes II* consisted of purposefully haphazard digital collages, printed on sewn-together strips of linen, packed with photos of decorative objects. The antiquities and antiques, many held in the collection of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art spanned millennia. Fabergé opera glasses, onyx cameos, a crystal bracelet from ancient Greece, and sundry other baubles and bijoux appeared jumbled together on a white ground. The JPEGs were strained beyond the limits of their resolution, causing golden necklaces to look bootleg, with grainy pixelated edges. Distortions in scale—a jade sword handle, for instance, was reproduced smaller than a snuff bottle—also helped make these treasures appear unwieldy and off-kilter. Some looked ridiculous and others regal; the hodgepodge underscored the reality that this distinction is entirely relative. All together, the luxury goods depicted in these collages sang a cacophonous song testifying to our changing concepts of ornamentation and value. In this context, the sequined paintings became evidence of our enduring magpie-like attraction to shiny things and witnesses to our shifting tastes. If what we covet changes with the seasons and across the centuries, Jensen reminded us, the impulse to adorn does not.

—Zoë Lescaze

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