

# ArtReview

Blair Thurman at Peres Projects,  
Berlin

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Curves, bends, flyovers and chicanes: Blair Thurman's constructions immediately conjure up the zip and vim of Formula One racetracks. Many of the Louisianaborn, fiftysomething artist's works are hybrids that see him applying acrylic paint to canvas on carved wood; they look like wall-mounted sculptures. Some of these are pulled into groovy shapes that hint at 1960s (P) optimism: stretched ovals, beanlike, as with *Bacardi Circuit* (2018), whose central bat logo refers to the critter on the label of the famous Cuban rum bottle. The twists of *Crazy 8* (2018) summon aerial images of the great circuits – Monza, Spa, Silverstone. The shape of the black painted numeral here equally recalls the plastic Scalextric sets of childhood, while the Lotus green and white Thurman deploys makes one nostalgic for the deadly daring of a Jim Clark and the iconic colours of his racer.

The blue and yellow serpentine turns and knots evident in *Mr. Salty* (2018) reference a prerace nibble – a packet of pretzel twists made by Nabisco – that Thurman, with infallible logic, imagines as the shape of a fictional circuit. The work his show is named after, *Exquisite Course* (2018), is another track outline, this one on a background of reflecting Plexiglas coloured a lurid urine-yellow. The title, clearly, plays on the Surrealist game of 'exquisite corpse', in which the collective assembly of words or images takes place without participants knowing what has gone before, the result an anarchic type of collage. Thurman's methods are more controlled. He suggestively uses the word 'course' here with all its multiple understandings: the route followed by a road or racetrack, but also as a verb, 'to course' like a river or, in its other meaning, to chase.

The glamour of fast vehicles and motion is made explicit in *The Speedway Painting* (1992), a 19-part curve of canvases in rectangles of different colours that nod to Ellsworth Kelly's geometries. If anything, though, Thurman's palette is more dream-bright, redolent of the extremes of advertising or food colouring, as

with his use of Pop tones like the acid-green of candied angelica and the Penelope Pitstop-pink seen in *Fuel Cell* (2018). He's fond too of silver spraypaint-jobs that call to mind petrolheads tinkering in their garages, as with the circular *Norway or the Highway* (2017), which may well reference the country's upcoming \$47-billion high-speed motorway and looks like a spiky customised hubcap.

Tight spirals feature in the black, grey and white curves of another oval, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (2018), complete with central void, its swerves like the flow of water swirling around a plughole. Here too are examples of Thurman's neon works, such as *Gallery Go Round 2* (2018): another course, this time of thin glass tubing in the shape of a fence or the gate to a paddock, its tangerine glow resembling the initial shimmer of street lighting at dusk and its watery reflection on the gallery floor like that cast on wet asphalt at night.

More specifically, the colouring Thurman uses here has a similar nectarine tinge to the bendy strips of plastic track still favoured by the 'Hot Wheels' enthusiasts, of which he's apparently one. Invented by industrial designer Elliot Handler, Hot Wheels also utilised the skills of Harry Bentley Bradley from General Motors, who created the initial set of brilliantly customised model cars. This pairing might be the biggest influence on Thurman's work. His own constructions echo the exhilaration you felt on first seeing those speeding coupes looping the loop. The dizzying, swooping forms here seem inspired by the adrenaline rush of skids and stunt jumps, a happier time when humankind thrilled to the innocent joys of defying gravity.

Blair Thurman: *Exquisite Course* at Peres Projects, Berlin, 16 November – 21 December