

ARTFORUM



Gene Beery, *We still have wild birds here*, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 18 x 14".

NEW YORK

Gene Beery

GREENSPON

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This exhibition, the first at Albus Greenspon, presents a five-decade sampling of the little-known Conceptualist Gene Beery's paintings, several of which forgo dithering aphorisms for some knotty wordplay. The artist's sharp, direct wit is manifest in works such as *Artists Paint Themselves*, 1966, and *What Is Beyond So What??*, 1960, which portray their title phrases. Inviting viewers to approach each canvas as blend of found signs and instruction manuals, Beery's word prompts certainly efface the capacity of text to anchor the permutations that an image incites. These frank statements, sometimes painted atop a psychedelic wash or white backdrop, elicit a train of connotations and ponderings; it is hard to not finish the punch line or fill in the blanks.

Beery's art should not be taken as a collection of ironic one-liners, though. Rather, his aptitude lies in his sensitivity and cultivation of a "logoscape" (a term coined by the artist), as in *We still have wild birds here*, 1994, a small canvas in which the text of the title is painted in black and lucidly aligned at the center. The painting recalls cardboard signs, the kind crafted with marker and stuck to a shop's front door. Its assertion invites an internal rumination on an impossible vista. *Eye Rest*, 1970, a small work that coyly hangs in the gallery bathroom, its bubble letters bottom-aligned against a brown ground. Extending from the right-hand corner of the painting's wooden frame is an electric cord that connects to an adjacent socket. A polysemic pun, the work is "on," even though the cord is not actually powering it. "Resting" particularly resonates in a contemporary climate that propagates high-production art-as-entertainment catering to a tuned-out public. Beery's staged surreal moment and sage commentary confront us with the hazards of art and its miraculous potential—an alchemy created by the coupling of even the most basic material.

— Piper Marshall