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Auto Exotic

IN Peter Cain's paintings (Marks, 1018 Madison Avenue, at 79th Street; through January 28), automobiles like the Mercedes 500SL and the Bugatti EP 110 appear as de-luxe mutants. The original showroom images of the cars have been sliced up on Cain's drawing board and reassembled in such a way as to suggest a faintly sinister, if timely, reversal of the process by which limos are "stretched." These disconcerting contractions were then projected onto canvas, rendered in oil (with some taped edges), and set against sleek, painterly grounds that would very likely get an A from Clement Greenberg.

In one outstanding work, the largest in the show, a blue bumper hits the road upside down, in a highway landscape of refracted planes in fruity pinks and peaches that evoke Poons, Noland, and the whole mandarin color-field gang of the nineteen-sixties. In addition to these ties, there are strong echoes—in Cain's high-resolution technique and in his very subject—of that abstract movement's contemporaneous flip side, hyperrealism. Likewise, the artist's relation to Pop is not at all a subtle one; his debt to Rosenquist in particular is apparent throughout.

Less obvious, perhaps, is what Cain makes of his customized auto bodies. His galleryful of seductive crippled vehicles, in fact, find their exact counterparts in Alan Turner's lyrically painted mutations of flesh and faces. Cain's cars are likely to rack up a lot of mileage in the new year.