

Myers, Terry. *Sadie Benning 'Fuzzy Math'*, The Brooklyn Rail, February 5, 2015, print.



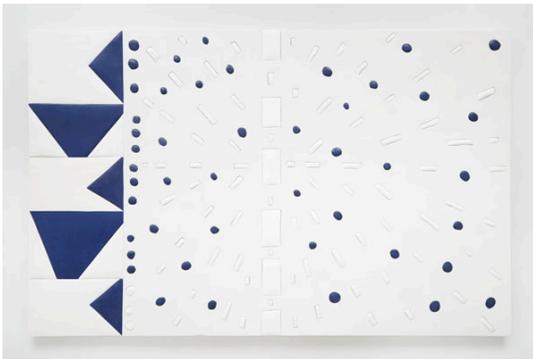
# SADIE BENNING *Fuzzy Math*

by Terry R. Myers

SUSANNE VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES PROJECTS

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Sadie Benning's recent works fit together beautifully while resisting fitting in completely with other things to which they could be compared. The complexity of their situation as such is what gives them their eye-catching personality, an attitude provided mainly by the disarming procedures of their production. Each work starts intact before being cut into pieces that are individually covered with aqua-resin, sanded, molded, and painted with casein and sometimes acrylic, and then put back together as a complete work. Without a doubt, they are paintings as well as sculptural reliefs, well-traveled territory since at least the early work (and philosophy) of Donald Judd. On the other hand, categories like painting and sculpture are no longer enough to keep Benning's work from also being classified as some kind of arguably sophisticated craft project. As far as I'm concerned, such identification would be far from wrong or, even worse, a put-down. This work shows us in no uncertain terms that leaving boundaries intact is a misuse, or better yet, a waste. That this substantial exhibition takes on uncertain terms themselves as an overall theme makes Benning's work all the more delicious in the aggregate, while giving me the opportunity to figure out why I've been obsessed with them from the onset: they are real and they are honest.



Sadie Benning, "Explosion," 2014. Medite, aqua-resin, and casein, 56 x 89". Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Photo: Chris Austin.

Residing, at first, within the realm of set theory, the term "fuzzy math" has been co-opted by the likes of journalism, politics, economics, and financial markets, including that of art. For Benning, it's pulling double duty as a reclamation of its original use value (to account for uncertainty in algebraic functions) for the open-ended making and meaning of art, and as a reminder of how much it is being misused to deceive and manipulate. Such is a delicate yet almost boisterous balancing act. The first work in the first room, "Hanging Chads" (all works 2014), makes clear just how adept Benning is at holding competing contradictions together without shutting any of them down. Comprised of 16 small white and red panels, the work is an impossible-to-pin-down representation of an abstraction (and vice versa) as both an artwork and politically motivated point of view. Parading under the guise of a rock solid figure/ground puzzle, the way in which Benning fits the pieces of these works back together is funny and charming, even loving. "Pie Chart," for example, stands out because its segments make it the most multi-colored work in the exhibition, giving it an extra boost of exuberance that is, as is the case in most of the rest of the works, poignantly tempered by the caressed quality of the burnished casein paint.

Some of the other works are either a combination of red and white, or blue and white, or red, white, and blue, so that the symbolism of patriotism is crystal clear but surprisingly neutralized. Benning's titles, of the blue and white works, for example—"Tanks," "Blue and White Zig Zag," "Blue and White Dashes," "Explosion," and "Target"—repeatedly reinforce the breadth of Benning's agility. "Explosion" is particularly variable. The large panel that makes up most of its surface is matte, its white paint pitted and suede-like, while the blue dots and white dashes that are pushed into their corresponding holes are shinier, inset like jewels. The left side of this work interrupts the cohesion of the "explosion" on the right with a set of white rectangles with blue triangles of varying sizes that could be taken as a nod to stop-motion animation.

The same colors become far more visceral in other, less graphic, works: first in "Irritation Painting" and "Irritation S," both of which remain stubbornly inscrutable, then in "Red Maze Monochrome," the most body-like work in the show (it's a painting with an intestinal tract), and ultimately, in five all-white works. Smaller than most of the rest, they gather mind and body completing Benning's ambition to complicate, if not eliminate, the binary. Four of them are presented in pairs ("Graph 3" and "Graph 4" representing the mind, "Untitled Lines (Nerves)" and "Untitled Lines (Body)," the body), while the fifth brings the entire exhibition together. Made from a rectangular support cut into triangles that all pointed towards the center of the piece once reassembled, "Smash" speaks volumes through a small hole created by that irregular configuration. It is an exquisite reminder, once again, of what has been said many times before—that the center cannot hold.