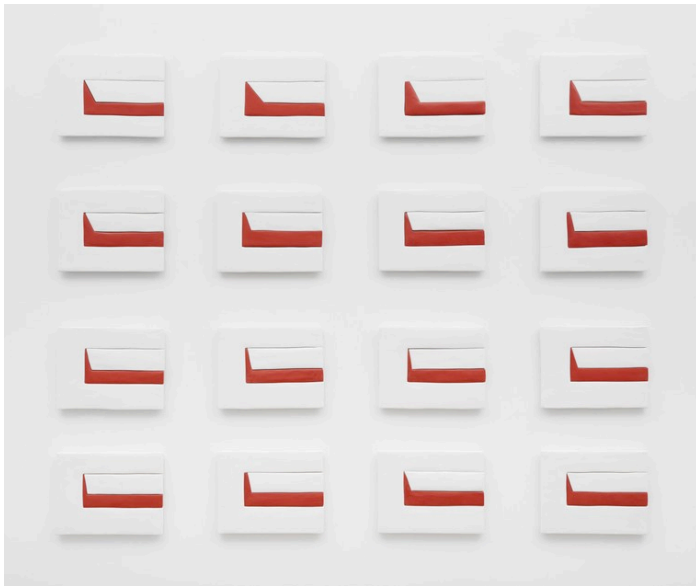




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by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Sadie Benning and Kim McCarty

Paintings at Susanne Vielmetter and Michael Maloney galleries are more than they seem.



The curse of the digital image is that people often feel as though they don't need to see the actual work of art. This is almost always erroneous but in the case of two shows now in Culver City, it is especially so.

Take the geometric abstract paintings of Sadie Benning. Is this simply another example of zombie modernism, resurrection of a kind of reductive painting popular in the middle of the 20th century? A visit to Susanne Vielmetter Projects, to see the actual paintings, would deliver an entirely different interpretation.

The paintings are physically crafted, with individual pieces layered with solid colors, mostly red, white and blue, and fitted into one another like so many tasteful puzzles. The surfaces, however, are treated with an aqua resin that puffs slightly so that they appear soft, even plump, marshmallowy. Thus far, they are stylish and smart. But there are more complex reasons for their appearance. The rectangular dashes and zig-zags reference the patterns of voting cards, tank formations and charts. Hence the show's title *Fuzzy Math*, referring obliquely to the sort of illogical economic theory that fuels political and military actions.

Other paintings incorporate figurative shapes such as *Glad Foot* (2014) or concentric circular bands of graphic red and white, a painting that also has something glad about it.

The paintings are all more remarkable for fact that Benning is better known for a lengthy, serious career in film and video. Father James Benning is well-known as a filmmaker and teacher at CalArts and gave her a video camera when she was just a teenager. She showed her first work in his class, subsequently in festivals and museums, often exploring issues of homosexuality and the ways in which that was unaccepted in a larger society. The paintings, therefore, are relatively new developments and as such are simultaneously inviting and awkward, sly and shy. The show continues through February 14.

Link to audio: <http://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/art-talk/sadie-benning-and-kim-mccarty>