



SADIE BENNING Kaufmann Repetto, Milan, Italy

The colourful reliefs in Sadie Benning's solo show 'Excuse me Ma'am' are almost two metres high: simultaneously sculptural, painterly and cartoonish, they're hard to pigeonhole. The artist achieves a dense, radiant colour with a mix of aqua resin, casein and acrylic, which creates an effect of lightness, although the works are physically heavy. The reliefs comprise fitted panels and follow the same cut-out principles employed in collage or stained glass.

The show has both a strong drawing component and a distinctive handmade quality. If the medium is difficult to identify, so, too, is the determination of gender in the figures the artist has created: Benning, who has been transitioning for a number of years, has rejected gender-specific pronouns in favour of the more indeterminate 'them' or 'they'. In the series 'Bra People' and 'Excuse me Ma'am' (all works 2016), figures originally drawn in pencil have been lifted from the artist's notebooks and enlarged in scale. These characters pop out of a colourful vortex of lines; one head has masculine characteristics but wears a black bra over a shirt, while hints of superheroes recur in the employment of uniforms and capes.

Each piece emanates a spinning force and seems to illustrate the origins of a prelinguistic world. *Soundwaves*, for example, with its bold black scribbles on top of pink, blue and white lines, recalls a customized musical score in which the intensity of the music is indicated by the thickness and juxtaposition of the lines. Similarly, *Sun*, *Soundwaves* visualizes energy flows; the drawings look like representations



of analogue transmission signals and could be referencing Benning's early work as an experimental filmmaker in the 1990s. Black scribbles also appear at the top and bottom of the relief *Amo*, while a futuristic character with what could be an African mask as a head, Wonder Woman's torso and the shoulders of a warrior is inscribed against a bright green backdrop that is interrupted by two horizontal red lines.

In a side room, the diptych *Double Exposer* is created from different materials to the other works in the show. On the right panel is a clunky bust silhouetted against a black and white landscape of leaves, while on the left, a digital image of a hooded figure ascends black and blue steps. At this person's feet is a tiny bleached photo of a woman, behind whom is a poster of the American flag, created from matchboxes. The woman in the photo could be a student in an American college dorm, her thoughts caught somewhere between the posters on her wall and real life. In a recent interview, Benning declared: 'I am often inspired by things that bother me.' Following the result of the US presidential election, the artist is surely not short of inspiration.

Caterina Riva

Above left
Sadie Benning, *Amo*, 2016, medite, aqua resin, casein and acrylic, 1.7 x 1.3 m

Above right
Sadie Benning, *Soundwaves*, 2016, medite, aqua resin, casein and acrylic, 1.9 x 1.4 m

Opposite page
Left
Kasper Bosmans, *Legend: Model Garden* (details), 2016, gouache and silver point on poplar panel, each: 28 x 21 cm

Right
Sidsel Paaske, *Blått brev* (Blue Letter), 1977