

Review

Sadie Benning, 'Fuzzy Math,' at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects



Sadie Benning makes wall-size jigsaw puzzles that leave people free to see them as paintings or sculptures. Their custom-cut pieces form abstract patterns that simultaneously suggest diagrammatic pictures, stylized graphs or handmade revisions of Minimalist paintings.

Ambiguity is the heart and soul of Benning's exhibition. Titled "Fuzzy Math," the N.Y. artist's L.A. debut fills four spacious galleries with a provocative combination of luxurious sensuality and adequate craftsmanship — a skill set more common to weekend hobbyists than specialized professions.

Rather than diminishing the effect of Benning's compositions, this hands-on amateurism gives them charm and kick. DIY earnestness triggers see-for-yourself curiosity. Quirky imperfections becoming lovely discoveries.

Each rectangular piece begins as a sheet of inexpensive pressed wood. It gets cut, with a jigsaw, into any number of sections. Each of these parts gets primed with a thick coat of aqua resin and then painted a single color with pigments suspended in casein — a milky medium that dries to look waxy or fleshy.

The surfaces' softness recalls cushions, some as pliant as suede, others as comfy as booths at old-school diners and still others like headboards for beds that have long gone out of fashion.

Simple palettes predominate. Creamy white, by itself or combined with lipstick red or royal blue, make up the majority of Benning's works. Their elegance is offset by a rainbow of other colors that come straight out of a kid's crayon box: yellow, green, purple, orange, black and light blue.

In Benning's hands, childhood innocence grows up without growing old. Its non-judgmental openness flourishes in works that straddle categories to reveal the complexities of firsthand experience.