

Art Pick

Color Commentary

Karl Benjamin, Ted Kerzie

By Peter Frank

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Although the history of abstract art in Southern California has been a lot more complex than we've given it credit for, Karl Benjamin has been recognized from the git-go as one of its key figures. He merits retrospection — and rewards it, even in as truncated a view as provided here in the first show mounted by the Claremont Museum. His various explorations of color and geometry lead us on a wild chase for a signature “look,” some sort of recurrent shape, gesture or visual habit that gives away its maker's identity from across the room. Instead, Benjamin delivers treatise after treatise on color, form and movement, refusing to get comfortable in any one “look.” What's consistent are his rich, vibrant palette and those famous hard edges, enough of a formula to allow Benjamin half a century or more of visual experimentation. After looking at a bunch of Benjamins, you *know* color. And you *feel* form.

Ted Kerzie makes a virtue out of the very “look” Benjamin eschews. In painting after painting, Kerzie superimposes an apparently stenciled pattern of myriad aligned dots on itself over and over again, until the entire canvas vibrates with a potentially limitless field of flickering, stuttering blips. A rainbow of colors shimmers from behind upper layers of oblitative black points. You lose focus. You fall in. You bounce off. You start over again, rebounding from painting to painting. Although Kerzie's dot-grids bear a certain relation to Benjamin's tessellated patterns (done in the late '70s and early '80s, around the time Kerzie emerged), they reject Benjamin's relational geometries for an all-over look — a buzz, really. But Kerzie shares Benjamin's ultimate reliance on color — and his ultimate faith in the resonance of pure form. *Karl Benjamin at the Claremont Museum, 536 W. First St., Claremont; Wed.-Mon. 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; thru July 4. (909) 621-3200. Ted Kerzie at L2Kontemporary, 990 N. Hill St., No. 205, dwntwn.; Thurs.-Sun. 1-6 p.m.; thru June 23. (626) 319-3661.*

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