

Sadie Benning *Underwater*

kaufmann repetto is pleased to present *Underwater*, a series of 13 new paintings by Sadie Benning which originated as drawings made in 2018. "At the time I was thinking about climate change – flooding – and the destabilizing reality of the neofascist power structures being enacted by Trump during his first term." Benning highlights the continued effort by the far right to spread misinformation about what is and is not "natural" – drawing a parallel between the willful denial of climate change and the denial of trans existence.

Through an innovative process which Benning has perfected over the past two decades, these works both complicate and merge the categories of painting, drawing and sculpture. Working alone, Benning shapes each work by hand, rendering a surface which encapsulates the intimate act of its construction.

In *Underwater*, the colorful figures arranged along the gallery walls juxtapose the desire for connection – community and alone time, taking a bath or drinking a cup tea – with the ever present line which bisects the world of the painting, a water line which is ominously rising and falling around them.

Submerged in varying levels of water, in varying blues, the expressive characters in these works are pictured in moments of reflection, acclimating to increasingly unlivable conditions—finding ways to move and adapt as if through some supernatural force, persevering. Some figures wear watches – underscoring a shifting sense of time as natural disasters and the distortion of clearly defined seasons continue to supplant our daily experience.

Embedded into the works are vintage jewels of adornment – objects imbued with personal histories, relics from a living past held in unnerving closeness to the constructed cartoon figures. "The objects stand in for the people who wore them – they embody another body – not just the figure in the painting," Benning explained. "Imbedding the object into the cartoon is a way of saying that what has been termed unreal is real – meaning what is dehumanized is human."

In a room of their own, as an acknowledgement of the dead – and of the past itself – three works appear drained of color, ghostlike: an ear listening, an eye looking at photos of a queer pride march in a locket, "Doug" with their nameplate belt buckle—beckoning. These works speak to the ineradicability of the soul.

Sadie Benning (Madison, 1973), lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Their work has been presented internationally in several solo exhibitions including Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus (2020); Camden Arts Centre, London (2018); Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (2017); The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2009); and The Power Plant, Toronto (2008). Benning has been included in the 7th Gwangju Biennale (2008); Whitney Biennial, New York (1993, 2000); and the Venice Biennale (1993). Their videos have been screened at renowned film festivals including Rotterdam International Film Festival (1998); Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Tokyo (1995); Sundance Film Festival, Park City (1992); and the Berlin International Film Festival (1992), among others. Benning's work has been featured in group exhibitions and screenings at Museum of Modern Art, New York (2019, 1991); Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, (2018); New Museum, New York (2017); and Centre Pompidou, Paris (2016), among others. Sadie Benning is part of the public collections of Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and the Anderson Collection, Stanford; among others.