

# Los Angeles Times

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## **Julian Hoeber: "Review"**

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Julian Hoeber's eight new paintings (one composed of eight small panels) push further into straightforward abstraction than much of his earlier work did. Yet the deeper they go the more objectified they become. In Hoeber's work, abstraction is not something separate from concrete realities or specific objects.

The paintings at Blum + Poe have many antecedents, but none seems more relevant than Frank Stella's so-called "black paintings" from the late 1950s, which helped launch Minimalism. Stella filled his canvases with methodical stripes whose patterns derived from the paintings' physical structure, emphasizing the artist as someone engaged in useful work rather than inspirational escapism. Hoeber's stripes do something similar -- with a twist. For him, escape also seems useful.

The pattern in "Execution Changes 16" splits the canvas down the center, a length of string (suggestive of a carpenter's snap-line) making the visual division physical. From there, the inch-wide gray stripes follow the painting's contour to the outer edge, becoming darker as they go. Split in two, the pattern pushes your eyes apart, as if intent on contradicting their tendency to converge and forcing a two-point perspective.

An optical illusion of stepped space is also quietly interrupted by small eruptions of intense surface color -- crimson, turquoise -- plus dense black, which bursts from the thickly painted stripes. They hint of dense under-painting, a sensuous but unobserved life hidden beneath the surface.

Logic begins to fray. Hoeber elaborates the theme in other works, including one that features brightly painted sides of the canvas stretcher bars, causing a reflective red glow on the inside of the work's shadow-box frame.

Underscoring the bracing tensions between physical and optical, labor and thought, Hoeber has built a long, segmented garden bench from plywood, its cantilevered slats rubbed with pigments that move from black to white in groups of 14 slats. It's a logical place to sit a moment and think -- even though it too is a painting that ought to be looked at and not touched.

A physically and perceptually disorienting Hoeber sculpture is also on view (through Feb. 27) at the UCLA Hammer Museum, as part of its Projects series.