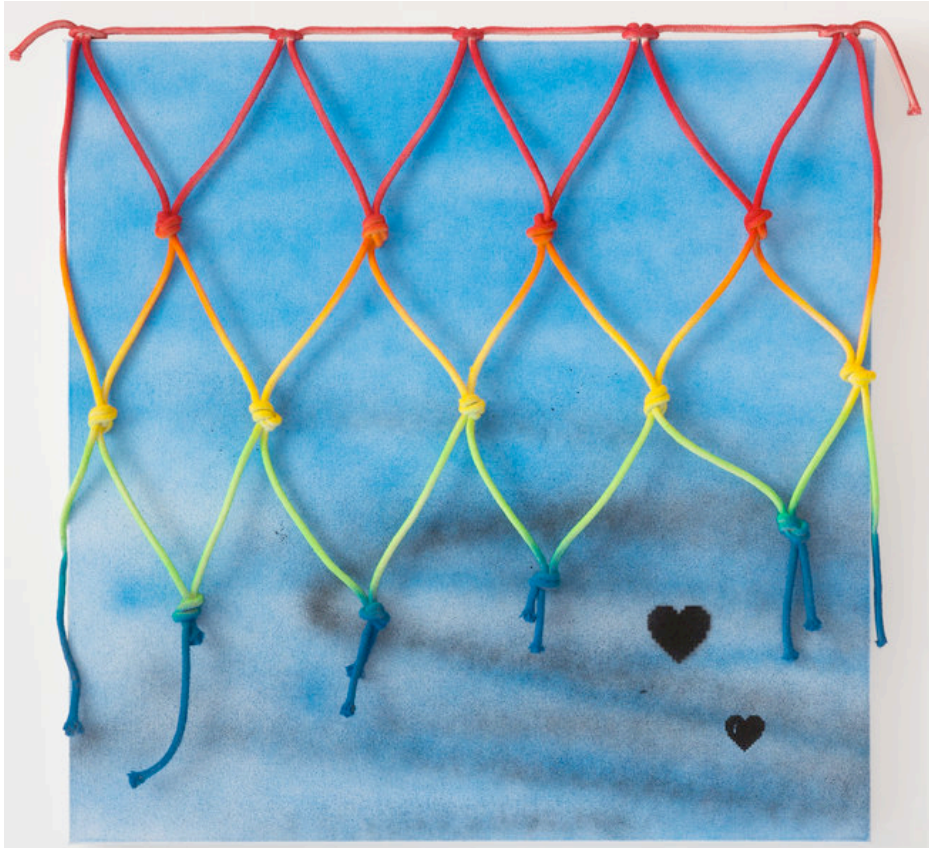


The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week



Wendy White's "Hearts (Blue)," part of her show "Santa Cruz" at Eric Firestone Gallery. Credit Wendy White, Eric Firestone Gallery

Wendy White

JULY 28, 2016 by Martha Schwendener

Nothing seems further from surfing and skateboarding in Southern California than a white cube gallery in New York. However, the aesthetics of these sports, with their boldly designed surfaces and the bright colors of the sun and sea, and the Zen-like concentration of participants, have frequently infiltrated and influenced contemporary art. Wendy White makes ample reference to both — and particularly 1980s surf and skate culture — in her show, "Santa Cruz."

Ms. White does not actually depict skaters and surfers. Instead, she channels the ethos of that scene and era with large blue-and-gray abstract paintings, sometimes draped with rainbow netting, and decals printed on the canvases and the wall. Pieces of black plastic cut into a heart with jagged edges and a cloud with three raindrops, both suspended from the ceiling by colored rope, conjure early computer icons and suggest an easy-to-use approach to art.

By drawing on the '80s Ms. White evokes a sense of nostalgia that is particular to her own experience but that translates well into the art realm. Artists, surfers and skateboarders all lament the professionalization of their spheres, in which the passionate play and radical experimentation are transformed into "training" or "branding." Painters now get graduate degrees to participate in the art system; elite skaters and surfers are sponsored by companies manufacturing everything from energy drinks to underwear. Artists aren't generally sponsored like that yet, with a list of products and companies associated with their names, but maybe it's just a matter of time before they are.