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WALL STREET JOURNAL

Bold Perceptions in Color

By Peter Plagens
December 8, 2012

Bill Thompson: *'Swell'*
Margaret Thatcher Projects
539 W. 23rd St., (212) 675-0222
Through Jan. 12

Bill Thompson makes easy (on the eye) relief sculpture the hard way. He starts with a two-dimensional shape rendered onto a block of polyurethane. Then he digs at, and smooths down, the block with power tools. After the form has been further finished by hand, the artist applies up to 20 coats of auto paint (glossy, with tiny sparkles) in colors made to order.

His modestly sized wall works recall both the cosmological implications of the British sculptor Anish Kapoor's monumental work (for example, the mirrored "bean" in Chicago's Millennium Park) and the "fantastic objects" of such 1960s and '70s Los Angeles favorites as Craig Kauffman and DeWain Valentine. But Mr. Thompson (b. 1957) has staked his own claim, combining the sureness of a multinational corporation's logo, the deliciousness of Valentine's Day candy and just a hint of threat (at least in one piece, a kind of hard, black pillow with pointy corners).