

# VENETIAN RED

## [Color in Motion: Michele Sudduth at SFMOMA Artists Gallery](#)

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*Duo* 2014  
Acrylic on canvas, 44 x 36"  
© Michele Sudduth

**VR:** I'm curious about the origin of this new work and how it evolved.

**MS:** It actually started about ten years ago with the painting *Blue Shift*, when I projected the image of a jigsaw puzzle piece over a striped painting and noticed the sense of movement that was created when I shifted the stripes against the puzzle image.

But what also fascinated me was the humanizing aspect of the puzzle image. Over the years I've played with that and, most recently, I extracted one single image out of a series of puzzle paintings and used that for this latest body of work. This new work is rather figurative, but it's also rather techno too, somewhere between figurative and architectural, which I like.



*Blue Shift* 2003  
Acrylic on canvas, 54 x 54"  
© Michele Sudduth

**VR:** Did particular ideas or themes emerge as the series evolved?

**MS:** This series has evolved a lot. One of the themes I've consistently experimented with is making artwork that is difficult to focus on, not because that's interesting in itself but because of the movement aspect of it, and because we are always being told to look at specific things in society and quite often they turn out to be the wrong things. Beyond that, our individual perspective changes all the time, or at least mine does, whether this is a parallax thing because of the angle of viewing or just because my mind changes, or I'm feeling differently or I have new information. So for a long time I've questioned the validity of having a viewpoint at all. I've certainly questioned it in terms of the artwork that I make; I don't want to root the viewer to any one particular perspective. So I've been thinking about this as a kaleidoscopic perspective, where we have bits and pieces of views that overlap and coincide and keep changing. That's what *Mission Boogie* is for me.



*Mission Boogie* 2014  
Acrylic on canvas, 54 x 90"  
© Michele Sudduth

**VR:** How does the notion of kaleidoscopic perspective play out in the current work?

**MS:** I think the kaleidoscopic perspective is there in the current work but it's taken me a long time to see it and to become comfortable with the imagery in the new paintings. It's perhaps because three years ago, a group of us set out to purchase our studio building in the Mission District. In that very challenging process with all its visceral social interactions I found that I had to move beyond my attachment to who I thought I was. Ultimately we triumphed. But the process of accommodating all of our different perspectives, fears, and hopes not only changed me personally but might also have been the genesis of what feels like a more overtly social expression in my recent paintings.

The puzzle piece can certainly be read as a figurative element and thus hints at narrative but I prefer to think of it as symbolic rather than narrative. What I can now see as consistent with my earlier work is the rhythm, repetition and movement of a world in which different views co-exist, none more important than the other, and all changing in the next second.



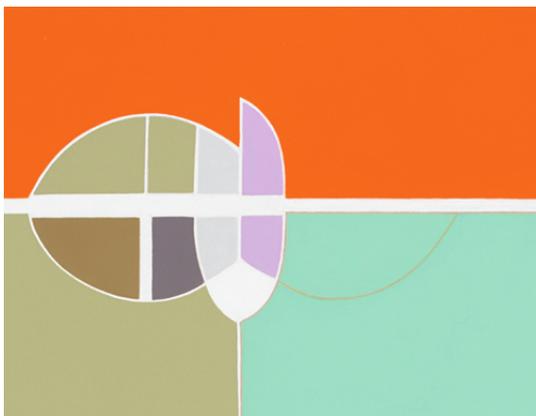
*London Bus* 2014  
Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 74"  
© Michele Sudduth

**VR:** It seems to me that color is a primary way your paintings reach out to their audience. What is the role of color in your work?

**MS:** Color is a real challenge for me and I work very hard at it and sometimes it flows but most of the time I'm sort of toughing it out, trying to figure out what's going to work. I believe Brigit Riley once said that color is the most irrational aspect of painting and that's certainly true for me.

**VR:** And yet the results look so intuitive, so effortless. It seems like you live easily in the world of color relationships.

**MS:** For me in terms of resolving a piece of work — even though I'm not sure I like the idea resolution — I always want it to have a lightness and a sense of inevitability. So I think that might be what you're thinking of when you say the color looks effortless. I want it to look that way. I want it to look like it just happened that way and there's absolutely no other way it could possibly be. In terms of color, *London Bus* began much differently than it ended. I conceived of the figures on a strong yellow background but that ground evolved through yellow, various oranges and reds to the final red, which now feels to me as though it was always meant to be that way.



*Mod Fish* 2014  
Acrylic on panel, 11 x 14 "  
© Michele Sudduth

**VR:** Can you say more about your painting process, and I feel there is more to discuss about the notion of “toughing it out” to get to what looks like a very natural place.

**MS:** Toughing it out actually doesn’t describe it, because sometimes I just have to relax and be easy with it but other times I find I have to push very hard. It just depends on the painting. These two little new paintings, both studies, have both been lifted out of existing paintings. The first one, *Mod Fish*, came very easily and quickly. I worked it out on the computer and got close to the colors I wanted, which is typically how I work. But I can never translate color directly from the digital image to paint because paint is such a different medium, the way light strikes it and of course scale changes everything. But this painting came easily and the colors are quite similar to my original computer sketch.



*Head Study Two* 2014  
Acrylic on panel, 10 x 12”  
© Michele Sudduth

The second painting has been much more challenging. I extracted this image from *London Bus* thinking I would experiment with a red-on-red painting but I haven’t been able to get it to work at this scale and on a hard panel. So, I’ve been thinking about the relationship between composition and color. Even though I work out a composition on the computer and then project it onto the canvas and spend a lot of time refining it, smoothing the lines and making sure the intersections work, the final resolution is actually driven by color. With this painting I don’t want to literally change the composition so I’ve been experimenting with how to change it with color – changing the weight and relationships of various components through color. I’m always looking for color that surprises me.

**VR:** In general, the exuberance of the work I think is largely due to the kind of rhythmic movement and buoyant color schemes you employ. They really sing.

**MS:** Yes, I am very much an optimist. I don’t need to be shown problems; I want to make art that speaks to solutions. In the end, all I can do is make a truthful painting, truthful to what the painting tells me it needs.