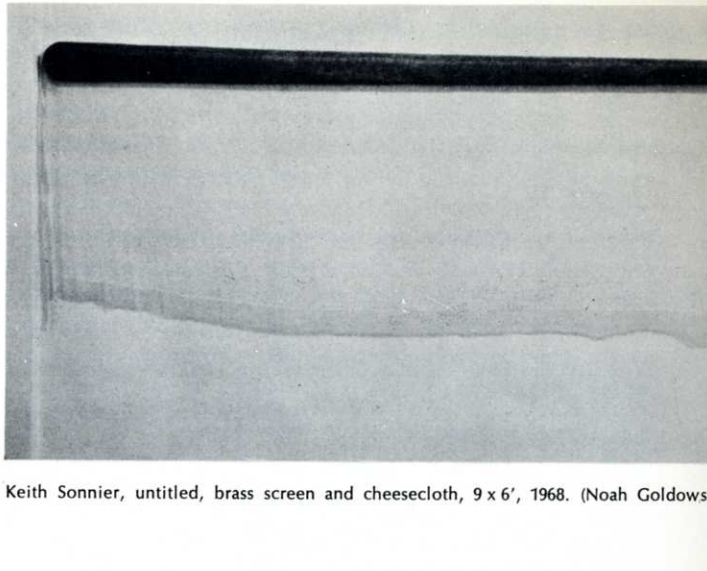
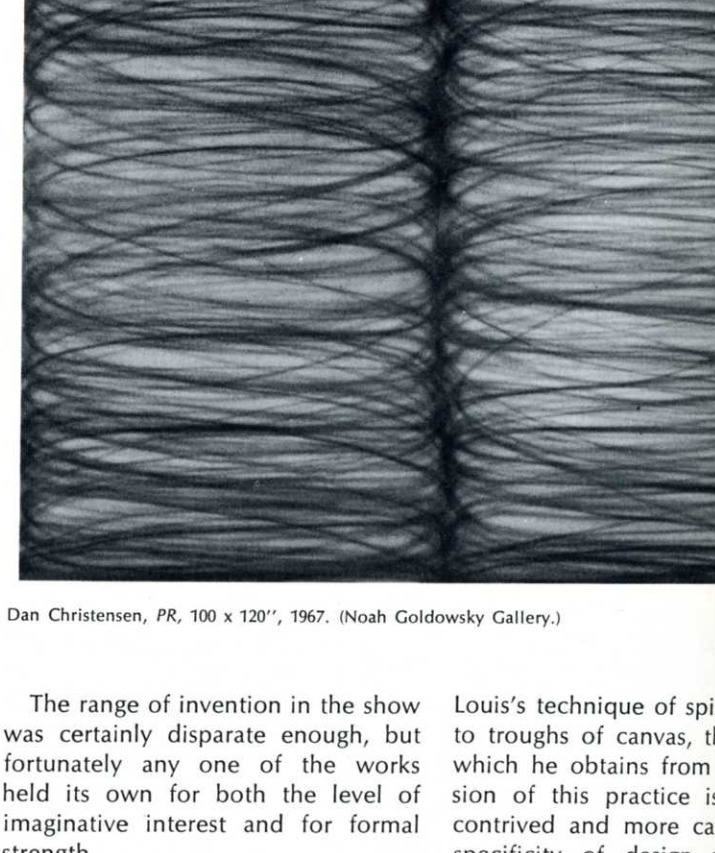
ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 1968 $1.50

NEW YORK



Keith Sonnier, untitled, brass screen and cheesecloth, 9 x 6', 1968. (Noah Goldows



Dan Christensen, *PR*, 100 x 120'', 1967. (Noah Goldowsky Gallery.)

KEITH SONNIER, NEIL JENNEY, DAN CHRISTENSEN, DAVID BUDD, Noah Goldowsky Gallery; SAM GILLIAM, Byron Gallery; DOUG OHLSON, Fischbach Gallery:

At the Noah Goldowsky Gallery an end of the season (non-) group show included two young sculptors, KEITH SONNIER and NEIL JENNEY, and two painters, DAN CHRISTENSEN and DAVID BUDD.

What Jenney calls his "non-visual sculpture" consists of a number of thoroughly unartistically arranged water-filled troughs of plastic and wood, fed with blurping and bubbling rubber tubes through which air is pumped by an exposed and shaky generator. To one side of this completely unassuming rattletrap and behind a screen in the corner of the room grows some dried-up moss dutifully watered by the ubiquitous Dick Bellamy. In another piece Jenney combines a slanted pan of dirt and plants with water-filled plastic bags held on wooden frames, in which algae scum is meant to form. Around and under these parts some short squiggly fragments of blue, yellow, and white neon are tenuously strung. Earlier works employed swinging screens of light bulbs, or twisted and bent rods covered with a stickily unpleasant green coating, revealing his interest in both internal motions and unorthodox use of materials for mostly non-visual ends. Much of Jenney's still varied and unresolved work — though it does not cater to the viewer nor concern itself with traditional spatial or structural relations of plastic form — must still be attended to in other ways, that is, watered, plugged in, or set in motion to acquire its *actual* presence. In other words, one has to be more involved with the internal processes as they function within these partly playful, mildly lethal-looking Rube Goldberg conglomerations, than with any particular set of external esthetic relations or expectations. Though deliberately less refined than Keith Sonnier's mesh screen pieces, Jenney exhibits an original (and to me) potentially fascinating and quirky sensibility, not without its own seriousness.

Sonnier is a former student of Robert Morris and his use rather than his articulation of the fine mesh material suggests some positive influence. The curving, almost billowing forms he organizes into irregular multi-part wall pieces (on painted wood backing or simply hung against the wall) give the same feeling of ambiguous volume and expanding pressure as in one of Morris's recently exhibited mesh-wedge pieces. Sonnier showed several differently worked sculptures all in copper or silver wire screening (one with a curtain of gauze). His sensitivity to the visual effects of the screen when suspended flatly against a wall surface or molded in convex forms (more patterns and subtle shadows appear), or to the shifting sense of solidity and transparency, rigidity and softness which his oddly shaped and graduated segments take on all together is already rather sophisticated.

Christensen's one canvas, sprayed with pastel loops spiralling endlessly on a white ground had a kind of luminous radiance and a muted lushness quite in contrast to Budd's large two-tone black textured field, roughly halved by a curving white horizontal crag (channel).

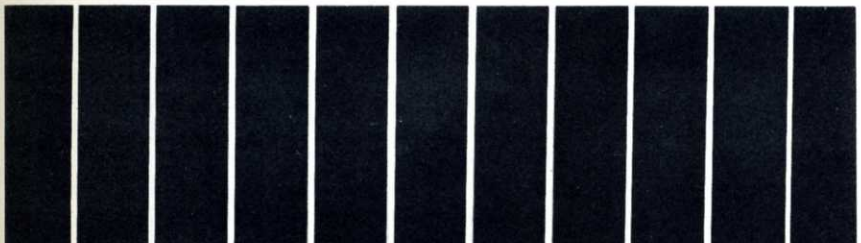
The range of invention in the show was certainly disparate enough, but fortunately any one of the works held its own for both the level of imaginative interest and for formal strength.

In his first one-man showing in New York, Washington artist SAM GILLIAM displays a range of touch and sensibility which indicates both his dependence on and divergence from the methods of other Washington painters, Louis and Noland. Although Gilliam takes off from Louis's technique of spi to troughs of canvas, t which he obtains from sion of this practice i contrived and more ca specificity of design guishes the older artis liam prefers to take surface tactility and at cused on the accident tained by the Rorscha which puddle and bl globs of paint. Color, used to situate an im particular exterior shape

to create the kind of optical space within which the painting of Louis and Noland addresses the observer. Instead color as *matter* — in mottled channels of opaque aluminum, splotches of maroon, or alluvial-like deposits of cobalt blue, viridian, and scarlet in a work like *Restore* (1968) — refers constantly to the physical location of the picture surface.

None of Gilliam's colors are ingratiating, and it is obvious that with his unpleasantly caked and smeared surfaces he aims to challenge the all-too-tasteful ends to which stain painting has been carried by some of its less inspired practitioners in recent years. In several small rice paper and acrylic paintings Gilliam defines the more delicate and lyrical aspect of his production. The absorbency of the ground in these works turns the pigment into soft, filmy phenomena, glowing swirls and pools which reminded me of Wilfred's *Lumia* screens. These, and a small vertical canvas, *Shift Again,* in which the pale lavenders, pinks, and speckled silver are less coarsely worked as pigment, are close in feeling to the influences from which Gilliam is usually able to disassociate himself more inventively. Although the immense wall-sized *Sock-It-To-Me* (110" x 360") is not, to my eye, a fully realized painting, I found it a more interesting venture for its ambition than for its failure to hold itself together on such a large scale. Despite the formal repetition of the folded patterns of red, yellow, green, and white, clotted like wet finger paint and layered over aluminum, the size itself seems to overreach the normally strong impact of the surface treatment — which is much more emphatic on a smaller field. Here the effects can look incidental rather than accidental. This in itself points to the problem I find with Gilliam's work — that the paintings can too easily look simply like the exercise of a particular method. But when he affronts the eye with his more boldly conceived and executed experiments, often immoderate in scale, he ends up pleasing less and risking more than he seems able to handle at this point.

Sam Gilliam, *Rouge*, acrylic, 1968. (Byron Gallery.)



Doug Ohlson, *Melrose*, acrylic, 11 panels, each 90 x 18", 1968. (Fischbach Gallery.)

DOUG OHLSON showed a group of impressive multi-part paintings at the Fischbach Gallery in May. The monochromed vertical panels (each 18" x 90", a 1:5 ratio maintained in the placement of squares within them) were hung about 2 or 3 inches apart to form continuous horizontal paintings, often spanning an entire wall of the gallery. Head on these paintings look like tightly structured, though still divided groups of modular units which seem to be organized into formal progressions as the squares inside the panels are shifted in pairs or trios from one position to another across the parts. A logicality is implied by this structuring which hardly exists and is even denied or made ambiguous, as the squares often disappear to float invisibly into ar tall, opaque shafts on w painted. Seen laterally take on another charac pear not as a geometrica composition but as fi glowing color, phased white channels of the but by the shadowed stretched painted canva of these panels in one the same ground color squares are of another close in value to the manner of reading the several angles applies ef to the more numero painting, such as *Vinca, The Gates*. I found the cessful than a smaller th like *See-Saw,* for their sp ual latitude, as well as choice of color combina a deep teal-turquoise in lavender blue squares, brown combined with mine red.

In the paintings wher els are used the studied — arrangement of the in the rectangular secti apparent for a superfi creeps into some of the also. But although the ous and larger paintin nearly as contrived as ones, their overall effect expanse sustains an inte the limitations of a too signed structure.

—EMILY V

GEORGE CALEB BINGH Galleries, UCLA; FREDER TON, Clark Art Institu town, Mass.; FREDERIC and CHARLES M. RUSS stein:

The exhibition of p drawings by George Ca (1811-1879) that was he ington, Cleveland and f Art Galleries of UCLA hensive and very beau opinion Bingham had by intellect of any America by intellect I mean th elaborate a great abund torial incident while at th