Art in America 1969

Trends Down, Sales Up

Grace Glueck

Now take a giant step, to the nearby Fischbach Gallery.

Though Doug Ohlson’s modular panel paintings, on view March 8-27, were born to bloom in a cool climate, don’t mistake them for garden-variety minimal. They break out of that category by virtue of the subtle tension between the sensuous colors and the quiet, slat like panels that contain them. “It’s important to me,” says Ohlson, “to get as much color into my paintings as possible by using a minimum of means.”

Well, no one can accuse the thirty-two-year-old, Minnesota born artist of extravagance. The only accents to his tall, narrow monochrome panels, lined up in horizontal continuums of five, six or even ten units, are squares of close-valued or contrasting colors – blue or green, red on blue, yellow on orange, turquoise on violet. (The effect is that of a gay modern building façade inflected by a single window.) When Ohlson truncates some of the panels – that is, trims off their contrasting squares – the lineup at top or bottom is engagingly disrupted. The “unity” of his paintings is also broken by the interstices between the panels. Remaining the same width (two to three inches) and painted in variant colors, they both separate and unite the panels, to the viewer’s confusion and ambivalence. But in the end, the whole wins out over all its parts. The *tightly organized format* *asserts* itself as a unity, with the unpredictable squares serving as an energetic pulse.

Reproduction;

Doug Ohlson: *Scorpio*, acrylic on canvas, 1968. Fischback Gallery, New York.