

GUSTO/FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2001

EXHIBIT**WHAT:** Sean Scherer: *Works on Paper***WHEN:** *Through next Friday***WHERE:** *Nina Freudenheim Gallery, 140 North St., Lenox Hotel***ADMISSION:** *Free***INFO:** *882-5777*

Advanced geometry

BY RICHARD HUNTINGTON
News Art Critic

Aranging elemental geometric shapes into even vaguely Mondrian-like compositions is so far from the cutting edge of contemporary abstraction that we might as well be talking about butter knives.

Nevertheless, Sean Scherer, evidently a persistent and intellectual painter, arranges away with a passion. His paintings on paper at the Nina Freudenheim Gallery employ a highly structured kind of geometric abstraction to excellent effect. I'm not sure he has exactly reinvigorated an art that should by now have been worn down to a useless nub, but his command of the complex geometric language — a language at the very root of modernism — is impressive.

You could, I suppose, as some have done, look at Scherer as a detached observer looking in on geometric art of the past and making little smart, art-savvy asides. Although I can see references furtively poking up through the geometry, this view doesn't quite hold for me. If there is an ironic stance here, it is easily outshined by the elaborate visual doings happening right there before the eye. He is seriously in the business of making beautiful objects.

In other words, this is a very formal kind of art. Scherer may very well be spinning off from Islamic tile design or, for all I know, contemporary blouse patterns, but in the end it's all about how he fits together those colored bars.

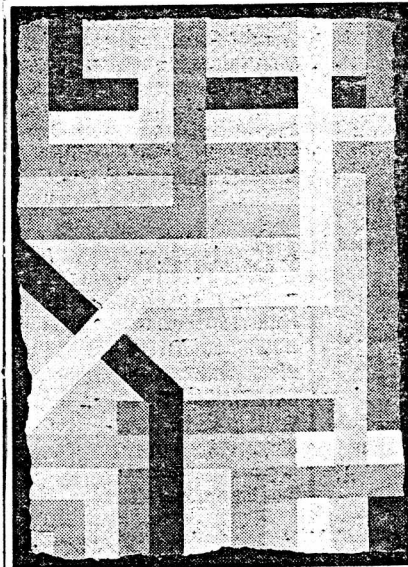
The works fall into groups centered around a visual theme worked out in variations. There is much to fathom in unraveling these tightly worked-out themes.

For example, in one subtly complicated red, white and blue painting the image is split down the middle, giving the impression that two separate patterns have banged against one another in some kind of geometric accident. The two diamond-shaped patterns of these parts are from the same family, obviously, but because of this slightly awkward meeting, both seem cut off by the vertical borders of the sheet. It's a visual tease, like discovering that you're getting two stories for the price of one, only to find out that both end half way through.

In another group he disrupts expectations by introducing a smaller box in one corner of what already could be seen as a complete composition. It like an insert, like one of those newspaper boxes that supply further information on a map. If the whole composition is a "window" then this little box becomes a window on a window.

In a group of leaner compositions — some in black, white and silver, others in soft colors — he highlights an angled form by setting it within an arrangement of right angles. The monochrome pieces have a stately, almost architectural poise. With their precise balances of pinks, soft greens, pale oranges and maroons, the colorful ones are his most sensuous works.

Mondrian sought absolute formal resolution. Scherer holds out the promises of formal resolution. Then, just when we think we are about to satisfy our natural desire for a sense of completeness, he takes it away. ●



Sean Scherer knows his way around lines and angles.