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ART IN REVIEW

DOUGLAS MELINI: 'A SHARING OF COLOR AND BEING A PART OF IT'

By Roberta Smith

131 Allen Street, near Rivington Street, Lower East Side. Through Aug. 11

In "A Sharing of Color and Being a Part of It," his first solo in a Manhattan gallery, Douglas Melini splits the difference between painting and object with plain-spoken yet resonant works that foment an unlikely fusion of art movements: Minimalism and Pattern and Decoration. This odd couple meets in jagged, symmetrical patchworks that reprise the Minimalist grid in patterns that resemble fabrics, specifically the checks, plaids and tattersalls of shirts, vests, handkerchiefs and jacket linings. A fastidious, distinctly physical sense of craft prevails, with a tolerance for little drips and slurps of paint that softens its slight obsessiveness. The taut surfaces are nonetheless dizzyingly intricate, thanks in part to the surprising array of pictorial references built into them.

Tight Op Art stripes enhance the pulsating visual effects of the grids. Each work's palette tends to be intensely color-coordinated, presenting numerous variations on, say, purple, pink or green pitted against more neutral tones and a few opposites. This treatment of color suggests, if you will, an outfit of layered garments, as well as a splintering of the modernist monochrome. In addition, each work's frame is painted with matching stripes and attenuated geometric shapes that recall game boards and folk art.

Intensifying the game board analogy, of course, are the compositions themselves, with their unfolding symmetries of deeply cut triangles and diamonds. These conjure African sculpture and masks, schematizations of stretched pelts, mechanical drawings and also a kaleidoscope's interlocking shapes. Three larger, relatively simple paintings with radiating compositions seem slightly unfinished in this company, although their quieter energy is appealing. But generally, the more shapes, patterns, allusions and illusions packed into Mr. Melini's object-oriented works, the better.