ARTFORUM

FEBRUARY, 1975 $3.00

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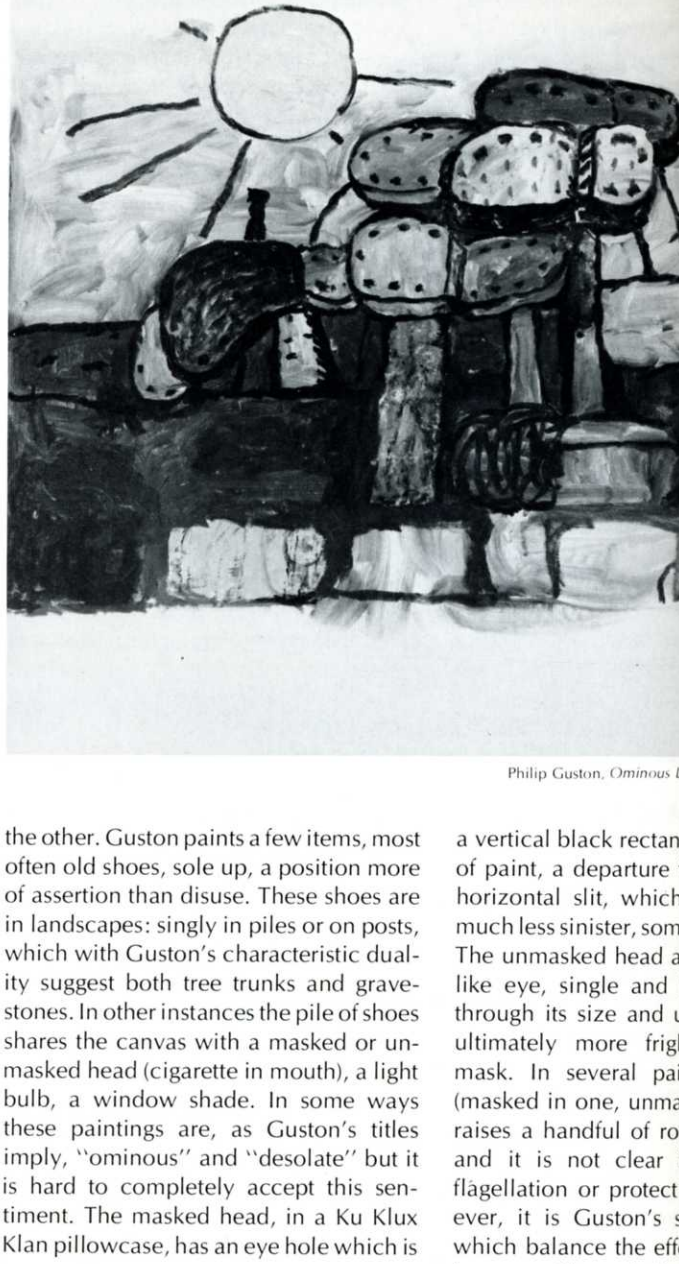
varied. In some paintings the colors remain distinct, brightly inharmonious. The paint is not as thick as previously and occasionally gives way to bare, unprimed canvas. In a work titled *Ykes* canvas shows white through a bluish green color at the bottom, balanced with streaks of white paint at the top. There is a tendency for largely unvaried color to shift rather dramatically at some crucial point, usually an edge or a corner. This happens in the extreme in *Parrot Island,* the best painting in the show. Predominantly green and blue splintered with white, its surface contains hints of flesh near the right edge which descend to a solid flesh area, edged in deep red, in the lower-right corner. The flesh decreases across the bottom edge of the painting, disappearing completely toward the far-left side. The paintings reflect greater control, but their structure is still quite dependent upon these isolated incidents for articulation. Poons's work looks like an obvious response to the combined challenges of Pollock and Morris Louis: drips into fountains. His earlier paintings may not have taken on the past the way these do, but they were infinitely better. Despite what seems to be a formulated sense of history, it is apparent that Poons sees a challenge somewhere and is pursuing it. In the mid '60s he did some very fine paintings. One continually hopes that sooner or later he will do them again.

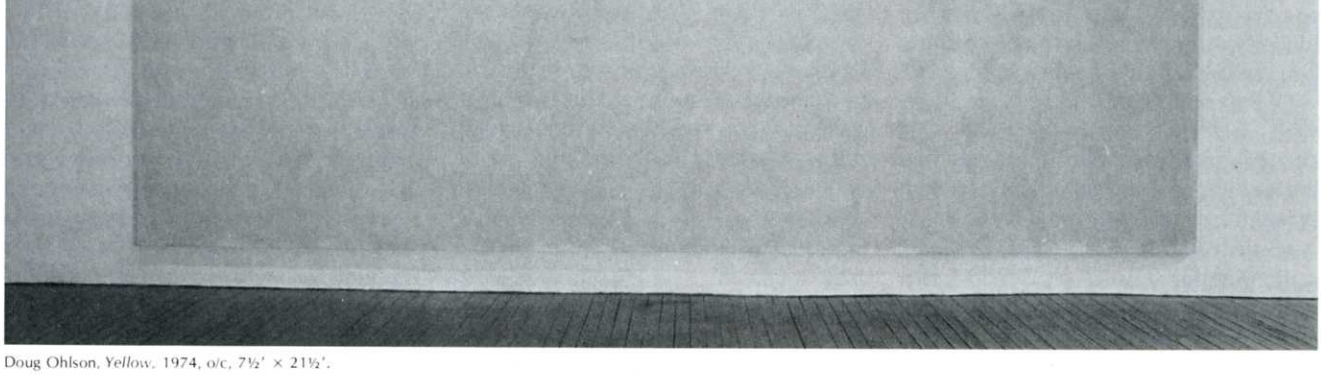
DOUG OHLSON continues to stain his canvases with large round shapes and the interstices between them with a lighter, sometimes contrasting color. Both result from the same process; the shapes are placed over a different color or are denser accumulations of a single color. The latter occurs in the largest painting in the show, *Yellow* (about 20' long) in which denser yellow shapes are visible due to slightly paler, bluer interstices. The entire surface tends to merge into a continuous yellow light and the distinctions disappear altogether as you get close to the painting. The painting is both subtle and straightforward in a way that most of the others in this exhibition are not.

As with Poons, too many of the others depend on an isolated incident or shift of color that draws attention to one area of the painting, as if the remainder existed to provide contrast. This is particularly true in two paintings where gray or black shapes and interstices are relieved by an interstice or two of a brown or rust shade. In a third the black shapes change to rust for the entire bottom row of the painting. Three others deal with combinations of various grays and pinks: a series of flat opaque salmon pink shapes over slate gray; light gray over pink which shows through the shapes themselves as well as the interstices. In a small painting hot pink shapes are interrupted at the center by four lavender pink ones — a color which also fills the interstices in other parts of the painting. The structure here is loose, almost disintegrating and seems different from the rest. But it is generally apparent that Ohlson is attempting to achieve diversity within this constant structure and use of one or two colors. The diversity is not yet interesting; Ohlson's color is either too pastel or thinly brooding. The paintings are better as they become more monochrome as in *Yellow:* this plays down the structure which seems simplistically naturalistic when the shapes are more discrete.

PHILIP GUSTON's paintings consist of three things: the images (and their possible meaning), the surfaces, and the color, all carefully balanced one against the other. Guston paints a few items, most often old shoes, sole up, a position more of assertion than disuse. These shoes are in landscapes: singly in piles or on posts, which with Guston's characteristic duality suggest both tree trunks and gravestones. In other instances the pile of shoes shares the canvas with a masked or unmasked head (cigarette in mouth), a light bulb, a window shade. In some ways these paintings are, as Guston's titles imply, "ominous" and "desolate" but it is hard to completely accept this sentiment. The masked head, in a Ku Klux Klan pillowcase, has an eye hole which is a vertical black rectan of paint, a departure horizontal slit, which much less sinister, som The unmasked head a like eye, single and through its size and ultimately more frig mask. In several pai (masked in one, unma raises a handful of ro and it is not clear flagellation or protect ever, it is Guston's which balance the eff imagery. The painting dominantly red and lig and outlines in black surfaces are also robu These paintings are extreme confidence an does not seem to be paint anywhere. Usual bother to paint the bot but finishes off anywh eight inches up. Even differently — each p each painting. Colors others; green shows through gray; or unmi the colors go on in stre with white. Guston's like De Kooning's, but tauter. In *Painting, Sm*



Philip Guston, *Ominous*



Doug Ohlson, *Yellow*, 1974, o/c, 7½' × 21½'.

Guston lies in bed smoking, a plate of cakes on his chest, the single unblinking eye trained on his painting table, occupied mostly by a pile of shoes. The quality of this stare is in all the paintings, explicitly in the eyes, masks, light bulbs, suns, implicitly in the attention and craftsmanship which his surfaces reflect. One senses that Guston has honed his life down to a few basic activities which are interdependent: he smokes and eats in order to paint. The surfaces confirm, as the imagery sometimes suggests, that he is completely at ease with this single preoccupation. A penchant for thick, animated shapes in his abstract paintings from the early '60s presaged Guston's return to this highly personal form of representation. This shift makes his surfaces particularly purposeful and diverse. Guston's accomplishment may not measure up to other Abstract Expressionists — Pollock, Newman and Rothko in particular — but he is doing his best paintings now; they are very good, and the nature of his perseverence makes the comparison, at this point, irrelevant.

— ROBERTA SMITH

JACKIE FERRARA, A.M. Sachs Gallery; JAMES BIEDERMAN, Artists Space; ROBERT MANGOLD, John Weber Gallery; DAVID NOVROS, Bykert Gallery uptown and downtown; LUCIO POZZI, John Weber Gallery; JESUS RAPHAEL SOTO, Guggenheim Museum, Denise René Gallery; PISTOLETTO, Sidney Janis Gallery; NANCY SPERO, A.I.R.; ROBERT DOISNEAU, Witkin Gallery:

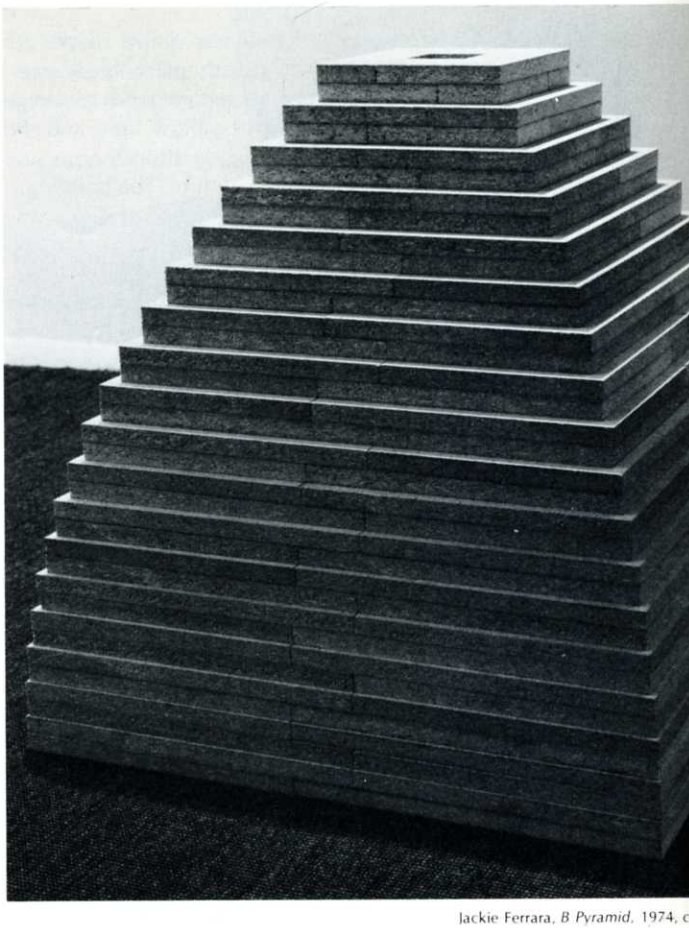
Looking at JACKIE FERRARA's pyramids one thinks in terms of building. The stacking of plywood or chipboard row on top of row recalls methods of architectural structuring, as well as some of Carl Andre's early work. Yet what becomes important in Ferrara's new pieces is not only building as an activity which ties the end product to its making, but also building as a concept of series — as the sequential ordering of part to part which accumulates into a whole that is both an entity in itself and the sum of its parts. A series implies progression. But progression is not merely additive. It may incorporate shift and change. And it is the dichotomy in Ferrara's work between the constancy of repetition and the variation given in the rate of progression which focuses one's attention on the system rather than the artifact of building.

To begin with Ferrara's *Hollow Core Pyramid,* which rises two feet from a two-foot-square base. Each row consists of four rectangles, fitted into a square, which move in rotation from end block to side as the layers spiral upward, decreasing consecutively in area. The top of the pyramid, as in most of Ferrara's work, is truncated, implying extension while at the same time halting the process to clarify it. For, one can look down through the top at the repeating constant of the empty square left by each row of rectangles. At the bottom one perceives the four squares which make up the base. By association one conceives the implicit cubed volume of the exterior which has been systematically decreased with each layer. The hollow of the interior becomes the standard against which one measures the steps of change. And one concentrates on the proportionate relationship of piece to piece which physically defines the ongoing progression of the series.

The interplay between concept and product becomes more complex when Ferrara employs a parabolic sequence instead of a linear one. Her *B Pyramid,* while retaining the norm of the central core, traces a bell-shaped curve on the outside due to the deaccelerating surface from bottom to top. Similarly *1–15 Ramp* rounds upward by steps into the wall as the chipboard segments decrease horizontally in length at a slower and slower rate while they simultaneously pile vertically stage by stage from a stack of one to 15. The logic of the concept contrasts with the seeming illogic of its physical realization as straight edges outline curves. One realizes how visually one expects a progression to be linear, proceeding at an even pace. The regularity of Ferrara's building process, of one plus one plus one, reinforces one's acceptance of the additive consistency of constructive ordering. But the plotting of a series, whether graphically or in three dimensions, involves not only the direction of the movement, but also its speed. It is the explicitness of this hidden factor of time which causes one's perceptual dislocation when confronted with the actualization of change. One shifts between the ordering of the concept and that of one's perception as the outline of the final shape counterpoints the consistency of its making.

This interplay between idea and visualization is perhaps summarized in the *Slatted A Pyramid.* Here two arithmetic series are combined to form an A-shaped pyramid which decreases more slowly at the bottom than the top. The rectangular slats of plywood are stacked in successive layers of two lengths and then two widths. The constancy of the hollow core is revealed in the banded rectangle created on the outside by the alternating empty spaces left as the slats shift from length to width. The evenness of these repeating bands from bottom to top contrasts with and underlines the contour defined by the progression of the outer edges. One's perception fluctuates between the exterior form and its internal generation. One sees the piece as a monument in which the shape becomes the given and its fabrication is merely the means of achieving it. However, the exposure of the interior returns one to the concept as a priori. The outcome seems as much a result of the application of the system as it is the determinant of it.

Ferrara's use of progression relies on the order of building where the whole arises out of the systematic structuring of its parts. In contrast, JAMES BIEDERMAN's additive procedure implies patterns of growth where each part is induced rather than c predecessor. Biederma work in pairs, providin sibilities of arranger accumulations of mate tal gluing together of sl a waving line is juxtapo cal stacking of an equa pieces. Horizontally th the side so that the top e the next, in the literal ta walk. The zigzag teeth edges punctuates the sr the top and exposes its gression. This work sp lifted into an upright tating at one point the i blocks for support — fact because tension b zontal thrust of the lin ward pull of gravity is it is really the vertica stones which lends t cance, and takes it outs dinosaur backbone ret slate piles piece on pie a straight edge only c recognizes this work



Jackie Ferrara, *B Pyramid,* 1974, c