

DOUGLASS FREED

Dougllass Freed, whose new work was recently on exhibit at the Vorpall Gallery, succeeds in combining an embracing opulent color with an arrestingly cool formal structure. Oil color, applied as spray, floats across the surface with subtle shifts that become richer upon closer inspection but never interrupt the unity of the complete field. The structure of the composition is provided by interlocking geometric forms achieved by fitting together separately stretched, precisely measured, smaller canvases.

Freed's method in working reflects the same combination of intuitive response and disciplined control. The various divisions of vertical and horizontal space are first plotted on graph paper; at this stage there is a fundamental relationship with the works of Mondrian, although the artist has not consciously been inspired by him. The works on paper which follow have considerable merit on their own. Sections of paper are cut to the dimensions of the diagram and are sprayed with colors currently in use on a large canvas. These may have little relationship to the colors chosen for the final work but serve to explore the effect that color shifts will have on the perceived relationships of the geometric elements involved.

In cutting the wood and stretching the separate canvases Freed demonstrates his respect for craftsmanship and the materials he uses, as any imperfection in the surface or in the joinings would mar the sense of unity of the whole which is crucial to the work. The application of color to the prepared canvases is the most intuitive phase of the work but is still under complete control. Many transparent layers are necessary to achieve the almost imperceptible changes of hue. The separate sections are hung with spaces between them for this process so that the canvas-covered sides may be sprayed also, adding both to the sense of depth between panels and to the 'object' quality of the work as a whole. A necessary tension develops between the need to achieve the richness of oil color and the desire to maintain a matte finish on the surface. Colors drift, combine, subtly affect each other, at times minim-

other times defining them. Freed thinks of his colors as 'opulent' and in this area acknowledges inspiration from the late paintings of Rothko.

His progress through the decade of the '70s has been accompanied by a gratifying number of awards and exhibitions, the most recent being his inclusion in "Visions 81," a traveling exhibit sponsored by the Mid-America Arts Alliance. This first New York showing reflects the culmination of a development which seems internally logical and almost inevitable.

In recent years his work has evolved through various responses to color-field painting in ways that continually sought a compatible sense of structure. The latest work begins to assume the nature of a series with the geometric structure providing one source of variations and the subjective inspiration of color providing another.

In the Encasement series, No. 22, *Siena* leaves no single edge unstructured and yet none of the panels is completely bracketed or "encased." The panel to the left is

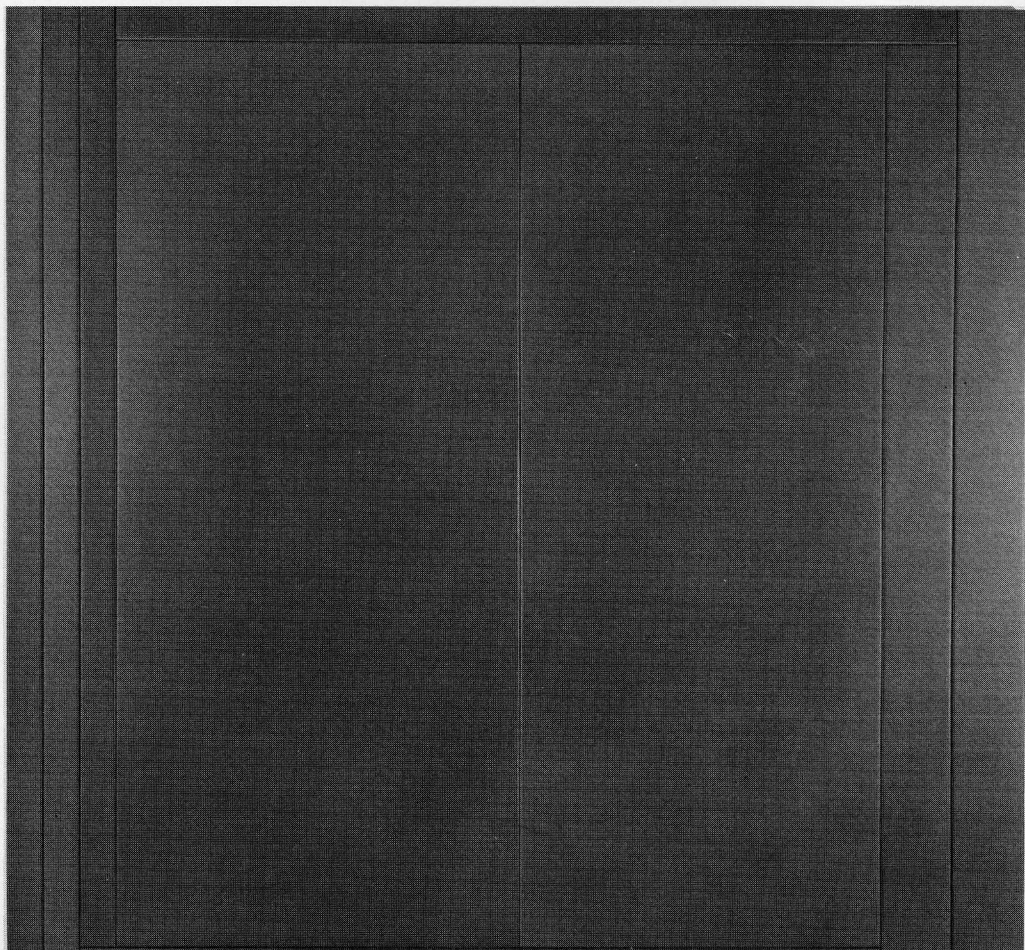
considerably wider than the others and has closures on three sides, each differing in treatment. All of the colors used in the whole composition find their place in this panel and appear in their most clearly defined state in the two crossbars at the lower edge. The two narrower panels on the right emphasize their verticality by the reversal of colors from top to bottom. The color tones of *Siena* give an overall warm and earthy feeling, yet the fusion of blues and greens in certain areas becomes surprisingly gemlike.

Variations on the Encasement structure will probably continue but a new series was begun in November with *Proscenium, Daum's Obershine*, which will be exhibited in "Visions 81." This 7-foot square composition has a symmetrical arrangement with a division in the center which suggests a possible opening. The horizontal lower members are joined at the corners in a way that would create the illusion of spatial recession if the colors were not used to hold our perception to the surface. The colors include green-

blacks, purples, and reds, but deep wine is dominant, adding to the sense of theater. The size of this work, its clarity of form, and the impelling quality of its color give it a sense of "presence," a standing-for-itself, that embodies most forcefully this artist's views of a work of art which refers only to itself.

Freed's work perhaps can best be seen as a very classical statement within the mainstream of modern art. There is a sense in which his work falls within the minimalist context: a reduction in form, a craftsmanlike regard for materials and workmanship, and a non-painterly surface. But the form is far more complex and admits of more variations than most minimal work, and the color surface is as fluid and evocative as a Turner or Monet. Of greater significance is the "idea" behind the work, the possibility of challenging the limits of art as the conceptualists wish to do, but in a way which preserves the aesthetic values that much of their art would deny. (Vorpall, *through February 15*)

Vera B. Townsend



Douglass
Freed,
Pro-
scenium,
Daum's
Ober-
shine,
1979. Oil
on canvas.
84 x 84".
Courtesy