

The New York Times

October 24, 2013

Donald Judd: 'Stacks'

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

Mnuchin Gallery

45 East 78th Street, Manhattan

Through Dec. 7

Donald Judd once wrote that an artist's main challenge is to find "the concatenation that will grow" — in other words, an artistic preoccupation that will sustain a lifetime of development, not peter out by the third or even second show. Judd took over a decade to find his own concatenation, spending most of the 1950s making paintings while edging unwittingly into three dimensions. Once there, he radicalized sculpture with nontraditional materials, brilliant color and, most of all, simple geometric forms that used more space than materials. Space, after all, was his ultimate material.

One of the signature works Judd devised was the "stack," a vertical column of cantilevered boxes marching up a wall, defining space in alternating positive and negative volumes of equal size. In the catalog to the exhibition at the Mnuchin Gallery, the art critic Judd Tully aptly calls the stacks "regal." They have the implacable presence of ships' prows or big trees but without the ponderous weight.

This show presents 10 of Judd's stacks ranging in date from 1968 to 1990 — the most ever exhibited together at once. The resulting theme and variation clarifies how he amplified the different visual and perceptual possibilities of a form by changing materials, making the same piece specific in new ways.

A stack with stainless-steel sides and opaque yellow Plexiglas tops and bottoms, for example, is altogether different from one with stainless-steel tops and bottoms and sides of opaque red Plexiglas. When the Plexiglas is translucent, it's a whole other story again. A stack with amber Plexiglas tops and bottoms has a core that seems flooded with burnished light. When the Plexiglas is dark blue — and the sides radiant copper — the interior space becomes mysterious and absorbent, while the exterior glows. When the Plexiglas is clear and the sides black anodized aluminum, a crystalline severity results. But a stack made entirely of violet anodized aluminum has a new-car sensuousness. Like many of Judd's forms, the stack was a mini-concatenation. It grew.