

The Met doubles down on shows of its vast collection of Asian art. BY CAROL VOGEL



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Weekend Arts II

The New York Times

3 Artists Exploring 3 Dimensions

Art would be a little better off if some museum would organize a good-sized exhibition representing all the artists mentioned in "Specific Objects," the well-known essay that Donald Judd published in Arts Yearbook in 1965.

ROBERTA SMITH

ART REVIEW

In it, he wrote about the rise of what he saw as a new kind of three-dimensional work. Most of it was neither painting nor sculpture, and all of it emphasized the physical facts of the art object.

Local History: Castellani, Judd, Stella *From left, two works by Enrico Castellani and one by Frank Stella in this show that also includes Donald Judd, at Dominique Lévy.*

Such work often involved nonart materials and occupied space assertively, without frames or pedestals.

The sheer diversity and frequent opulence of the works in "Specific Objects" — by artists like Lucas Samaras, John Cham-

berlain, Lee Bontecou, Yayoi Kusama, Richard Artschwager, H. C. Westermann, Dan Flavin, Claes Oldenburg and George Ortman — would dazzle. And it would also confuse, because it might also lay to rest the undead misconception that "Specific Objects" was Mr. Judd's polemic for Minimalism, a term he strongly disliked and rarely used.

Until that show comes along, some com-

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3 Artists Exploring 3 Dimensions



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Fort can be taken from an exceptionally beautiful exhibition at the Dominique Lévy Gallery in New York, “Local History: Castellani, Judd, Stella,” which takes its title from a related essay Mr. Judd published in 1964 that set the stage for “Specific Objects,” especially by summarizing the decline of Abstract Expressionism as a critical and market force and pinpointing the exhibitions that signaled a new vitality.

The show assembles works from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s by the Italian artist Enrico Castellani, Mr. Judd and his fellow American Frank Stella.

The show was conceived by Emilio Steinberger, the gallery’s director, and organized with Linda Norden, an independent art historian and curator, and Peter Ballantine, a Judd specialist who once fabricated the artist’s plywood pieces to exacting specifications.

The combination of works by Mr. Stella, Mr. Castellani and Mr. Judd seems forced, first of all because this gallery represents both Mr. Stella and Mr. Castellani. In addition, only Mr. Stella and

From left: Frank Stella’s “5 Eldridge Street (Blue Horizon)” (1958); his “For Picabia” (1961); Donald Judd’s “Untitled (DSS 41)” (1963), in foreground; and his “Untitled” (1974).

Mr. Judd were local — New York artists linked by friendship, mutual admiration and shared artistic concerns. Mr. Judd approvingly described Mr. Stella’s shaped paintings from the early 1960s as “slabs,” not paintings.

Mr. Castellani was working in Milan, where he was close to Piero Manzoni, an artist with a more Dadaist approach. Mr. Castellani knew of Mr. Judd’s work, but never met him. Mr. Judd rarely mentioned Mr. Castellani in his writing. Nonetheless, the Lévy news release bruits about the improbable notion that Mr. Judd regarded Mr. Castellani as the “father of the style that came to be known as Minimalism” and as “essential for Judd’s formulation of a specific art object that ‘need only be interesting.’”

The show makes sense if local is defined more abstractly as signifying a new kind of highly focused, ground-level attention to the art object and all its visible details, however minute. These artists zeroed in on art’s physicality with unusual intensity. We

see some of their development in that direction here.

Mr. Judd’s move to three dimensions is summarized by two very different works from 1963: an aluminum-faced relief drilled with a grid of tiny holes whose top and bottom edges curve outward aggressively, and a floor box painted cadmium red light for maximum visual effect. (Note the careful alignment of the heads of the screws holding the aluminum in place.)

Mr. Stella’s growth was even more rapid. In two 1958 paintings — “East Broadway Sketch” and “5 Eldridge Street (Blue Horizon)” — his groundbreaking stripes start to emerge out of more expressive paint handling, sometimes barely covering it up. (Note the enlivening pentimenti behind the rough blue horizontals of the rarely seen “5 Eldridge Street.”) By 1963, the stripes have come into much sharper focus, thanks to taped edges. They seem to determine the open-centered quadrhedron of “Ileana Sonnabend,” a metallic silver painting that has turned a wonderful shade of lavender. The stripes are even more formative in the exuberant 1965 “BAFT,” whose bent stripes of purple, orange and green give the canvas a zigzag step down and an almost Op Art buzz. This buzz is enhanced by the bleeding of the colors beneath the tape, an effect that, Ms. Norden notes, Mr. Judd

wrote about in an article on the Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman, in which he described how such bleeding added to the complexity of Mr. Newman’s zips, also made using tape.

Mr. Castellani would ultimately make monochromatic reliefs from canvas stretched over patterns of protruding nails, adding nails on top before painting. The result is somewhere between armor and tufted upholstery, especially in the quietly bristling “Trittico argento” of 1966. Optical illusions sometimes result from the patterns of nails, as in the “Quadripolare (Superficie bianca)” of 1971. We see Mr. Castellani hit on his signature approach in the 1959 “Superficie nera,” a small, charming all-black work in which the bulges in the canvas result from chestnuts, not nails, and the effect is of a starry sky.

In works from the early 1960s never before exhibited in the United States, he experiments with striped fabric stretched over a frame with symmetrical protrusions. He also makes a red work spanning a corner whose surface is disrupted by a single curve that can be read several ways, most of them erotic.

“Local” also implies grass roots, a leveling in which everything is equal, which is inherent in Mr. Judd’s idea of “nonrelational” compositions of “equal parts” — as Ms. Norden describes in her essay. For him, it had political implications: He saw it as a rejection of the hierarchical composition of older art, especially European painting, where a few larger parts of the picture dominate smaller, less significant parts, like kings and nobles ruling over society’s lower echelons.

Simple repetition is the prevailing compositional tactic in this show, which is almost a conversation about its possibilities. Mr. Castellani’s nail obsession speaks to the drilled holes of Mr. Judd’s aluminum relief across the way. Even more striking is the shared use of overlapping elements in Mr. Stella’s “BAFT” and Mr. Castellani’s 1969 “Spartito” (“Score”), made by simply arranging a stack of hundreds of partly overlapping sheets of paper until they formed a pronounced bell curve in real space. There are others to be found, if you look locally enough.

“Local History: Castellani, Judd, Stella” runs through Jan. 17 at the Dominique Lévy Gallery, 909 Madison Avenue, at 73rd Street; 212-772-2004, dominique-levy.com.