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Art in Review, Jim Isermann

Deitch Projects
18 Wooster Street, SoHO
Through Oct. 15

By Ken Johnson
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Jim Isermann, who joins artists like Jorge Pardo and Andrea Zittel as a pioneer of art about design, has not received his due in New York. That may be because this Los Angeles artist has tended



A partial view of Jim Isermann's wall installation at Deitch Projects.

to favor visual pleasure and Pop-style humor over obvious conceptual programming, and until now he has not had a Manhattan gallery that gave him room for his more expansive ideas. His enveloping installation at Deitch may still be too conceptually understated and ambiguous for New York, but it is quietly spectacular. Its cool beauty and absorbing complexity will grow on you as you spend time with it.

In Deitch's industrial garage-size Wooster Street gallery, Mr. Isermann has installed a single floor-to-ceiling wall that starts to the left of the front door, extends the length of the gallery, curls around the far end and returns about a third of the way back. It is made of 2,700 boxy diamond-shaped modules of white plastic, each vacuum molded to have an inverted pyramidal front. There are five slightly different versions, and because of the way they are orchestrated, the wall appears to undulate like a huge, billowing flag.

While the dark lines between the modules create a woozily distorted grid, a softer, secondary, all-over grid produced by the alignment of the internal edges of the concave pyramids remains perfectly undistorted – albeit tipped on the bias. (It would be interesting to have a mathematician analyze the system.)

The facets of the modules also produce complex shadows that vary in different places under the low, all-natural illumination provided by the gallery's skylights. And the glossy facets reflect ambient colors – the cool grays of the concrete floor and the warm tones of the raised wood platform at the far end of the room.

While all this makes for a surprisingly powerful visual experience, it also invites mediation on topics like Minimalism, Op Art, the utopian aspirations of Modernist design and the debasement of design by commercialism and mass production. Mr Isermann does not tell us what we should think about this heady confluence of themes, and the freedom from didactic instruction is a big part of his installation's beauty.