

The Downtown Scene: Sculpture for Outdoors

By DAVID L. SHIREY

Most outdoor public sculpture fails. It fails because it rarely comes to grips with the multiple and complex relationships it must effect with the surrounding environment. More often than not, the numerous sculptures that have been increasingly dotting the city plazas and shopping centers throughout the country are more of an eyesore, more of a visual and physical deterrent than they are an esthetically pleasing, organic part of the landscape.

One artist who understands the sculptural problems inherent to the outside is the Australian Clement Meadmore. Of the 18 sculptures created by artists from around the world for the 1968 Olympics Route of Friendship in Mexico City, Mr. Meadmore's contribution, I think, was the best. Another work, "Upstart I" part of the 1967 New York City program "Sculpture in Environment," was placed at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 60th Street and was a handsome addition to its surroundings.

Mr. Meadmore's current exhibition at the Max Hutchinson Gallery, 127 Greene Street, effectively demonstrates how his sculpture seems conceived and made for the open air. Despite their size, some of the works, not more than two or three feet long and high, are endowed with an innate monumentality that immediately suggests a potential translation into pieces of large-scale dimension. In fact, one of the sculptures on display is fortunately supposed to be blown up to a grand magnitude of 22 by 48 feet for the new Albany mall.

The reason that Mr. Meadmore's sculptures grow so easily derives from their measured energy and stark simplicity. Made of polyurethane and aluminum and painted black, they are of a minimalist persuasion that explores the interrelated geometry of ovals, ellipses, circles, rectangles, curves and straight edges, concave and convex surfaces and the interpretation of spaces. But they are better than most other minimalist sculptures in that they go beyond the mere statement of elementary geometry by tautening and releasing energies within and along themselves.

Almost like tense coils with strong loose ends, the sculp-

tures wrench their power from the energy bursting from their centers to their outer reaches and assertedly define their stability through a delicate balance of the parts. Mr. Meadmore's best works, such as "Virginia," are those that do not get confused in too much complicated geometry and possess the volume and space to exercise their energy.

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William Williams (Reese Palley, 93 Prince Street): This exhibition of Mr. Williams, who is represented in the current Whitney Museum of American Art show "Structure of Color," is a hard-edge free-for-all of strident, aggressive colors and a baffling mishmash of explosive, entangled geometric patterns.

Grouped in series of 2, 3, 6, 8, the 19 large canvases, especially the series of 6 and 8, do produce a sense of a wall architecture of dazzling color as well as a cinematic effect engendered through a repetition of color and image. But Mr. Williams's color overpowers and denies his geometric imagery, reminiscent of Frank Stella. Except in a few canvases and water-colors, where the colors are slightly subdued and the imagery less confusing, the imagery and the color cannot stand together or apart.