

## At the Galleries

THE MOST DISCUSSED SHOWS of the past season were—for very different reasons—*Vermeer and the Delft School* and *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years*. These widely divergent blockbusters, one a paean to illuminating scholarship, the other a celebration of vicariousness and/or nostalgia, got most of the press and, to judge from the crowds at the Metropolitan Museum, most of the attendance, but there were plenty of other notable exhibitions in New York during the past few months, among them an impressive debut, a constellation of offerings by old pros and mid-career artists, and a couple of surprises. Let's start with the surprises.

At Cecilia de Torres Gallery, the Argentine-born, New York-based Eduardo Costa presented an elegant installation of recent “volumetric paintings.” Chunky spheres and discs, plump triangles and rectangles, sometimes sliced or altered, appeared to thrust through the walls of the gallery or to hover against them. At first, these simple geometric solids seemed straightforward enough, but they became more elusive over time. Despite their economy, they seemed to question the premises of minimalism, and despite their bulk, they were curiously un-sculptural. Costa seems to subscribe to a modernist notion of painting as a flat surface covered with some hue; he substitutes real density and real spatial presence for the illusionism of traditional painting, so that flatness swells into mass, yet mass remains a visual, rather than tactile attribute. It's as though the “volumetric” works began life as brushy monochrome paintings, but wrenched themselves out of two dimensions into three in order to become chunks of dull primary colors or pristine black and white.

I had associated Costa with stylish, often ephemeral conceptual projects—the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum from the literally and figuratively substantial, thoughtful structures at Torres. Yet according to a handsome, informative catalogue, Costa has made “volumetric” works since the mid-'90s, after he saw a lump of dried pigment in a can and decided that it was “a new kind of painting.” (The earlier “volumetric” pieces included rather cartoonlike figurative constructions of lemons or flowers.) Whether Costa's recent “volumetric paintings” radically reformulate the entire tradition of geometric abstraction, as Alexander Alberro maintains in the catalogue, or are simply logical extensions of that tradition—which seems closer to the mark—these uncanny, harmonious colored forms were hard to ignore.