



## "The Estate of General Idea: Ziggurat"



Photograph: Courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash

The Canadian Conceptual Art group General Idea worked together from 1969 until 1994, when two of its three members died of AIDS. AA Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal (all of which are pseudonyms) wed a critical questioning of art's conventions to campy, tongue-in-cheek parody, producing a spectrum of oddball works that ranged from building plans to beauty pageants. The sketches, photographs, prints, documentation, and ephemera at the entrance to this exhibition demonstrate the group's range, as well as its attachment to the ziggurat, a geometric form rooted in ancient structures that obsessively found its way into much of General Idea's work. Several photos show models sporting costumes made of stepped pyramids that wrap the wearer from head to knee, turning him or her into a walking construction.

The real surprise of the show is a series of paintings in the main gallery. Covered in all-over patterns of interlocking ziggurats, two rectangular compositions from 1968–69 neatly combine stain painting with systemic minimalism. Nearly textbook examples of avant-garde abstract painting concerns of their day, these canvases split the difference between seriousness and burlesque.

Elsewhere, four shaped canvases on four-inch-thick stretcher frames—all 1986—nod to Frank Stella's paintings of the early '60s, though their amped-up fluorescent colors and idiosyncratic architectural iconography suggest that we should as jokey company to Peter Halley's contemporaneous Neo-Geo works. In this case and others, mockery for General Idea becomes the sincerest form of imitation.

BY: JOSEPH R. WOLIN

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