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Art in Review

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■ Sal Scarpitta, then and now ■ Kupferman's grids.

Moshe Kupferman

Bertha Urdang Gallery
23 East 74th Street
Manhattan
Through tomorrow

One of the consistently engaging features of Israeli artist Moshe Kupferman's work, apparent in this two-decade survey, is how he has personalized the grid form, which he adopted early as the central structure of his work. In a 1971 drawing, for example, vertical and horizontal graphite strokes are repeated as an adamant, unbroken obliterating gesture. In other drawings, exuberant abstract patterns — fountainlike sprays in one instance — are visible behind a screen of gray lines.

The suggestion of architectonic structures — prisms, ramparts, pillared interiors — runs through the artist's work. These were defined in the 1970's with tensile yet resilient lines, often set in fields of misted color. In more recent oil paintings, the verticals are sometimes thick, broken columns of vertically stacked plaques, with the paint layered, scraped and dragged to achieve a silvery sheen.

Despite these instances of material richness, the work as a whole projects an air of intense but modest gravity. This results both from the choice of medium — works on paper predominate in this show, and the oil paintings are not large — and from a palette of blacks, grays and purples that has varied little over the years. More than format or color, however, it is the decisive movement of Mr. Kupferman's hand — obliterating visions or casting nets to trap them — that binds this show together.

HOLLAND COTTER