

October 11, 2012

Sarah Oppenheimer's D-33 at P.P.O.W.

By ROBERTA SMITH

'D-33'

P.P.O.W.

535 West 22nd Street,

Chelsea

Through Saturday

Among the environmental artworks spilling out of Chelsea galleries this month, Sarah Oppenheimer's "D-33" is definitely the most restrained and arguably the best. All Ms. Oppenheimer has done is rearrange the walls at P.P.O.W. to form a symmetrical configuration of six spaces and connect them with a pair of slanting, four-way openings, which sometimes function as doorways and sometimes more like windows. That these apertures are edged in bands of dark, matte aluminum gives them a terrific graphic punch and adds to the work's spatial confusion while also introducing hints of Elizabethan half-timber and *Caligari*-esque Expressionism. Upon first entering the gallery, for example, visitors sense the walls appearing to tilt inward, an effect that makes the space look like a modernist version of an old-fashioned artist's garret.

The openings also appear to be identical, which is not the case. The thickness of the walls varies and so does the width and structure of the metal framing. One opening is blocked by a sheet of mirrored glass — perhaps to balance the fact that, across the way, one of the six spaces is inaccessible, visible only through a floor-level triangular opening and very much in use by gallery staff members. All these discrepancies greatly complicate perception as, probably, does a less noticeable variation: according to the gallery, each room is painted a different shade of white.

Sorting all this out is immensely pleasurable, and happily there is no resolution. From certain vantage points — like the opening view — a semblance of agreement can be established, but it quickly falls apart. Difference prevails; a new variation on the empty-gallery-as-art is achieved; and space is torqued in ways both apparent and mysterious.