OPEN THE DOOR

A Thesis
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Approved by

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"My interest is in making things that are important to me. In making them I make discoveries. They are important to me because they are real, experienced, because they are tangible. I am interested in transforming an idea into something physical."
Jackie Winsor, *Winsor Knots*

"-ideas were not to be worshipped nor followed blindly but were to be spent, by using them as shoes are used; they were to be subordinated to and made of life, the basic reality. Not life in the general and abstract sense, but the life of each concrete man of flesh and bone, who is the subject and supreme object of all philosophy."
Ree Morton, *Ree Morton Retrospective 1971-1977*

During my time as a graduate student, I have come to understand the basic skills of fabrication and have begun to learn the vocabulary of objects and materials, their forms and processes. These two years have brought me closer to a balance with my previous undergraduate experiences and training as a painter. Much work lay ahead of me in gaining a more equal balance; I feel that points of clarity within the work, of aesthetic concern, intent, and integration have been achieved.

It is through familiarizing myself with and utilizing many of the concepts of such artists and sculptors as Marcel Duchamp, Anthony Caro, Carl Andre, Eva Hesse, Ree Morton, Richard Serra, and Jackie Winsor that I have come to write this thesis. The jumble of influences and
aesthetics that comes with a list like this often refute or knock heads with each other, but that is the way I like it. They have become a reservoir from which I can draw out conflicts to integrate, emphasize, or deemphasize, a vocabulary if you will.

I am particularly drawn to the aesthetics of Duchamp and Ree Morton; their questioning of how a material, image or object is to be taken in and interpreted by the viewer has been very valuable to me. In my role as an artist, I have also found my life entering the work in much the same way as Duchamp's and Morton's lives did, through punning and sexual humor, a subject I won't go into as it is primarily visual and to explain it defeats the purpose of the chosen format. Their work questions from within the realm of the personal-social dialectic, intermingling formalism with sexuality or intimate narratives and experiences.

This is true also to an extent with the work of Eva Hesse; her works, often described as psychic models, are integrated with the tough aesthetics of minimalism through obsessive almost absurd use of repetition. Hesse's development as an artist from painter to sculptor has acted as a guide for my own movement towards a more object oriented work. As a painter, I found myself
more involved with materials than imagery. I was frankly intrigued by my own inability to construct and stretch a canvas correctly; the resulting physical distortions began to play an increasingly more important role over the imposition of imagery. Gradually the work began to be more volumetric and came to rest on the floor in much the same way that Hesse's early work began to visually feel the effect of gravity.

The notion of gravity lead me to readings on Serra and Andre taking their work as object lessons on materiality, weight and process presentation. Particularly, in the case of Serra and Jackie Winsor, works of formal process manipulation lead the viewer into witnessing dramatic expression declared through implied or actual weight.

During my first year as a graduate student while learning to weld, the work of Anthony Caro was pointed out to me as something that I should look into. What initially attracted me to his work was his use of raw industrial piping and plate; but I became even more interested in his formal manipulation and confrontation of the viewer with both physical and pictorial spaces within the same work. In *Early One Morning*, one view
of the work may be read as a sculptural mimicry or parody of pictorial space, overlapping planes and contracted space; while other aspects of the work acknowledge the physical construct and the viewers relationship to it. Caro's juxtaposition of the two spatial types, understood as a change in being, point to the theme of transformation avowed in the title. Through Caro's work I began to see the possibilities for ordering and controlling the viewer's perception of space in a unified work; not only controlling perception through illusion, but also through the actual arrangement of objects in space.

Caro's use of the table motif acquainted me with the issue of how an object relates to its base; a concept whose historical precedent reaches back to the Egyptian Ka figures of the Old Kingdom dynasties. I was intrigued with the use of a base that was not neutralized but that acted to inform and become a part of the object as in the work of Caro, Smith, and Brancusi. In reading about Tatlin's corner constructions, I began to see the relationship of the room to the object as an expansion of the object-base issue taken to the level of the environmental. This and Caro's use of color to visually relate the object to the floor in a
figure-ground gestalt, lead to my use of the floor as the foundation for my pieces in space.

The use of the floor in relation to the environment lead me to the works of Carl Andre, Richard Serra, and a second look at the work of Eva Hesse.

Carl Andre's metal "rugs" rely on the implication of material weight and surface to unify the work in a feeling of dynamic compression of mass. The implication of material weight is balanced or held in check by the surface, color and reflectivity of the metal that refers back to the visual regularity of shape within each unit of the configuration. This creates a state "of non-artificial adherence of the separate units to the work,"\(^2\) resonating an expansive spatial force within the environment. The "rugs" are "materials as expressions of their own being,"\(^3\) honest materials as they are, strictly organized in their configurations and economic in terms of the fullness of effect that they have withing their environment.

Dealing with Andre's work has brought a number of issues into my own work: such as the use of surface modification, the manipulation of implied weight, the use of overlapping elements and modules, and similar questions concerning the use of the floor as support surface
that Caro's work brought up.

My interest in the work of Richard Serra stems from his "use of gravity and weight as pure aggressive physicality, but not without and urge toward internal self-expression."\textsuperscript{4} The rubber pieces of 1968 and the lead splashings of 1969 are the direct image of a cause and effect relationship between the artist. Serra fulfills the Duchampian corollary, "The artist is not someone who makes things; his works are not pieces of workmanship--they are acts."\textsuperscript{5} The obvious presentation of process activity, its preparation, and documentation have played a major role in my installation work and performance pieces.

Serra's process activities are akin to the works of Eva Hesse in their impressive physicality, but Hesse's work differs from Serra's in its concern for a quality that emphasizes the actual gesture of the hand in the manipulation of the materials. The enriching quality of touch over the entire surface of a work, such as Repetition Nineteen II, a fiberglass piece from 1968, acts to unify a work that takes on a serial form. The manipulation of the material acts also to open the work out to the viewer in a very sensual way, physical yet fragile. Hesse's feel for the absurd is directly tied into her
feelings that, "if something is absurd, it's much more exaggerated, more absurd if it's repeated." Through her example of an art that is an essence, a center of life, I have tried to develop my own sense of absurdity where incongruous elements must meet in the same format, where fragments of a much larger whole stand alone, and in the concentration of an enormous amount of energy and preparation are put into a short lived act.

In the summer of 1981 I became acquainted with the work and issues of the late Ree Morton; I was both shocked and delighted by what she took on. Her use of industrial, prefabricated and found materials was a confirmation and pathfinder for my own use of these non-traditional materials. Her attitudes towards them are summed up in the following quotation from Ree Morton Retrospective 1971-1977, concerning her installation at the Whitney Museum of Art of To Each Concrete Man:

"I had looked at the space a lot and one of the hardest things about that space is the heaviness of the floor. That was one reason for putting the work up on a platform, also that I realized that it was very stagelike and I wanted that kind of theatrical association to go with it. I found that flooring by chance. I had seen linoleum flagstone which I thought was really fine, and was getting ready to buy some when I was in a display supply house and saw a sample of that and just went nuts about it. I just knew that I had to have that. It
turned out that some people have asked if I painted it myself or made it. I didn't. I didn't touch it. I found it absolutely the way it was, and just loved using it and finding it just exactly the way I would have made it. But I didn't have to...

Well, the meaning (of the linoleum flagstone material) was just that, being separate, but also making a kind of comment on the floor. Also that I just loved the material, that it's latex and that you can purch [inset]. I think it's funny."

Morton's world is a world of artificialities and incongruities where walls are dematerialized into a painted greyness yet are colorfully indicated, lights shire only to reflect themselves, fake floors cover real floors, a string of empty light sockets is juxta- psed against a wall painted to appear spotlit. Physical and existential spaces are structured and perforated with signs and emblems of images and ideas. Morton, like Duchamp in the Large Glass, asks the viewer to make connections and associations not present or even necessarily implied within the work. Her fanaticism for the viewer to be able to discover a meaning that is specific to that individual, lead to the notion of a work that was open to interpretation and a relative.

"...probably the only thing that I insist on is that you can't see it wrong. I guess it's from being opposed to looking at work where you have to be able to understand, you have to get involved in the...philosophical or phenomenological or whatever implications of a piece and that's where it exists much more as an idea than as an object. Whereas, I think that I'm
involved with very immediate, tactile, emotional responses to what's there; I mean it should trigger associations that you have because of who you are and that's exactly what I want to allow you. I want it closed, but I also want it open." 7

Morton's work dealt with her own personal concerns for her work and what it was to express for herself, but she never lost sight of feeling for the viewer that saw the work completely different from her own interpretation. That the actual physical object and the inherent content are left open to the viewer's reading, and that it is incorporated within the work as a major element in it's construction, attest to her desire for a dialogue with the viewer centered on experience and individual interpretation of signs and their relationships.

The early works of Jackie Winsor are silent, contemplative pieces that resonate the energy of their making. Through her obvious methods of construction, such as wrapping or nailing, she creates solid heavy volumes. The activities of process construction and viewing are seen as a polemic that the work acts to bridge; "to create a one to one relationship between ""making time"" and ""perceiving time"" so that the form grows out of the process and is revealed by it." 8 Through an excessive, unnecessary, even structurally absurd process
Winsor acts to bring together two materials to shape her solid forms, they become object lessons of frustration and obsession. Yet it is essential for the two materials to have equal weight and importance; as in Nail Piece of 1970 where fifty pounds of nails were pounded layer by layer into fifty pounds of wood.

In conclusion, I would like to list the three guidelines put forth by Hilory Chapman for a sculpture of sustained ambiguity. The quality of ambiguity in sculpture is like metaphor in poetry, irreducible and in a clear state of being. The object through both science and art has come to exist on a number of differing levels of reality, from the object in relation to man to a description of the object on the sub-atomic level. And finally, that both object and illusion must meet in a sustained ambiguity, neither negating nor affirming one over the other. That the ambiguity must be perfectly poised so that "everywhere appearance and vision came, as it were, together in the object." If there is too much emphasis on the object it will tilt the work towards empty reductivism...and too much emphasis on the image will pull the work into the realm of painting and illusion.
THESIS SHOW

"Self-disclosure requires strength—it is only risky if we are overly dependent on the approval of others; if we are strong enough to live with or without approval we can afford to be transparent."
Barbara Forisha, Sex Roles And Personal Awareness

"They are very much involved in the situation, in time...the work becomes a marker for where you are and what you think. And if it's exactly where you are at that time, then it's fine."
Ree Morton, Ree Morton Retrospective 1971-1977

"I came at it as a painter. You never lose that."
Jackie Winsor, Winsor Knots

An Introduction

My relationship to my work is similar to Eva Hesse's in that my work cannot be separated from my life.11 The work appears to lack continuity from piece to piece. The threads of developmental continuity do exist in both conceptual and material choices. The fluid integration of images and materials in my work and in many of the works by the artists sited above, particularly Hesse, Serra and Winsor, is at the core a form of objectified self-portraiture, manifesting itself through the work. The work is a facade, a physical embodiment of the interaction with those elements and images at the time of the piece's construction. They

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reflect the ongoing transformation of particular concerns, information, means and images that intermingle with the personal and aesthetic past to act as indicators of a state of being. They serve to mark a point in time, and to foreshadow future development that is anchored in the past of experience and in ongoing interaction with the present.

A recurring theme or method within the work has been my manipulation of materials and images, in such a way that they undermine the casual or usual expectations of those elements. In so doing, I refer back to myself and the love-hate relationship that I have with illusion, illusion being both blessing and bane. Much of my time has been devoted to the study of illusions and their visual, physical, and psychological manifestations. Whether you call them illusions, gestalts, phenomena, lies or simply reality, nothing is what it appears to be. Art is the language of lies, where one is judged on how well the lie is manifested in the chosen physical, visual, written or verbal format. I have a stubborn streak a mile wide--I have never accepted anything on face value. My work has focused on the artificial, the illusory, and it's manipulation. Images and materials in my work present themselves in a mode that is usually
counter to their natural state for the purpose of testing the "givens" of reality. When there is un-questioned acceptance of how things are, possibilities are shut down. I see my work, it's reversals and ambiguities, as trying to reopen those possibilities; to find and share the hope that yes, things can be different.

The action of layering is a physical overlapping and stacking of one material on top of another and acts as a metaphor for the interweaving and meshing of ideas and images. The specific modules vary from piece to piece, in sizes ranging from two inches by eighteen inches in Furrow, to four feet by eight feet in One Day II.

The site specific installations Boundaries, About Sex on the Beach, Iceflow/Clearwater and One Day II (the first three no longer exist), may be activated within the given space or attempt to control the viewer's actual space. They are characteristically open to entry or to motion within, and attempt to alter physically or psychologically the perception of passage through, in or around the space in which they exist.

The smaller constructions; Four in One Pool, Furrow, Emergent State, Portrait of Lou Jeffreys II, One Day and 58th Victim all place the viewer on the outside and because of their height, force the viewer to look
down into them. They are too small to be entered except through visual-tactile perception and mental penetration. They exist in space but are contained and do not undertake any alterations of the space on the environmental level.
Upon entering the gallery, the viewer encountered *Four in One Pool*, a piece that was made in response to Pee Morton's statements about having a relative reading be inherent in the concept and construction of the work. The forms used in this piece are in a state of ambiguous image flux, utilizing the discontinuous perceptual changes and size relationships of the various elements to achieve it. The use of the pool as an overriding image acts to unify all the disparate readings and functions as a bridge or "in" for the viewer to enter the work. *Four in One Pool* was an important piece for me at the time, in terms of isolating a number of concerns: the desire for a relative reading of its parts, the imagistic reversal of the pool water which is an iconographic referent to sperm and genetic "pools", the use of implied weight in the floor bound rectangle and the material relationship of the wood modules to their transparent coloration. The use of relative readings and interpretations in *Four in One Pool* gave me a format in which to work on several aesthetic fronts within a single piece, and to place myself in the position of being a juggler attempting to see how
many balls I could keep in the air at one time, a position I must relish as I find myself there constantly.

Furrow continues the use of the water image, manifested in this piece as a thir line that is contained within and under two narrow rows of plywood modules. The flux of image readings progresses from (1) the material substances (plywood and glass), to (2) the reductionist view of the piece as a line between two points, to (3) a single plowed furrow with irrigation water flowing through it which is a punning reference to sexual arousal. Furrow came at a time when I was resisting the image or format of the floor bound rectangle used in Four in One Pool. I had begun to view it as a hard impenetrable surface that was blocking or hiding something behind it, like a door that would not open. The final form of the piece was arrived at after a number of distorted or pulled out rectangular shapes had been tried. The focus of the piece as I have stated above was an attempt to open out the rectangle, to expose what was below the surface. To an extent this was realized by means of integrating the relationship of glass and wood. The glass bricks support the wood modules in an inversion of the window frame construct, which is preceded in Duchamp's Fresh Widow. The plywood is revealed on the surface of the piece instead of
being hidden or painted over; it's surface beaten with a hammer, treating the material in a raw subtractive way that reverses plywood's usual clean constructive handling. Broken glass was reformed into opaque multi-layered "bricks", through the slumping process, turning waste matter into usable form.

The Portrait of Lou Jeffreys II is a small rectangular cast relief that lies on the floor. The shape of a small boat and it's wake, moves up the right side of the rectangle while on the left, the flat of an iron and the texture of the fabric it has just creased move downward. The Portrait of Lou Jeffreys II is a cast drawing using the process, material and textural surface to integrate two disparate images, and becomes a metaphor for the sexual union between male (the boat) and female (the iron) images.

One Day is a piece that twists the intent of previous site specific works; it acts to record a particular point in time, place and situation; instead of acting to alter the site the piece is the embodiment of that alteration. A common folding chair painted in the value pattern that was created by the sun on February 26, 1982 at approximately three-thirty in the afternoon, while standing on my back porch. Beneath the chair is a
plywood panel that is painted with the shadow of the chair, part of the painted shadow overlaps the painted image of the corner of the blanket that lays beneath the plywood panel. On the red blanket lays a green bound volume of Art's Magazine. The chair and the book are objects of the same nature, they act to document specific information, but fail in their task because they can never fully document their subject. They are object abstractions, not events. What is experienced through them is wholly different from what they act to record. The illusions of documentation, memory, and the inability of objects to truly document an event impart One Day with a melancholic existence; that was characteristic of my own feelings at the time, as I was experiencing the end of a long-standing relationship. One Day stands in between my definitions of site specific installations and object constructions.

The last small construction in the show, 58th Victim, is a piece based compositionally on One Day but placed vertically on the wall. Nightmarish in quality, this piece too acts to integrate itself through the undermining of its elements. The patterning of a leopard skin hanging is deemphasized by a raking light that articulates the hung quality of the fabric. In this lighting situation a solid black, minimal, slide box
(as in a surface on which something slides) looses it's physicality and appears as a visual stripe. Only the porkchops remain unaltered by the light, taking on a slightly grotesque humor in their dumped quality. Informed by One Day, 58th Victim acts to document the now distorted memory of how I felt, at the time of it's construction, about a traumatic experience in my past.

One Day II is a piece based on the construction of the same name mentioned earlier in this paper and is an extension upon it. The focus of One Day is on objects, particular objects that seek to document a point in time; One Day II is broader and more abstract in scope encompassing the architectural landscape, and the hours of the day. One Day II utilizes the material reversals used in 58th Victim to emphasize the hung quality of the tiger stripe sky over it's patterning, and to minimalize the physicality of the constructions, through flat lighting, that promoted a planar or more two dimensional reading of them. The twelve constructions; each composed of the same four elements (two four foot by eight foot sheets of braced plywood, a plywood door frame and a five panel door); appeared to be in the process of either becoming a small enclosure or returning to a state where the materials were as yet unformed. The constructions appear to be in the process of becoming
ore or the other; but each construction exists as a complete unit, whole and finished in and of themselves as closer inspection revealed the exposed bolting systems used in each piece, thus reversing the visual effect of stop action that was implied by the placement of the constructions within the gallery. The individuality of each construction was further emphasized by the use of color and a small encaustic object that was specific to each of the twelve constructions. The symbolism of the colors and encaustic objects is associated with a specific hour of the day, using Richardson's Iconology (a seventeenth century book of symbology) and other sources as references.

One Day II operates on two levels, appearing to become and being; this relationship is significant to me at this point of completion of my graduate studies here at Ohio State University. For myself, One Day II speaks of both my stubborn contrariness, in it's refusal to be pinned down to one state of being, and my innate ability to enter most situations "back-asswards" which is part of the humor inherent in attempting to question and juggle as many things as possible at one time. But, further insight into One Day II is telling also of my abilities as both a human being and an artist to meet and successfully cope with those situations as
they present themselves.
FOOTNOTES

3. Ibid., p. 279
5. O. Paz, *The Readymade, Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, Spectrum, p. 84-89
6. L. Lippard, p. 5
10. Ibid.
11. L. Lippard, p. 5
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