EXPLORATION OF SPACE AND LIGHT

A Thesis

Presented in partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School Of the Ohio State University

by

James Virgil Shumate

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1989

Master's Examination Committee

Richard Harned
Richard Roth
Robert Shay

Approved by

Adviser
Department of Art
VITA

1954..............Born, Cleveland Ohio

1984..............B.F.A. Kent State University
                 Kent, Ohio

1989..............M.F.A. Ohio State University
                 Columbus, Ohio

                 Field of Study: Glass
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I believe my creative impulsion comes from a need to control things in my life, and that my art has the ability to take the shape of things which can offer me that control.

I have come to see my sculptural ideas as developing from a my sensitivity, to the visual element: space. The body of work described in this paper, was inspired by experiences I've had in space: walking down a hallway at night lit only by the light streaming through cracked doorways that seem to reshape the hall... the quiet openness of a city street at 4am. on Sunday morning where one can experience the architectural masses and forms with the shapes of the shadows cast by the ever present lights.

During the course of developing this work, I learned to control how one might react both consciously and unconsciously to a particular space. The viewer perceives different levels of visual activity as they move through my installations, which generates in them a quiet uneasiness that heightens their own awareness of where they are in space. By doing this, the viewers judge and review their own perceptions, of space and illusion. They become more in touch with themselves while in my installations.

My first conscious study of perception-related art was the glass sculpture "Untitled Composition #1". (plate I) The piece consisted mainly of a glass plane held vertically
by a partial, frame construction of black glass and mirror. This sheet of glass bisected a variety of black, blown glass shapes, which were glued to it. The effect was that of floating shapes in the glass space. I saw the floating objects as representing a sense of frozen time, while the black glass and mirrors embodied negative space by reflecting images of the floating objects. I sandblasted the image of shadows on the glass plane, which, along with the actual shadows, gave the piece more steps from object to shadow. The sculpture was an attempt to deal with transitional space, light, and shadow. This piece was conceived as being part of a larger whole, in which the objects I created would relate to one another.

I was given the opportunity to work experimentally in a windowless space, which was half of a 14' x 25' storage room. I spent several weeks making components for this installation. My intention was to put the room together very fast, like an action painting, bringing all the components together (light, objects, and paint). By connecting large surface areas from floor to ceiling with paint I appeared to raise up the level of the floor (plate II). I suspended objects in the space and glued objects on plates of glass (plate III). I controlled the lighting, dimming it in certain areas and throwing shadows in other areas.
included mirrors, set at different angles, in the space, to extend it's boundaries. By repeating forms, juxtaposing large shapes to details, and controlling light and shadow in the installation, I was working on a "whirlwind" of space; the viewer was to feel as though they were in a tornado of still space, frozen for a split second, free to examine.

Before creating a second installation, I read Wassily Kandinsky's "Point And Line To Plane", his treatise on non-objective painting. In his writing and illustrations, Kandinsky dissected his art elements and established a vocabulary of shapes and forms, in order to experiment and create his vision of non-objective painting.

["Here I seek only to point the way, to establish certain analytical methods and, at the same time, to take synthetic values into account."]

Kandinsky cross references Pictorial Form, (color) to Graphic Form (line); for example, a horizontal line represents the color black, and a vertical line represents the color white. I felt that cataloguing my spatial elements would help me to control my sculptural space similar to the way Kandinsky controlled the space in his paintings.

What I look for is a progression from light to dark, large to small, illusion to reality. Light represents a giving of knowledge or access to the unknown; darkness
represents the unknown or obscured. These associations are in line with traditional views.

( LIGHT ) radiance, brilliance, clearness, splendor, illuminate (LIGHT OF) with knowledge of, because of ( SEE THE LIGHT ) come into being, exist,( DARK ) dim, shadowy, vague, gloomy, obscure, uninformed, unaware,( DARKNESS ) concealment, isolation.

Also the objects, shadows, and color have their purpose in my work. The objects are fragments of reality in an illusionary space, the shadows represent a transition from non-existence to reality, and the light is the spirit of the work.

The first installation helped me to judge the amount of emphasis each element should have in this space. In the second installation, I decided to pare down and control the elements. The piece was again set in the 14'X 25' foot room; this time the lighting in the room was subdued. I used large pieces of black tar paper to cover areas of the floor and walls, along with 1/4 inch steel rods that went from floor to ceiling (plate IV). I painted portions of the steel rods white to camouflage them against the white walls. These steel rods, along with a hanging steel screen and, a two foot glass cube, were placed about the room, to interact with the viewers and to guide them as they moved though the space. The light sources were white neon and fluorescent
lamps (plate V). The neon was an exposed bright curved blue/white mark that gave sharp, reflections and shadows. A fluorescent lamp was positioned behind a column of white paper stretched from floor to ceiling, emanating white light from the corner of the room. It became apparent to me how critical the quality and source of light might be in my work.

At this time my work was evaluated by my graduate committee. They brought to my attention the existence of other artists who work with light. One artist they identified, whose works and ideas have influenced my thinking is James Turrell. Turrell's art deals exclusively with light that creates atmospheres of colored space. James Turrell said of his art work ("Amba" plate VI).

["I'm interested in playing with not only the physical limits of how we perceive, but the learned limits. As you look at a piece or an experience, you assemble the piece. As you move on it, you can reassemble it. And the fact is that you can go back in, and assemble it again, to its original state. And yet having done that doesn't steal its magic. It's very important to me that you see it one way at first, and then it reveals itself as something else. Then you go back and see that initial way again. Seeing yourself see."]

What impressed me most about Turrell's work was his in-depth study of the mechanisms of human perception, resulting in a phenomenal control of the spaces in which he worked. Although my work differs from Turrell's, I embraced
his "spacial" use of light.

In my third installation, I continued using the same 14'X 25' storage room. I decided to create passages of light connected together by objects floating in the space, declaring the transition between the light and dark (plate VII). I constructed planes with light and shadow, a glass cube that glowed from within, and a floating light source that would emanate light through a sheet of green plate glass (plate VIII). There was a large curved reflective black mark, that represented negative space, which distorted and reflected the light sources in the room. There was also a curved, steel screen and two wire frame cubes which represented the flux between the material and the immaterial (plate IX). All light sources were different in nature, creating several different stations of access to the piece.

My next installation was set as an absolutely black void, in which the viewer was presented with an interior space of activity. I wanted the viewers to feel as though they were in a void, centered around a module of shapes, forms, and light. Steel white lines penetrated the space from floor to ceiling. White wire frame cubes of differing shapes and sizes, floated in the space. Panels of sheer white fabric dissected the interior. These objects were activated by two
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neon blades of light: a long thin white one, and another, shorter one, with a pink cast. All the objects in the space were painted white and seemed to glow in the colored lights. I dimmed the intensity of the light in order to unify the installation. The phenomenon of illusions from the light, combined with a sheet of plate glass which reflected sections of the interior, created a column of activity as one moved through the piece.

My final installation as a graduate student took place in the Hopkins Hall Art Gallery. The gallery, 50'L X 25'W X 11'H was the largest space I worked with to date. For my thesis exhibition, I decided to focus on my concerns of light and space, but along with this I felt a need to look at the space differently. I have an object-orientated background in sculpture and glass. I feel that through my research I progressed from using objects to activate a space, to working with the space as an object.

The gallery became a large rectangular object that I reshaped using walls and light as my carving tools. I used two neon lamps placed in two steel tubes with slits running from floor to ceiling, which gave a controlled directional light. These lights cast shadows on two steel rods that ran from floor to ceiling and finished out three sides of two large illusionary planes (plate X). The walls in the installation, were deflectors and receivers of
light. By stopping the light and producing shadows, the walls created large illusionary volumes (plate XI). I also created an illusionary plane by using a beam of light emanating from a corner slit of my installed walls.

It was summer, the gallery was air conditioned and considerably cooler than the surrounding hallways. In a partially enclosed corner of the space, there was a luminous sheet of material, back lit with a red neon light, creating a red field of warm light, to enhance people's experience of the temperature change.

This installation represents, to me, the facets of my nature as a person. The range of views my personality can take, from the dark hidden areas (illusionary and real) to the lit areas that create other facets. In this maze, a heart exists giving it the life it needs.
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