PAINTERLY OBJECT

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Painterly Object

Critique of architectural concepts is a method of composition. The attempt to rigorously unravel the abstract relationships set in architecture eventually forms an architectural composition. The aesthetic effects that this method of composition delivers will be discussed in this essay. The critique of architectural concepts will bring to the fore the applicability of painterly composition to architecture and the aesthetics born from the union of architectural and painterly composition. Volumetric objects with painterly effects will be examined to formulate this new kind of aesthetics. Composition, as understood both in the domain of painting and architecture, will produce a new kind of architectural object with painterly qualities.

On Composition

Formally, composition is an architect's essential activity. Composition, as an idea, is not simply the accidental coming together of different objects, but a certain relationship implied by the act of posing at least two objects together. In an architectural composition the objects that are posed together are called elements. Elements are considered as simples within the framework of composing. Nonetheless, from a historical perspective they are synthetic since they come to be through creative processes. The proposition that there is a relationship between the elements of composition and that the totality of the elements forms something more than the simple sum of the elements is self-evident in the field of architecture. In other words, architectural composition is never a collage. Who would doubt that a composite of windows in walls on a base covered with a roof doesn't add up to some architectural entity, possibly a house? Most would doubt, however, the identity of the composite. In between the transition from an architectural composition to an architectural entity there is a cloudy area. In that cloudy area breathes the creative genius of the architect.

In order to capture an adequate notion of the architectural composition, one must have an understanding of the aspirations of architecture as a field. However contradictory it may sound, the field of architecture is both art and science – a centaur endowed with both the hominoid aesthetic intellection and the equiterial capability and practicality. The field of architecture can be reduced neither to the Galerie des Machines (1886-1889), a constructive experiment finding perfection in touching the limits of the

rules of geometry and the laws of gravitation, nor to a transcendentally abstract design for instance Disney Concert Hall by Gehry Partners, LLP. The field of architecture aspires to provide new pathways to the abstract while fulfilling practical responsibilities. Therefore, an architectural entity is a solid object with sensible and human qualities that at the same time provides a pathway to the abstract reality beyond these qualities.

On this ground the field of architecture can be defined as the field between opposite poles: utility and abstraction. The interplay between the two poles is the architectural dynamic that produces the history of architecture as it extends. The idea of an architectural dynamic shouldn't be interpreted as to assert that there is a spirit of architecture that drives the interplay of the two opposite poles toward some aesthetic perfection. Rather the idea of an architectural dynamic expresses the mortal challenge to existentiate an entity that captures both the human and the supra-human. The idea thus engenders a sublime challenge that stands in no need for a perfect end but in absolute need for fresh beginnings.

Jacques Lucan's Composition and Non-Composition traces the lifelines of this interplay of opposites. Lucan begins by exposing the closed order of Jean Durand, who lead the Ecole Polytechnique from 1796 to 1833. Jean Durand attempted to conceive "a procedure to be followed in the composition of any project." His attempt consisted in moving architecture away from ossified ideals such as the Vitruvian triad and brining architecture closer to the ideals of utility and efficiency. According to him, architecture had a function and hence a purpose to fulfill. The function of architecture was to utilize and delineate space in the most efficient way to construct living spaces in terms of commodity. The beauty, say in the form of a pleasing picturesque abstraction, could not be but an accidental quality revealed only on the exterior. For instance, Durand considered symmetry as functional element in composition; however, should the symmetry of composition served a sense of beauty to the viewer, then that sense of beauty would be an accidental feature of the functionality of symmetry.

On Objecthood and Painting

Traditional painting is representational. It results as the the objects of the outside world reflect onto the imaginary plane of the mind, a picture plane. The representational relationship between the mind and the world is one of molding. The mind molds the

world into mental content and projects the molded world onto the canvas. This projected world, whether appropriable or abstract, remains within the boundaries of conceivable representations. (…) The representational nature of traditional painting is intact even in the works of one of the most disruptive painters: Pablo Picasso. Picasso's Ma Jolie (1912), a painting of a woman holding a guitar, regardless of its unique geometry, is still a figure in space, a representation. This painting looks abstract; however, it is still using the canvas as a screen to project a representation of the reality. The aesthetic effect of the painting takes place as a mental event independent of the objecthood of the painting, that is the surface and dimensions of the canvas and the paint.

Before the surface took the prominent role in painting, painting stood as an arrangement of objects but not as an object in itself. The painting traditionally behaved as a screen that allowed the arrangement of objects to yield representations. On the flatbed picture plane (Steinberg), the traditional arrangement of objects becomes an arrangement of qualities that yield a singular object. Flatbed painting is not representational. It does not reflect objects of the outside world onto an imaginary plane of the mind. Instead it fuses the outside world and the mind and creates an object in itself that is both mental and real at the same time. (Graham Harman)

Moreover, there is a foundational principle that grounds traditional painting from the very beginning. Steinberg names that principle as "the human erect position" [1]. This position establishes a heavenly line stretching from top to the bottom, which captures vertically the picture plane. The viewer stands upright, observes the painting, and the visual field expands from the top to the bottom. Every possible interpretation of the viewer inadvertently originates and flows down the heavenly line. The role of the human erect position in the interpretation of the painting remains uncontested until Rauschenberg, and Pollock introduce the flatbed technique during the fifties

The flatbed picture plane, breaks the primacy of the heavenly line. Instead of a vertical flow, the flatbed picture plane constitutes an indeterminate expanse in every direction. The molding mind ceases to function properly within this indeterminate expanse, and the representational reflection of the outside world onto the mind becomes obscured. In the indeterminate expanse objects are fragmented into perceptual pieces rather than unified as representations. The role of the surface in the fragmentation of the objects is pivotal. The surface, instead of welcoming the information as a unifying plane,

1 Steinberg, Leo. "The Flatbed Picture Plane." Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-century Art. New York: Oxford UP, 1972. 61-98. Print.

distorts the incoming information from the object. The surface changes the traditional picture plane, conceived as a recipient that let the objects be arranged as they ought to appear to the mind, into a melting pot that converts the objects to uncanny perceptions. This alternative picture plane transmutes the painting into an object in itself. The flatbed picture plane offers not the glimpse of a world, but a scrap of printed material.

The flatbed object, as opposed to the traditional painting, promotes objecthood over mental agreeableness. The flatbed object has sensible qualities and volumetric dimensions, rendering it unfitting for a simple mental representation. Rauschenberg's Bed provides an instance of the flatbed object. The bed has depth, that is the height of the bed. The height of the bed frees the painting from the representational realm defined by two dimensions. If the bed were to be figured within the two-dimensional realm, then the concrete object constituted of paint and canvas would be translated into a mental construct representing a bed. The height must be added as a mental construct to the two-dimensional figure of the bed in order to suggest that the figure of the bed indeed represents a bed. In contrast, in Rauschenberg's Bed, the height added as a real dimension denies the possibility of mentally constructing a representation by immediately revealing a concrete bed. In other words, the painting becomes an object in itself, rather than a clue for a mental construct.

Paintings of Jackson Pollock are also tangible and volumetric, and thus have depth. However, the sense of depth emanating from his paintings significantly differ from that of Rauschenberg's pieces. The depth of Pollock's paintings rather emerges as a result of his method. His method of dripping paint on a horizontal canvas results in a large conglomeration of colors. During the painting process, the colors are laid on the canvas. The accumulation of the paint on the canvas builds depth incrementally on the canvas. Consequently, the canvas and the accumulated paint merge to deliver the dimension of depth. The merging together of the canvas and paint through the dimension of depth shifts the status of Pollock's paintings from a painting to an object.

Little Blank Riding Hood, 1962 is a peculiar example of the flatbed object. This painting of Larry Bell consists of a red volume painted on a canvas. On behalf of his work Larry says that the painted colored area was an attempt to alter the volume within the canvas plane[1]. The canvas used was not a regular one with rectangular shape with a two-dimensional space for the painting to take place. It is then evident that the empty

1 Kohn, Adrian. "Work and Words." Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface. By Robin Clark, Hugh M. Davies, and Michael Auping. San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2011. 154. Print.

Fig. 01. Larry Bell, Little Blank Riding Hood, 1962. Acrylic on shaped canvas, 65 × 65 x 2 1/4 in. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Gift of Murray Gribin.

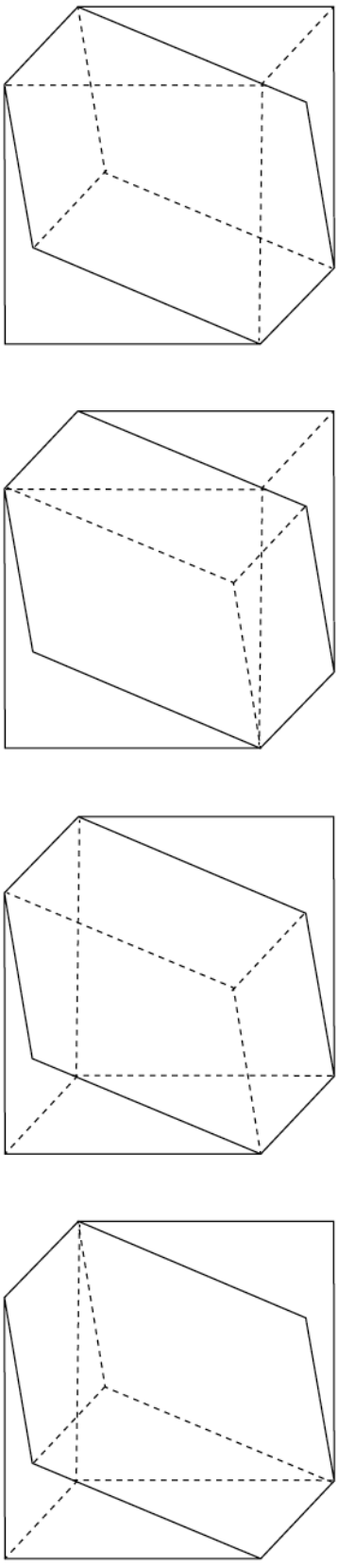

Fig. 02 Schematic reproductions of Larry Bell, Little Blank Riding Hood, 1962, with alterations. From: Kohn, Adrian. “Work and Words.” Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface. By Robin Clark, Hugh M. Davies, and Michael Auping. San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2011. 154-155. Print.

painting fails to fulfill the essential qualities of a traditional image plane from the outset.

As Adrian Kohn discusses works of Larry Bell, he uses in his essay schematic reproductions of Little Blank Riding Hood, visualizing Larry Bell's flat painting as two volumes overlaid on top of each other. Technically, Little Blank Riding Hood is composed of a red prism painted on top of a white cube. Since the white cube is not painted on the canvas, but rather is the canvas, the red prism and the white cube taken together transmute into a singular object that transcends the two-dimensional setting of the canvas. Therefore, the canvas and the red prism are perceived together as an object, and not a representation of two overlaid volumes.

Manipulating Material for Painterly Effects

-material properties --> phenomenological effects --> painterly effects (?)

Larry Bell continues his research about the visual effects of overlaid volumes in his vapor drawings and glass works. Vapor drawings are glass surfaces that are coated with fine reflective particles. The coating is done by a process called thermal evaporation in vacuum (TEV). TEV is a common technique for coating materials with metals. Bell experiments with this method and harnesses TEV to create gradients on glass surfaces. Each of the gradient surfaces, just like the Little Blank Riding Hood, is a singular object by itself. The gradient surfaces are grafted on the wall and thus produce the same painterly effect as the Little Red. The resemblance is impromptu since, due to the structure of glass, the gradient surface can stand without the support of the wall as opposed to the painting standing in need of that support. Bell later exploits the structure of the glass to create volumetric installations located in three-dimensional space to capture a larger visual field, thus amplifying the painterly effect.

Bell's volumetric installations are painterly objects that repurpose the materials to enrich them painterly qualities. In Bell's work the primary purpose of glass is not to be simply transparent but to create pictorial visions. The transparency of glass naturally filters the environment; however, the filtering differs from the filtering of a window. The filtering, due to the gradient surface of the glass, distorts the environment and thus produce painterly effects.

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Fig. 01. Larry Bell, Untitled, Wall Piece, 1967, Larry Bell. White and black glass, vacuum coated. 120 x 300 in. Collection of Michael Straus, Birmingham, Alabama. from “Untitled, Wall Piece»Pacific Standard Time at the Getty.” Pacific Standard Time at the Getty. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

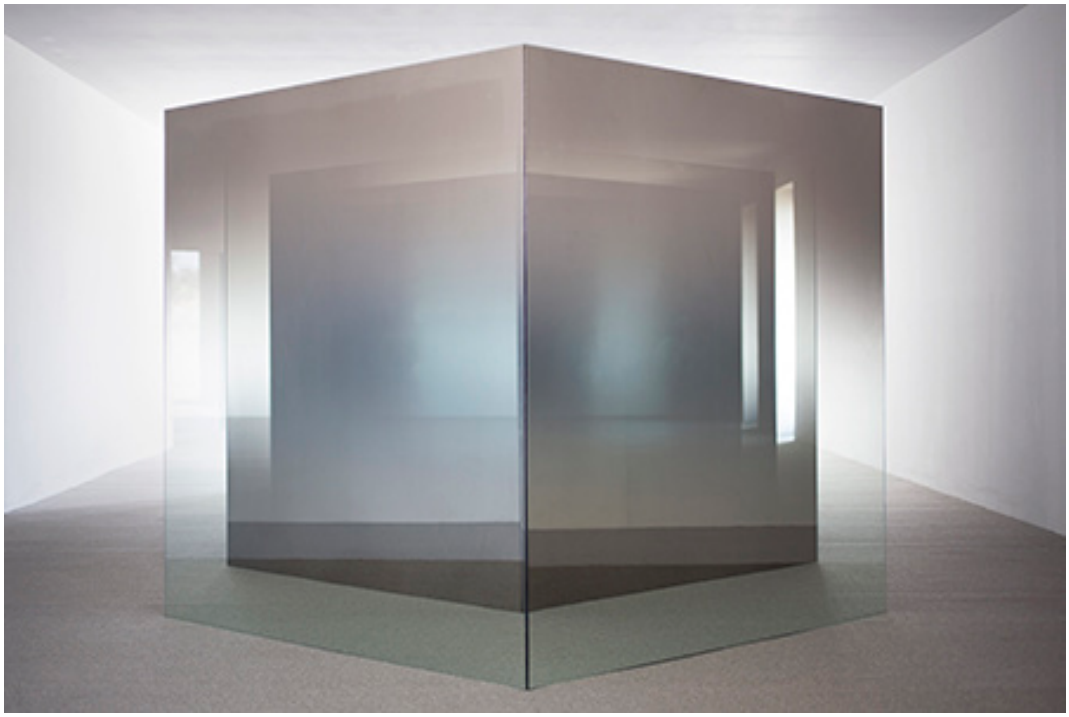

Fig. 04. Larry Bell,Standing Walls II, 1968/2016 Clear and grey tempered glass, Unique, 2 panels grey tempered glass: 243.8 x 182.8 x 1.3 cm, 3 panels clear tempered glass: 243.8 x 182.8 x 1.3 cm, 243.8 x 550.2 x 365.1 cm, Collection Unknown from "Larry Bell From the '60s." Exhibitions — From the '60s — List of works — Standing Walls II — Hauser & Wirth. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

Fig. 05. Larry Bell, 6 X 6 AN IMPROVISATION, 2014, Clear and grey tempered glass, in. Collection of Chinati Foundation, from "LARRY BELL: 6 X 6 AN IMPROVISATION." Chinati. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.

Ken Price's artwork also provides an example of a painterly object, an object with unique aesthetic qualities open to various possible perceptual interpretations. Price exploits the properties of the material to produce painterly effects. His artwork shapes the material to bestow the material with roughness and smoothness as in a sculpture and establishes relations of colors to evoke a chromatic harmony as in a painting. The result is a unique object, a volumetric painting with the tangible qualities of a sculpture.

Designing with clay, Price creates forms that has both soft and rough edges. His "bulbous, suggestive undulating blob, aglow with color" as described by Roberta Smith[1], can often be associated with cartoonish surreal objects. Ken Price, instead of glazing, paints his clay sculptures in multiple layers of color. It is then sanded intricately to selectively reveal the layers of paint, producing the final colorful object. The sanding procedure discloses the various colors embedded in the object and the relations between the disclosed colors brings about painterly effects. Therefore, the sanding procedure binds together the painterly coloration and the sculptural formation,

Price's procedure of production begins with forming and baking the object. Subsequently, the object is painted, and finally it is carved and sanded into a painterly object. The sanding procedure is a spatial exercise that carves the sculpted form of the object. The form of the object influences the disclosure of colors as it conditions the sanding exercise. Conversely, the disclosure of colors influences the final form of the object, since the painterly practice envisioning the coloration of the object frames the disclosure of colors. Therefore, there is an interplay between the form of the object and its painterly qualities. It is this interplay that generates a painterly object.

If the object is depicted during the phase of formation and not of painting, then the object will be seen only according to its form without displaying any painterly quality. Therefore, before the carving, sanding and the subsequent disclosure of colors the object is not a painterly object.

1 Smith, Roberta. "Crucible of Creativity, Stoking Earth Into Art." The New York Times, New York (29 March 2009): n. pag. Print.

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