The Event of Art

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Forms, Appearances, and the Tragic (a first attempt)
Titles (for exhibition)

A title both sums up and opens up a space of understanding of what is to be presented. A Philosopher of Eminence (or is it immanence) or Behold the Man or Murder as One of the Fine Arts or What is Fragile, What is Slow Moving, What is Perishable or Form, Appearance, Imitation or They Do Not “Arrive” from “Elsewhere” or The Sensuous Presentation of the Absolute.

Themes

the alphabet, language as material, letter forms, words as letter forms that reflect and or are transparent, folding, veiling, masking, covering inhabiting, topology, form, from striated to smooth, from variegated to folded and enfolded, opaque and transparent, to both reflect and to cover to uncover, to hide, the flesh of the word, the surface as skin, as never ending, as sensitive to light and temperature, limitless plenitude of living things, capaciousness of forms
What it will look like when I pack up for the show at the Meier building?

Listening to the lectures on tragedy of Simon Critchley where he describes in a lecture on Socrates and Plato, forms, appearances and imitation. I wrote about this to give description to my most recent thoughts on those works that have more volume, more depth, can be approached in the round—thoughts which had occurred to me only after seeing them, seeing them as an ensemble. In working towards the show for the Grand Army Plaza building I could see in certain corners of the building in the gallery space an inset or jag that suggested a vitrine. Here I thought, ah, not just a screen, not just a fabric piece, hanging but a floating rectangle, transparent but floating, so I made one and then another and then another. And these were pure, if you like, and empty, a vessel, a container, a containment. Not only did light pass through it, it trapped space, it defined a clear inside. And what was this, this inside-outside, this tabernacle, this enclosure, this space of emptiness? What was the space in there, inside the vitrine, empty, but all around me, the space between things, not empty, well empty but I did notice it as empty? So the space framed, shaped was an object, ah, but just an object, but a form, yes a form, this was form. This was something different, Whereas the work In What Language to Come was about the folding, the texture, the prismatic light falling through materials, these shapes suggested three-dimensional works, as Donald Judd would use the term for works somewhere between painting and sculpture.

I started to put objects including gloves, plastic hospital bags, rubber hoses inside the vitrines. The vitrine sets off an object, keeping it away from being touched, keeping it encased, enclosed.
Then I took these objects outside the hanging fabric vitrines and hung them, suspended them above the ground by attaching them to strings I had extended from wall to wall, going lengthwise and widthwise. So there was nothing that touched the floor, nothing that had the solidity to be a self standing object. Things were all held up, but not inflated like a pneumatic, or strung along as in a great number of individual parts of an exploded puzzle. Hanging, a set of connected suspended objects like a mobile in the sense of a Calder mobile or Sarah Sze sculpture installation, made of a network of hundreds of pieces. This is something again different.

This different I wanted to articulate along a line of thought of Forms, Appearances and Imitations. Ah, I thought, here is form, not here is a form. No, this is form. Obviously, this is the simplest of forms, and it is entirely man-made, and made by hand. Made by hand meaning made without tools of calculation, not drafted to then be fabricated, not made with a 3D software program. Because once you see form, everything is form, a form factor, a shape: and suddenly your mind sees it. Not the world as image, but the world as forms, as volumes and folds, as mass and gravity, as weight and bearing, as things, as thingness. And very soon this world of form, of things can get very complicated as forms can get very complex, not just as objects but form becoming, from snails to universes. Very quickly the mind goes not just to objects and forms but to space time.

With this in mind, listening to that part of Critchley’s talk on tragedy. Not simply that explication of ideal forms, but tragedy as intimation and its condemnation, or exclusion — which he explains by way of Judith Butler and others, this idea of turning away from exaggerated lamentation, containing grief, the outpouring, the hysteria, of grief and its imitation in poetry and drama, especially tragic drama — because what is wanted according to Socrates,
is comportment, reason, the appeal to one’s higher self, one’s restrained and measured self, to the reasonable, to reason, logos, logic, dispassion.

With this in mind, I thought through the work with reason being form, reason being abstracted from bodies, reason taking on a logic of its own, reason as pure form. Very soon reason became unreason. Reason became its own tragedy or more precisely, tragic. This made me think of Pasolini, reason’s unreason, the tyranny of reason, reason gone mad.

So, on the one hand there was form, form in the sense of the specific objects of Donald Judd or earth objects of Smithson, his conceptual notion of site and non-site. For a moment let’s leave aside the objects, the forms of Eva Hesse or Lee Bontecou, and why, well because in the sense of Judd or Smithson, these soon become lyric, mythic, anthropologic, literary, and they want to stay clear of that, very clear of that. For Judd it’s form all the way down, and the new industrial materials that create the suburban, forms with those materials that stand outside suburban human time. For Smithson, mineral and crystalline time, time outside human narrative. Forms and shapes and becomings outside biology, which we can see in Hesse and Bontecou.
I read this in the context of minimalism, minimalism as a zero-degree sculpture, as in Carl Andre. And so the artists mentioned above, coming out of minimalism, have a very new sense of objects, process, materiality, object hood, breaking further and further out of the Modernist tradition that comes from Europe. For purposes of contrast, think of Mathew Barney, Jason Rhodes, Sarah Sze: this is a kind of maximalism, where there is so much going on, materially and narratively, tending towards excess. This is not to say that it is excessive at all, it’s just to locate the place of my concerns, which are thinking through, sensually re-imaging this moment of post-minimalism, post-conceptualism of a materiality that’s rather simple, let’s say like Richard Tuttle. This, I think, is a reaction akin to kids now interested in analogue photography — with so much going with the computer, with computation, with software tools, including much of my early work in computational cinema, computer games, the image photograph (the immaterial image, the image of circulation, of social networks) in search, etc. there is desire for the tactile, embodied perception and being, along the lines so beautifully described in the work of Merleau-Ponty.

Now I think it’s impossible to go back. We can’t go back to the moment of material investigation that artists took on from the fifties to the seventies. I think we can take it as a point of departure, a re-orientation to materiality from which new things can be said. That’s the exciting part, and said within a limit. And that’s what all the writing is about, to find that limit that’s productive.
In giving up the outline Cezanne was abandoning himself to chaos of sensation, which would upset the objects and constantly suggest illusions, as, for example, the illusion we have when we move our heads that objects themselves are moving—if our judgment did not constantly set these appearances straight.

He wanted to depict matter as it takes on form, the birth of order through spontaneous organization. He makes a basic distinction not between “the senses” and “the understanding” but rather between the spontaneous organization of the things we perceive and the human organization of ideas and sciences. We see things; we agree about them; we are anchored in them; and it is with “nature” as our base that we construct our sciences. Cezanne wanted to paint this primordial world, and his pictures therefore seem to show nature pure, while photographs of the same landscapes suggest man’s works, conveniences, and imminent presence. Cezanne never wished to “paint like a savage.” He wanted to put intelligence, ideas, sciences, perspective, and tradition back in touch with the world of nature which they were intended to comprehend. He wished, as he said, to confront the sciences with the nature “from which they came.”

By remaining faithful to the phenomena in his investigations of perspective, Cezanne discovered what recent psychologists have come to formulate: the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one. The objects we see close at hand appear smaller, those far away seem larger than they do in a photograph.

(Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cezanne’s Doubt”)

Notes: b

In Deleuze’s lecture on Spinoza, he wants to give us an understanding of Spinoza’s use of affectus and affectio. One concerns feeling and the other affect, that which affects us, has affect distinct from affection as in a feeling of closeness or tenderness.

(http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com/2007/02/on-spinoza.html)