GEOMETRIC AS EXPRESSION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

ART

DECEMBER 2004

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Geometric as Expression

This thesis exhibition, using elements of geometry, is presented as an encounter with ideas linking art to personal experience. It offers an opportunity to connect with simple visual pleasures featuring tall, kinetic, sculptures characterized by geometric design (angles, squares, rectangles, lines, circles and combinations) with movement and spirit. The geometric aspect of the work may be considered an integral part of the beauty of my design which displays the essence of simplicity as a component of a more complex idea related to logical thought. This is a form which is considered geometric because the design appears related more to geometry than to nature.

This work has been created at a time when the barriers and traditions in fine art have ceased to exist and socio-political commentary has become the mission. In the process, art as an object that can speak and enrich life is given little credibility. Yet, creating personal sculpture to be lived with on a daily basis is my chosen direction for visual expression; waters that are by no means uncharted. The work has been created with the knowledge that the genre is not particularly new, in the same sense that the forms used by the minimalists were not really new, except they were newly accepted as art and the process was valued over the non-referential structures. By contrast, my sculpture is referential in intent. The basis of the work will be discussed in general terms related to design, concept, and the notion of spirit.

Early diagrams of geometric forms can be found in the margin illustrations of Elements, Euclid's recorded foundation for geometry from approximately 300 BC. See figure 1.
Relating variations of these forms to art was the contribution of intuitive and objective minimalist geometric modernism (Malevich, Mondrian, De Stijl) in the early twentieth century, but geometric forms per se (Judd, Morris, Andre, Le Witt) did not enter the museums until almost mid-twentieth century.
To fully appreciate geometric design as art, it is necessary to recognize some of the historical background. Elam quotes from Le Corbusier’s 1931 book, *Towards a New Architecture*, "Geometry is the language of man ... he has discovered rhythms apparent to the eye and clear in their relations with one another ... They resound in man by an organic inevitability, the same fine inevitability which causes the tracing out of the Golden Section by children, old men, savages and the learned" (qtd. in Elam 5). This comment is later translated by Etchells in 1986 as "Our eyes are made to see forms in light; light and shade reveal these forms; cubes, cones, spheres, cylinders or pyramids are the great primary forms which light reveals to advantage; the image of these is distinct and tangible within us and without ambiguity. It is for that reason that these are beautiful forms, the most beautiful forms. Everybody is agreed as to that, the child, the savage and the metaphysician" (qtd. in Etchells 29).

My sculpture represents geometric form used as a means to generate specific (for me) and non-specific (for the viewer) interpretations of the work, generally keeping in mind the golden section proportion (1:1.618), yet not searching for precise measurement formulas. "These principles include an understanding of classic proportioning systems such as the golden section and root rectangles, as well as ratios and proportion, interrelationships of form, and regulating lines" (Elam 5). The sculpture, *Square Nautilus*, a diminishing spiral, is used as a specific example of geometric proportion from Elam’s book (35). See figure 2. The other sculptures in this exhibit, while visually geometric, represent a less quantifiable geometric approach.
In addition to being geometric in design, my work is larger than human scale. This changes the relationship of the viewer to the work and the viewing distance. Unlike smaller works where the observer must move close in to see it, the observer tends to move away from larger works. My work remains approachable by virtue of its non-domineering linear quality. In a landscape setting, the works must be of sufficient scale so they are not dwarfed by other elements. "Scale can be manipulated to involve viewers by making them feel they are changing in size. When presented with a Lilliputian village, we become towering Gullivers; when presented with works that have the appearance of being created by giants, we become like Lilliputians" (Zelanski and Fisher 24). My work falls in between these two extremes.

Characteristics of good design are described by Jay Kappraff. (1)

1. Repetition—some patterns should repeat continuously.
2. Harmony—parts should fit together.
3. Variety—it should be nonmonotonous (not completely predictable).

The simple vertical repetition of angles, one of the seven line groups discussed in *The Surface Plane*, creates a stylized form purged of all incidental
information (Boles and Newman 50). This repetition of a shape can physically end, yet it can continue as a visual extension or afterimage in our mind.

Kinetic movement, maintained in a subtle range, has the specific purpose of giving the work a dynamic component, representing an inner life. Inner life or internal qualities may seem somewhat metaphysical, but kinesis is implied by altering the static state. On an expressive level, where the optical dynamics makes a personal connection with the viewer, it is not art about art. The viewer's interpretation of my pieces for this exhibition becomes the meaning. Quite simply, it is not what you see but what you think when you see it.

In addition to literal kinetics, the vertical format also implies visual kinetics that can be continued in the imagination. This can be readily observed in two-dimensional works. "Kandinsky’s course of analytical drawing was concerned with the extraction of inner lines of force from the complex of forms presented; the objects were considered as energy-tension and the composition reduced to an arrangement of lines expressing these tensions" (de Sausmarez 70). See figure 3. This principle holds true for three dimensional works as well, although it may not be as apparent in sculpture of orderly design.

Of particular note, is the fact that the kinetics of my work is due to the designs and the inherent properties of the material. There are no moving parts, no motor, no churning or engagement of gears. The movement is noiseless and is generated by wind currents and the flexibility of the material. The kinetic response is as natural as that of a tree in the wind and continuously changes. "When a sculpture displayed in a gallery does somehow seem compelling, our attention is sustained by an intensified visual and kinesthetic engagement with it
which is continually changing and shifting register. This is what makes its fixed shape and substance come alive" (Potts 1). A fixed shape has the potential for this optical movement. This optical dynamic is a characteristic in my work.

Figure 3: Basic Design: The Dynamics of Visual; Form, Chapter 6, Visual Kinetics, de Sausmarez (70).
Speaking of spirit and soul in sculpture, without religious reference, does not imply that the sculptor is considered a spiritual agent although numerous sculptors in the past have sought this quality. "And yet the attempt must be made, because again and again, against the ideology of Modernism, many of the most significant artists throughout the twentieth century have insisted on the spiritual nature of their work ... The ideological construct of Modernism would appear to collapse before the actuality it claims to describe and, at that moment, a new imperative is born – the need to locate what has been suppressed and denied by so many critics: the spiritual dimension of modern art" (Abbs 166). This metaphysical quality is not easy to discuss, but I want it to be part of my work, recognized and appreciated by the viewer. How it is created, how the sculpture is transformed, is even less definable. Quite possibly it depends on the sculptor’s intention, skill, imagination, and the viewers' receptiveness to a spiritual, not religious, understanding. When and if this occurs, the sculpture has transcended its nature as an object and become an experience. If the artist has to say it has spirit, it has already become part of my work and how it will be constructed with simplicity of design and subtlety of kinesis that suggest meaning beyond the object. My work is decidedly minimalist in appearance yet anti-minimalist in intent. A contradiction that seems less radical when one takes a closer look at the minimalists of the sixties as a diverse group. "By the late sixties minimalism had become a neutral style label... and the practices it designated entered the museum and the canon of art history. The general acceptance of “minimalism” as a leading movement of late twentieth-century art dates to this assimilation."
And yet one problem with art-historical rubric of this kind is its assumption that work identified by a single name shares a formal identity, and the artists so designated share a common understanding. In the case of minimalism this could not be more mistaken” (Meyer 3).

I reconcile my work with minimalism by adapting a shared minimal aesthetic of simplified form. What I think about my work and its intended meaning beyond what is seen is more important. I value the evidence of the artist’s hand, the individuality of the work and the open interpretation by the viewer.

Along with creativity comes discovery. In my case it was the recognition that a fortuitously selected material had the potential to accomplish my goal for incorporating kinetics into my sculpture. Aluminum 6061 is a heat treated aluminum alloy that can be cold worked and retain its flexibility. This material can be manipulated without stress fractures in the slip roller or the Hossfeld Universal Bender. It is the perfect solution for the work I wanted to produce that would be larger than human scale and subtly move with wind currents.

All my work for this exhibition is geometric in design but can be divided into groups based on my goals for the individual pieces. One group is a series based on pure geometry called Euclid's Dream (Plates I – IV). It includes the repetition of angles vertically. One of these sculptures is simple angles; other pieces transform the angles into parallelograms, rectangles, squares and diamonds. All these works, intended for personal gardens or landscape settings, are geometric but interact with organic forms. Their movement in the wind integrates them with the environment so they seem more natural and less foreign. The work, Angles into Squares and Diamonds (Plate IV), is composed of two
relating vertical angle forms. The relationship of the angles changes depending on the direction of the viewer; from a straight forward view it appears as two verticals; from the side the angles become squares; and from a three-quarter view they form diamond shapes. They all cast interesting shadows in the sunlight.

The second group includes Night Surf (Plate VIII) and Night into Morning (Plate X). They are still geometric, but emphasize a more metaphysical or expressive meaning. Placing a geometric form between two black verticals directs vision toward the in-between space. The black verticals can represent night, mystery, or other things. It is an open invitation for varied interpretations.

Two pieces can be loosely categorized as a third group. One is Cycles (Plate VII), the interaction of two circles, where the continuity of the circles needs to be completed visually by the viewer. It is the undefined space, a break in continuity, which represents the unknown in cycles. The other, Square Nautilus (Plate V), is a precise geometric work that shares characteristics with the natural nautilus.

The untitled sculpture (Plate VI) uses geometric elements to create an image that appears somewhat organic, a fantasy plant form. This work has the potential to elicit the most varied interpretations of any of the works that are presented in this exhibition. It is a landscape piece that is meant to provoke the imagination with a little humor.

Installation for this exhibition represents my intention for the sculpture to be located in an outdoor setting with eight works, Plates I – VIII, placed by groves of bamboo and in elevated planting areas leading to the Commons Gallery. The three larger works, Plates IX – XI, are shown inside the Commons Gallery.
The economy of form of the work in this thesis exhibition represents ideas beyond their appearance. My sculpture represents, for me personally, an exploration of my experiences, a personal aesthetic developed over the years and the effect these factors have on my imagination. For example, *Night into Morning* (Plate X) is the compressed emotion of an early morning sunrise on a Kailua beach. The sculpture is not about the beauty of the panorama; it is the essence of the event as a personal emotion when we are keenly aware of our aliveness. In a more general sense, my aspiration is to reaffirm that we can communicate through a lexicon of made objects.
Works Cited


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