Human Perceptions of Light, Space and Technology

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In Los Angeles during the 1960s, a group of artists strove to create works that would bring a heightened sense of awareness to viewers’ perceptions of light and space. Surrounded by anxieties around nuclear technology, Light and Space artists like James Turrell\(^1\) and Robert Irwin\(^2\) used their work to address this period of technological excitement and uncertainty. Embracing neon, resin, plastics and metals, they used aerospace materials to make works that invited the viewer to escape a world in which these very technologies threatened to make disappear. Issues of altering human perceptions of light and space are at the heart of my summer fellowship project. In particular, I studied and experimented with the power of interactions between material and immaterial media to create immersive experiences that value subjective human perceptions.

My project consisted of two interrelated parts: first, I studied and visited Light and Space artworks in the Los Angeles area—particularly those influenced by the 1960s Light and Space movement—to examine the multiple strategies implemented by artists in their use of dematerialized forms and spatial environments; second, I produced a collection of sketches, watercolors, photographs, and sculptural pieces motivated by my experiential responses to these installations. Thus, I have built an encyclopedia of tactics through which Light and Space artists contended with the physicality of space and immateriality of light.

As I studied how Light and Space artists responded to Southern California’s aerospace industry and commercial culture, my own work translates and communicates personal interests in human perception as influenced by light and space within Los Angeles’ modern landscape. My own artistic practice already tackles minimalistic forms that convey movement within a single frame or limited space.\(^3\) Many works are connected with a common theme of installation art. I have a strong inclination towards integrating materials within a space to provide physical markers of human experiences and emotions. These previous explorations of material furthered my ability to effectively transform and incorporate dematerialized forms into my existing practice to alter human perceptions of the natural world.

In the fall, the exhibition and artist talk of my summer work will consist of three parts: first, photographs, videos, color swatches, and sketches that capture key aspects and tactics of the Light and Space works and how they produce this gray area between an anxiety towards and celebration of technology; second, a collection of my own reflections as well as plans towards my installations and sculptural pieces; third, a site-specific installation that will evolve from my experimentations with light and space. Additionally, I sought to incorporate colors, materials, and symbols that speak to my reality as a female artist of color working within a movement that is dominated by white male artists.

Following my summer project, I will be conducting an independent study in Visual Arts under the advisement of Professor Jackie Brown. I will be building off of my summer portfolio to create larger installations in spaces on the Bowdoin College campus to further my understanding of Light and Space within a different environment and culture. My final senior project during the Spring 2016 semester will continue to build on this study, as I plan to apply strategies of Light and Space art to my own personal circumstances and contemporary references. After graduation, I plan to pursue a Masters in Fine Arts with a focus on installation art. Additionally, I will be working towards applying to the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship program in the fall, bringing this project to be the foundation from which my creative process and understandings of visuality, materiality, and spatiality will emanate.

Faculty Mentor: Jackie Brown
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\(^1\) [http://www.jamesturrell.com](http://www.jamesturrell.com)

\(^2\) [http://www.pacegallery.com/artists/211/robert-irwin](http://www.pacegallery.com/artists/211/robert-irwin)

\(^3\) [http://www.rachelleezheng.com](http://www.rachelleezheng.com)