

HAP TIVEY

Fourth Situation

FINE ARTS GALLERY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE
APRIL 2 - MAY 8, 1976

"Generally speaking, color directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul."

Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, New York, Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947.

"(Man) forgets that form is a condition and that in reality form does not exist. How, then, can he reveal stimulus when stimulus is not a form and has no limits?"

Kazimir Malevich, quoted by Max Kozloff, *Artforum*, Vol. XII, No. 5, January 1974.

"The light is not in the body alone, nor is it only outside the body. Mountains and rivers and the great earth are lit by sun and moon. All that is this light . . . understanding and clarity, perception and enlightenment, and all movements (of the spirit) are likewise this light . . ."

Huang-ti nei-ching su-wen, a Taoist work purportedly from the mythical ruler Huang Ti, quoted by Richard Wilhelm in *The Secret of the Golden Flower, A Chinese Book of Life*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1931.

"Perceiving brings one to the goal."

Confucius, quoted by Wilhelm in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.

The light installations of Hap Tivey fuse and extend two major traditions in 20th century art; first the interest in non-representational or non-objective forms as a means to transcend from the material to the spiritual plane, as exemplified in the writings of Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich or Wilhelm Worringer, and secondly the use of large scale, minimal forms to focus on perceptual phenomena. The latter development is manifested with different nuances on the East and West Coasts. The primary structures of artists like Carl Andre or Donald Judd are literalist in nature. It is obvious that Andre's floor pieces or Judd's boxes are what they are. There is no doubt about their size, shape or structure. They are rational, modular and mathematical. Nonetheless one of the most interesting characteristics of these pieces is the dichotomy they set up for the viewer between conceptual and perceptual information. Although we know intellectually that each modular component of the mathematically conceived pieces is identical in size and shape, visual perceptual distortions make each module appear slightly differently. These visual illusions, however, are generated by the viewer looking at simple, literal materials, as opposed to artist-created illusions of things which are not actually inherent in the materials themselves, such as the traditional perspectival illusion of deep space on a flat surface. West coast artists like Robert Irwin or Larry Bell also use large scale, minimal forms, but deliberately manipu-


late the materials in such a way that their physicality is denied. Ephemeral perceptual illusions are created so that the viewer no longer knows what is being observed — actual material, like glass or plastic, or less substantial phenomena like light, shadow or empty space.


Although Tivey's work has a strong generic relationship to the West Coast aesthetic which focuses on the perception of light and space, it also derives from life experiences outside art. The son of a physicist, Tivey studied physics and math before changing his major to art in his senior year. In other words, his scientific knowledge in a sense predates his aesthetic activity, in contrast to many artists using technologically complex processes whose largely self-taught skills are acquired after traditional art training. Tivey's other life interest, which is equal in intensity to his art activity, is the study and practice of Zen. Far from merely an intellectual or academic interest, Tivey's involvement in Zen has taken the form of a year's rigorous training in a traditional Japanese monastery. It is interesting to observe in his biography that his emerging commitment to art seems to parallel his developing commitment to the study of Zen. Although he left the monastery in order to resume his art work, I sense that for him the making of art and the practice of Zen are simply different outer forms of the same internal activity. Many critics have made indirect references to parallels between West Coast art and Eastern religions or philosophies, but this relationship is the most direct and specific in Tivey's work.

In a lecture given to Irvine students and faculty during the installation of the *Fourth Situation* Tivey spoke in Western, scientific metaphors. For example, he suggested that although we may actually see space as negative and curved rather than the Euclidean space we have assimilated through learning, we don't know what we are seeing because of our conditioned patterns of perception. His goal as an artist is to create "eccentric mind states" (the title of his lecture), that is, situations which allow us to step outside our preconceived ideas of what the world is and give us the opportunity to look into ourselves. By providing a shift of perceptual axis he presents us with new perceptual information, with the intent that we can learn something about ourselves we did not know before we encountered the work of art.

The mechanism which Tivey uses to initiate the perceptual shift is an entire environment in which every detail is considered — the proportions and textures of the floors and walls, the quality and color of the light, shadows and reflections. At the University of California, Irvine, one entered the *Fourth Situation* through a small gallery exhibiting Tivey's drawings of environments, programs of light, and Japanese sages confronting technological light forms — fluorescent tubes, incandescent bulbs and so forth. Proceeding from the exhibition of

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drawings, one walked into a large, apparently empty space in which the wall facing the viewer was composed or broken up into line, space and color by fluorescent tubes extending from floor to ceiling. Fluorescent tubes were similarly placed at the two corner edges of the opposite wall. In the middle of this wall a ganz field, or eight foot concave hemisphere, evenly sprayed white, was mysteriously imbedded/suspended with a fluorescent tube on its left side. Programmed "on-off" light and color changes altered the quality of light and space in the entire room.

On first viewing many people thought the ganz field — a structure originally devised by perceptual psychologists — was a flat, circular painting on the wall. Approaching closer, it became evident that the area receded into space, but no boundaries to the space could be perceived. The ganz field phenomenon was originally utilized in experimental situations to test the physiological and psychological reactions to the perception of space without boundaries. (One practical application of this phenomenon is the training of pilots who often unwittingly fly upside down in bad weather.) In nature the only analogous situation would be looking straight up at the sky without any horizon line or other interruption in the visual field. Other analogous experiences occur with anaesthetics or other drugs, or in meditative states. The fact is that viewing the ganz field affects various physiological and psychological changes. It has been demonstrated that gazing at a uniform visual field increases the production of alpha rhythms in the electro-encephalographic spectrum, resulting in an EEG pattern that is also characteristic of experienced meditators.¹ Having nothing to focus upon produces retinal fatigue, and the viewer begins to see phosphenes and colors of his own making, becoming aware of the actual process of perception itself, rather than the perception of an object outside oneself.

To view the third part of the Irvine installation, the observer removed his shoes and walked down a corridor panelled with neutral-colored sound-deadening board, whose soft, textured surface complemented the equally soft and sensuous surface of the gray felt rug. Turning a corner and approaching the end of the corridor, one climbed three beautifully crafted redwood steps to sit on a small platform, covered with gray felt edged with redwood which was anchored with brass nails. This platform extended out into a second ganz field eight feet in diameter, so that one was seated in the middle of boundless space as opposed to seeing it recede from the wall in the outer room. Thus the disorienting effects were magnified. The fluorescent color changes in this space were also more dramatic, particularly a change from a bright, light green to a pulsating, velvety pink/purple, an after-image. Following an initial period of adjustment, most of the color or other phenomena experienced were self-generated, not objectively present. For a

few viewers the perceptual shift away from learned experience was anxiety-producing. Most people, even those not accustomed to viewing contemporary art, responded with positive feelings of calm, peace or serenity, and a large number, including myself, with physical and emotional joy.

Tivey says that he is a traditionalist in the sense that he wants to make beautiful art, that he uses colored light in space because that is a very beautiful thing for him. The perception of color-in-itself has been a major concern of many artists in the twentieth century, from Josef Albers to Ellsworth Kelly, just as the perception of light and space has been a motivating force in the art of West Coast artists like Bell, Irwin or James Turrell. Tivey extends both these traditions by presenting the opportunity for the experience of highly saturated color suspended in space, without the physical sensation of an object — pure, colored light.

I find the experience of Tivey's work highly exhilarating. Because I cannot perceive any object in the ganz field, I feel no separation between myself and what is out there, but rather a part of the color and space — expanding, contracting, floating, pulsating, advancing, receding, tingling with a kinesthetic sensation that is experienced as synonymous to the perceptual color vibrations. I experience these ineffable sensations in a state that I can only describe as being identical with my perceptual field. The sense of loss of self and merging with a greater force, energy, being, which is part of my experience of Tivey's work assumes a truly spiritual dimension for me, alternately described by psychologists as an altered state of consciousness or ecstatic state.

I feel that the spiritual parameters of contemporary art have been largely neglected in the emphasis on the scientific and secular characteristics of our time. In fact Tivey's art and that of many other contemporary artists, especially those who emphasize awareness of the perceptual process, can provide the transcendental experiences of the nature of being for which our society is desperately seeking. In nearly all spiritual traditions light itself has been either a metaphoric or direct component of mystical experience. Focused attention on perceptual processes is a prescribed spiritual exercise, particularly in Zen.² The congruent experiences of altered or mystical states of consciousness attained through art and various spiritual practices provide mutual validation for both areas of endeavor. Much contemporary art is so esoterically predicated on a complex internal dialogue that it is incomprehensible except to a highly educated elite. I see increasing evidence, however, that much contemporary art can also speak directly to people's deepest spiritual needs, as Hap Tivey's installations eloquently demonstrate.

Melinda Wertz, 1976

1947 Born April 17, Portland, Oregon.

1955 Moved to Houston, Texas.

1958 Returned to Portland, Oregon.

1964 Introduced to the writing of D. T. Suzuki.

1965 Entered Pomona College as a physics major, sponsored by Lockheed.

1967 Met Toshu Sasaki Roshi, began practicing Rinzai Zen, changed major from physics to math. Began drawing with John Mason.

1968 Met Zenkei Shibayama Roshi and his disciple Gensho Fukushima. Changed major from math to art.

1969 Met Mowry Baden, stopped painting and made large stretched canvases to walk into. Two performances and two shows of large painting/sculptures at Montgomery Gallery. B.A. from Pomona College. I.W. draft classification from U.S. government. Quit making art, moved to the desert and began work as conscientious objector at Angel View Crippled Children's Foundation.

1970-71 Lived alone in a Datsun pickup in the desert, practiced Zazen and maintained correspondence with Gensho Fukushima in Japan. Made images on sand dunes for the wind.

1971 Met Jim Turrell. Returned to Claremont Graduate School, exhibition of light sculptures in Libra Gallery, compiled resource text on light for Turrell's class, built fire tunnels, lived in a tree house in the mountains.

1972 Met Doug Wheeler, built *First Situation* for low light using six frequency geodesic dome, began showing light projections of kerosene lamps, found funding for *Second Situation*, began making films.

1973 Built black environment in Vancouver, B.C. Moved to Pasadena studio and built *Second Situation*. M.F.A. from Claremont Graduate School. Studied privately with Gensho Fukushima during his one year stay in Claremont.

1974 Showed Pasadena Studio. Compiled documentation of light programs, projections and spaces. Began showing films. Shibayama Roshi died. Left for Hofuku-ji monastery in Japan to study with Fukushima Roshi.

1975 Left Hofuku-ji monastery and began constructing *Third Situation* in New York.

1976 Visiting artist at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and the University of Colorado, Denver. Taught science at Otis Art Institute, installed *Fourth Situation* at University of California, Irvine.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to the sponsors of this exhibition, The Student Affairs Committee for Arts and Ms. Carolyn Rowan, without whose generosity neither the exhibition nor the catalogue would have been possible. Paul Tzanetopoulos, a graduate student at Irvine, provided invaluable assistance with installation, as did Chris Jones, a Claremont Graduate School student. I thank John Elliott, Assistant to the Dean, for his advice and support, Helen and Charles Righter for their photographs, and David Anderson of Typecraft, Inc., Pasadena, for his sensitive catalogue design. Most of all I thank Hap Tivey, not only for making his beautiful art, but also for the privilege of knowing and working with him.

MELINDA WORTZ

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First photograph, *Fourth Situation, Part I*, 16' x 38' wall with four eight-foot, daylight, fluorescent tubes.

Second photograph, *Fourth Situation, Part II*, 16' x 24' wall, 8' ganz field, four eight-foot, warm white and one six-foot, daylight fluorescent tubes.

Photograph on insert, *Fourth Situation, Part III*, corridor, 8' ganz field chamber, six-foot, cool green fluorescent tube.

Footnotes

1. Interview with Edward Wortz, PhD, experimental psychologist, June, 1976.
2. See *The Surangama Sutra* translated by Charles Luk, London, Rider and Company, 1966, especially pp. 31-38. A modern spiritual master, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, uses specially prepared room environments whose physical structure and qualities of light are designed to enhance self awareness.