ISENHOUR, MARY M. Cube Constructions. (1970) Directed by: Mr. Walter Barker. pp. 5

A means of physically involving the observer in an aesthetic experience with a three-dimensional art form is illustrated in a series of plywood cube constructions which permit the creation of random relationships of color and form. Five cubes 16x16x16 inches and one large cube 30x30x30 inches with machine parts recessed in each were exhibited at the Weatherspoon Gallery.

# CUBE CONSTRUCTIONS

by

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CATALOGUE

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|---|---|
| LIME CUBE | PLYWOOD 16x16x16 inches |
| PINK CUBE | PLYWOOD 16x16x16 inches |
| BLUE CUBE | PLYWOOD 16x16x16 inches |
| PURPLE CUBE | PLYWOOD 16x16x16 inches |
| YELLOW CUBE | PLYWOOD 16x16x16 inches |
| RED CUBE | PLYWOOD 30x30x30 inches |
| ORANGE FIELD | PLYWOOD 8x8 feet |

After several unsuccessful attempts at changing my approach to painting, I recalled an old carburetor that I had noticed among some pieces of sculpture at a friend's house in California. When I asked about the carburetor, the owner remarked that it was one of her favorite objects and as deserving of appreciation as any other three-dimensional form.

Remembering the carburetor motivated me to consider machine parts in my work. I developed an appreciation for the unique character of mass produced parts while selecting pieces from tons of scrap metal; and, since I wanted color in whatever evolved with the parts, I painted several of them with combinations of high gloss enamels. At first I conceived a relief construction consisting of the painted metal objects arranged on a plywood support; however, Will Insley suggested that a three-dimensional form might be more effective.

With the assistance of a cabinetmaker, I built several cubes in which to place the objects. After the completion of one cube, I noticed that the cube strongly suggested something to be played with or manipulated in some way. In order to capitalize on the manipulative characteristic

of the cubes, I placed the cubes on casters. In doing this I wanted to make the observer a participant along with the artist in creating new patterns by moving the cubes. This was a means of incorporating art as a random experience into my work rather than as an entirely conditioned response.

When a section of the cube construction was exhibited at the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, the director of the gallery mentioned that adults as well as children enjoyed playing with the cubes, and he hoped nothing had been damaged. Since people often are intimidated by the atmosphere of a gallery, I was delighted that the forms had evoked this response since there were no directions indicating that it was permissible to touch and handle the cubes.

These incidents of several years ago prompted the creative process which this paper illustrates. It traces what happens between my first conception and the form it finally produced. My original idea thus expanded to include a concept of the physical involvement of the observer with the art object. This involvement adds another dimension to traditionally experienced art which I believe has inhibited the observer's responses and taught him to relate to art only emotionally or intellectually.

My work incorporates found objects, discovered machine parts, bright commercial color, and involvement on the part of the spectator. The cube constructions include aspects of several directions or movements in contemporary art. Most obvious are the junk machine parts for which the cubes provide an environment. "In England, Paolozzi produced junk machine-parts figures, but has since turned to an art of shiny, new, machine precision, more properly associated with pop art."[1] Herbert Read elaborates further on Paolozzi's use of machine parts. "Until this recent development, which begins in 1961, it was still possible to relate Paolozzi's work to the work of Richier or César, and ultimately to Picasso's (Baboon and Young, 1951). But his new images, functionless machine-tools or sterile computers, derive not, like his previous work, from the débris of industrialism, but from the rational order of technology."[2]

The color-field painters, Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland, greatly influenced my choice of brilliant color

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[1]H. Harvard Arnason, History of Modern Art (New York, 1969), p. 569.

[2]Herbert Read, A Concise History of Modern Sculpture (New York, 1964), p. 235.

enamels on the various metal objects and wooden cubes. Many of these colors are visible in our daily lives on billboards, automobiles, etc.

The cubes invite the observer to become involved with them in the creation of random relationships of color and space. This tends to eliminate the distance between art and the experience of the observer much like the Happenings of the 1950's and the early 1960's.

From these influences and ideas evolved my thesis exhibit consisting of five plywood cubes 16x16x16 inches with metal pieces recessed in each and another larger cube 30x30x30 inches which contains four blocks with metal objects attached. These blocks can also be moved to form a variety of relationships. Each machine part and cube is painted with a combination of three enamel colors. All of the cubes are on plastic casters so that they can be moved on the flat 8x8 foot orange field.

This explanation about the actual work on exhibit traces the origin and development of my idea, indicates how the idea evolved to the actual art object, and refers to the relationships of my cube constructions to past and current directions in art.

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