ACTIVATING SPACE WITHIN THE OBJECT
AND THE SITE

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I look at the world as a sculptor, examining physical constructs and implied meanings. My current research developed from my earlier studies of “containment” or, more specifically, “encapsulation,” creating visual, often physical, boundaries around selected content. Encapsulation confers a more active role than “containment”, a process rather than a result. This idea speaks to the issues of form, and asks the viewer to question the outside “shape of the form” in relation to the inside shape and content.

My work focuses on exposed interior spaces and forms, allowing the viewer to enter the space physically as well as mentally and psychologically. Built in a large enough scale, the viewer could actually become the content. The sculpture’s interpretation revolves around the seen as well as the unseen.

I built this duality into my work by using transparent and opaque materials. I also implemented small diameter stainless steel rod along with the transparent and opaque vinyl to reduce forms to their respective shapes and volumes. This approach allowed me to clean the “slate” of an object’s collective meaning and context, adapting it to the intent of my work.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Explanation of Prior Research

I look at the world as a sculptor, examining physical constructs and implied meanings. My current research developed from my earlier studies of “containment” or, more specifically, “encapsulation,” creating visual, often physical, boundaries around selected content. Encapsulation confers a more active role than “containment”, a process rather than a result. This idea speaks to the issues of form, and asks the viewer to question the outside “shape of the form” in relation to the inside shape and content.

I used sculptural and architectural materials such as stone, metals, glass, and wood in my research of encapsulation. Some of my earlier sculptures dealt more specifically with the idea of containment. They appear as if the contents are physically held back, kept from bursting out. Another dealt with the idea of protecting what was contained, maintaining what was sacred. Still others were created with a sense of utility, containing industrial references. Working through these areas of research, my sensitivity to these concepts has evolved from a buckshot approach to that of a bullet.

My aim became focused, not on the object, but on the spaces within the forms and their associative meanings. The sculptor, Eric Orr, posed the question, “Why is space active and the object passive?” This question has no ready answer, but my work about encapsulation arrived at the point of exploring the possibilities. My studies progressed
from questioning the form to addressing the uncertainty of emptiness. I found that the 
spaces inside my works are as compelling as the physical construct.

My work focuses on exposed interior spaces and forms, allowing the viewer to 
enter the space physically as well as mentally and psychologically. Built in a large 
enough scale, the viewer could actually become the content. The sculpture’s 
interpretation revolves around the seen as well as the unseen.

I built this duality into my work by using transparent and opaque materials. I also 
implemented small diameter stainless steel rod along with the transparent and opaque 
vinyl to reduce forms to their respective shapes and volumes. This approach allowed me 
to clean the “slate” of an object’s collective meaning and context, adapting it to the intent 
of my work.

Often, I was more interested in the interiors of things rather than the exteriors. As 
I had grown in knowledge and consideration of how my sculptures relate to the issues of 
site, I was struck with the idea of site within a sculpture. I believed a sense of place, an 
environment, could be created using “active spaces” and forms. Some of the boxes 
created by Joseph Cornell came to mind when considering created environments. These 
sites can be “entered into” through their constructed spaces, imagery, and associations. 
My work, although considerably different in other ways, achieved a similar effect.

Statement of Problem

I allowed the viewer selected visual access into my sculptures by creating forms 
using transparent and opaque materials. These forms were explored in the context of the 
spaces they create and the spaces they penetrate. These active spaces create voids
amidst the forms, tending to suggest some form of function. Working from the architectural premise of “form following function”, I addressed the question of site within a sculpture.

First, I used additional forms within or outside the primary form to establish relationships and activate the volume. Second, I explored intersecting these multiple shapes and volumes to challenge their individual integrity and bring about new questions of meaning. Third, I incorporated forms that have been constructed out of alternative media to layer additional meanings. The following questions were addressed:

1. How can a combination of solid building and open construction be used to create site and activate space within my sculpture?

2. How can the viewer be drawn psychologically and emotionally into a sculpture where a void exists? Size permitting, will the viewer be physically drawn into a work where only a void exists?

3. Can the scale of a work effect the activation of space and the creation of site within and around the sculpture?

Methodology

I addressed the proposed research by making seven sculptures that explore activating space within the object and the site. I kept a journal of writings and sketches, mounted a professional exhibition, made photographic documentation, and wrote a paper of the research.
CHAPTER 2

SCULPTURE RESEARCH

_Cube, Cone, Rectangular Polygon_

This work represents the freest expression of encapsulation to date. It is not decorative, nor is it functional. It moves beyond these aspects into explorations of the formal elements, their relationships, and further artistic development. _Cube, Cone, Rectangular Polygon_ succeeds in its simplicity most of all. There are no frills to this work. It is purely form and relationship without symbols and ideological baggage. This sculpture has become the benchmark for the research of activating space and creating site within a sculpture.

This first work in a new body of sculpture maintains the architectural influence that I had incorporated in many of my previous works. Simple geometric forms, clean lines, and materials usage all parallel that of architecture. Most of all, the architectural concept of “form following function” implicitly comes through the work and its title, _Cube, Cone, Rectangular Polygon_. A balance was struck in this work between material and immaterial elements, between the seen and obscured spaces that come together to form relationships that suggest action and purpose.

One can see into the sculpture through transparent yellow vinyl and view the stainless steel structure and the forms created inside. The craftsmanship speaks clearly of intent, but the sculpture remains shrouded in minimal ambiguity. A physical opening was
included in the work by means of a conical form, which pierces and activates the interior space. This pierced interior space shares its environment with an opaque cube structure, another relationship suggestive of function.

The scale of this work does not allow one to physically enter, but the warm, yellow monochromatic color and activated interior spaces draw an emotional and psychological interaction. The combination of revealed and obscured spaces creates a sense of public and private space within the sculpture. The parallel to architecture can again be drawn as one considers “lived spaces”. For example, houses are designed for both social and intimate function, reflecting their use and ultimately their users. People, in a simplified way, are like this sculpture, revealing some things and concealing others.

_Cube, Cone, Rectangular Polygon_ has a personality as well, “fleshed out” with warm colors, strong lines, and a smooth polished surface. These outward appearances are kept in check by what lies beneath the surface, that which is kept out of sight. The artist, Joseph Cornell, comes to mind in relation to this work. Cornell has created playful, meaningful, thought-provoking environments within enclosed spaces. His "shadow boxes" are made of mixed media and often contain capsules within capsules. Another artist that can be paralleled to my work is that of the sculptor, Christo. He has mastered the reduction of site to simple forms, no matter how big or small. It is this strangely familiar, but awkward transformation that draws people in to reconsider the implications and purpose of place. _Cube, Cone, Rectangular Polygon_ approaches this form of manipulation on the level of the object versus the reduction of site.
The next sculpture is entitled *Contents*, and it stands out as further evolution of the activation of space and the creation of site within a sculpture. The work is a collective of four identical pieces that are arranged to form an enclosure. The scale was increased so that one can physically enter into the work and thus activate the space that has been created within it. The activated space also takes on the implications of site resulting from the unique environment formed inside.

The enclosed space is made up of four, six feet tall, shrink-wrapped bench forms. One can very easily relate to these works as architectural rather than as objects due to their large scale. Each form is well defined, completely transparent, and revealing of what lies on the other side. The openly built stainless steel rod forms respond in an animated fashion to the tightly wound shrink-wrap as they arch and bow with grace and elegance to the tension placed upon them. The narrow swaths of material serve also to break up the surface planes with a cascading effect of movement and reflection. This combined with the blue-green color show off the void within the forms.

The life-size scale relates to the viewer in terms of architecture and not as an object. One passage exists for the viewer to enter and exit a space that accommodates one or two people comfortably. The enclosure, more than the other works in the show, takes on most literally the characteristics of site. This sculpture created a special place within the gallery’s interior where one could see and be seen in a unique way. In addition, the confined interior space of the sculpture compelled the viewer to deal with
the materials and forms in a more personal way. Subsequently, the viewer took on the role of participant and became the content of the sculpture.

My motivation for this sculpture stems from experiences I had as a child. I often took the opportunity to activate the spaces within my home using the materials at hand. I would use a bag of clothespins and all the available sheets and blankets to make rooms within rooms. I would turn chairs and couches on edge to form alcoves and anchor points for hanging fabric. The spaces were selective in the size of person who could enter as well as the ability to see in and out. I had the discretion to make visible or conceal the contents of the spaces held within.

As for the sculpture Contents, it contains while allowing the contents to be seen. This may contribute to the uneasy feeling most people had upon entering the sculpture. They entered a space that speaks of vulnerability on many levels. In addition to the delicate materials, the viewer entered in, sensing the closeness of the space. Even more, the viewer became aware of their place inside the work and conscious of how they may have been seen interacting with the piece.

The appeal of the previous work, Cube, Cone, Rectangular Polygon, stems from its transparency and vulnerability. Although it was too small to physically enter, the viewer had a sense of being inside as a result of the materials. This new work, Contents, deals specifically with the void. Site exists within these forms, a site that speaks of a void, a void that speaks to people. With a scale of approximately six feet cubed, this sculpture impacts not only the surrounding space and architecture but the average person as well.
**Architectural Axis**

The third work in the series of seven began where the prior two had left off, but quickly my thoughts turned towards addressing and activating the space beyond the object, that of the gallery itself. I began to see the gallery broken down into compartments, which in turn were broken down into strata, vertical levels. *Cube, Cone, Rectangular Polygon* is a floor level piece about the size of a coffee table, and *Contents* is firmly grounded as well but extended into the upper two-thirds of the vertical space. With these thoughts in mind, I made the next sculpture.

*Architectural Axis* is a hanging work, activating the mid to high-level strata of the gallery. The initial form was interpreted from that of a fish trap, constructed in open, rod form with mainly opaque vinyl. There is one colored transparent vinyl panel that draws attention to a single area of physical entrance. The interior space of this sculpture is pierced and activated by a vertical axis in the form of a slender elongated rectangle, paneled with bright yellow opaque vinyl. This element pierces the work and becomes an architectural reference. The work was hung so that the vertical axis lies perpendicular to the floor and parallel to the walls, relating to the architecture of the site. This relationship, along with the unique cast shadows of lines, color, and solidity, served to activate the site and space around the sculpture.

*Architectural Axis* has more of a traditional negative space within it. It has no vinyl skin covering the outermost planes of the object, only the lines of the quarter inch rods that merely suggest the enclosure. The interior clover-shaped form was paneled in opaque black vinyl, contrasted with the bright yellow columnar form passing through it.
The antagonistic dialogue between the two forms as they share a common space serves to draw in the viewer, as does the implied movement around the axis of the sculpture. The primary forms and negative spaces of this sculpture appear to swing around the strong vertical axis, like a ringer in a horseshoe tossing competition.

The scale of this work relegates it as object; but the central component, the axis, spoke to the surroundings of the site, enlarging its sphere of influence. I found that not only were its own spaces activated, but those beyond the sculpture were affected by the work as well because of its implied movement, cast shadows, and placement.

_Glove Box_

Open rod forms were created in a similar fashion to the previous works, but a solid metal form was added to this sculpture to explore the effect of combining the two processes and their respective aesthetics. With the addition of the solid metal form, the diameter of the stainless steel rod was increased to half inch to achieve a visual balance between the mass of the sculpture’s components. This sculpture physically allows the viewer to insert his or her arms through the two openings in the solid metal form and into a pair of twenty-four inch black vinyl gloves. The viewer literally activates the interior of the overall form with their individual movement and presence for the sake of recording their response on vinyl pages using a permanent marker.

Incorporating the show registry in the sculpture, _Glove Box_, seemed a perfect fit as I looked for varying ways of activating space and varying degrees of allowing the viewer to enter the works. The functionality of this work serves to activate the interior
space before the gloves are even put on; but the activation was consummated as the viewer became a participant, leaving behind their thoughts, if only a signature.

This work maintains a psychological and emotional appeal due to its nature of being a record. Viewers participated in this sculpture in part because of the blanks, or voids, of the pages that can be filled and partly because of the chance to add to what has already been written. It is said that each person brings a unique interpretation to a work of art according to his or her life experiences. This sculpture is no different, but it keeps a record of the individual responses.

_Glove Box_ is merely an object, an encapsulated space that can be activated from the outside. This work, in a subtle way, suggests site in as much as it is place to write, a desk of sorts. This sculpture did, however, address the gallery space in a new way. I had chosen from the outset that it would physically engage the architecture of the gallery as a wall mounted piece. My thoughts had grown more intentional as to how I would activate the space of the gallery, and a large wall-mounted sculpture had yet to be done.

_Get In To It_

The next sculpture was conceived as my attention turned towards a smaller, more intimate scale. As I considered shoebox size, I knew right away that I did not favor the use of a display pedestal; and, secondly, I did not want this small-scale work to be mistaken for a model. I quickly resolved these issues by designing a secondary structure around the actual sculpture. The sculpture, _Get In To It_, is a vinyl and open-constructed, quarter inch, stainless steel rod pail of water. This reference to a bucket sits on a two-tier,
solid, stainless steel platform, which tapers back to a vertical eight-foot ladder topped with a solid steel diving platform.

This resolution to having a small-scale work in the show came with such a carnivalesque, even cartoonish, appeal; I could not resist the playful opportunity. This sculpture referenced site more than any other work in the show because of the context it is taken from. As I thought of the viewer “getting into” this smallest of works, I wanted to overdo it and include the humorously impossible feat of diving from a great distance into a pail of water. With this in mind, Get In To It was built in exaggerated perspective so that the ladder appears taller and the diving platform higher and more precarious. I believe if the work appears to be the product of fantasy, the easier one can imagine him or herself a part of it.

The overall appeal shifted to the external attributes and implications because it has far more solidly built forms than any other work in this series. The activated space is the open air between the bucket and the ledge of the diving platform. More specifically, the viewer’s eyes recognize the activated space between the two forms. This outward form of activated space, along with the whimsy and intrigue built into this sculpture, create a sense of energy and anticipation that sets this work apart from the other works in this series.

Activating Space

There was yet one more way that I had found to activate space. Object and site physically merged to encompass and activate the largest space, an entire room of the
gallery. I built an installation to the exact specifications of an opening and doorway between the two levels of the gallery.

This sculpture, *Activating Space*, is a single panel with a five-inch depth like that of the gallery walls. It was constructed in an open fashion with quarter inch stainless steel rod and fleshted out with smoked-gray semitransparent vinyl on the face of the work and opaque red vinyl panels leading into the depth of the piece. These materials serve to break up the visibility through the sculpture and encourage the viewer to look through a built-in two-foot diameter opening in the panel. This opening contains a two-foot diameter stainless steel, half-inch gauge grate that the viewer can rotate at will. The portal is the physical entrance to what becomes the interior of this sculpture, the adjacent room of the gallery.

The site of this adjacent gallery space was appropriated into this sculpture, along with all the contents therein. There were four sculptures in this space as well as countless people who came and went throughout the week of the show. This work took on the nature of architecture as it separated, contained, and allowed visual passage between lived spaces. I am fascinated most by this hybrid form of sculpture. I have given much thought as to how to take this research further without compromising the autonomy of sculpture. I believe the sharing of characteristics is possible as long as the nature of the work is sculptural.

*Rebirth*

A spin off of *Activating Space* occurred as its design and concept became resolved. *Rebirth* was a literal extension of *Activating Space* that needed its own identity
and space. This sculpture represents a passage, and it is what lies at either end of the passage that interests me. Therefore, this half open, half closed tube form was constructed in a minimal fashion when compared with most of the other works in this series.

I was interested in the change of place and site that occurs as a result of going through a passage. Beyond the physical implications of *Rebirth*, there are also issues of the spiritual passage. Beyond the physical, I believe the nature of someone can change, and it is this duality that I thought about while creating this sculpture.
CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

All of these works dealt with or were influenced by architectural concerns in some way. Some of the works created site and space that were activated by their own contents or by the viewer’s presence. Another work, because of its historical context, gave reference to site, and another appropriated the existing site of the gallery space because it was an installation piece.

Consistent efforts were also made in consideration of how the works would relate to each other and to the interior space of the gallery. Materially, all the pieces remain very focused using stainless steel and vinyl. As for construction, the common denominator is open constructed rod forms with vinyl panels. Once all the works were assembled together, it was noted that circular forms resonate throughout most of the works. I believe this resulted from my concern that there be a sense of flow between the individual sculptures, and between the sculptures and the spaces of the gallery. Circular elements are often used in design to create a sense of fluidness; and, subconsciously, I included this in my sculptures.

All said and done, I feel that this body of sculpture held true to its course while providing a variety of approaches and angles to the research of activating space. Personally, I progressed in my abilities as a craftsman, while following through with the research surrounding the activating space concept. Having only scratched the surface, I anticipate the next move in my research and artistic development.
Illustration 1. *Cube, Cone, Rectangular Polygon*; 24” x 24” x 48”
Illustration 2. *Contents*, 73” x 88” x 73”
Illustration 3. *Architectural Axis*, 51” x 51” x 51”

Illustration 4. Detail of *Architectural Axis*
Illustration 5. *Glove Box*, 72” x 36” x 31”

Ill. 6. Detail for *Glove Box*
Illustration 7. *Get In To It*, 99” x 25” x 42”

Illustration 8. *Get In To It*, Detail
Illustration 9. *Activating Space*, View 1
81” x 65” x 5”

Illustration 10. *Activating Space*, View 2

Illustration 11. Detail for *Activating Space*
Illustration 12. *Rebirth*, 26”x 26” x 68”

Illustration 13. Detail for *Rebirth*