CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT:

An Exploration of Nontraditional Space

An Abstract submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Art in

Art

by

Karen J. Valentine

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California State University, Northridge
To Fred, whose unending love and faith has made this possible.

To dear friends who generously gave so much of themselves.

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My love and deepest gratitude to all.
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My main concern is space, but not in the more formal
terms that are generally dealt with in an art context.
I am concerned with space in a way that relates more
directly to people and their feelings about themselves
and their environment. These I define as psychic space,
ritual space, psychological space, interpersonal space
and territorial space. These spaces, usually defined by
our own self-imposed limitations, are dependent on our
personal vision of the world; the boundaries of our
consciousness being no larger than we allow.

I am interested in exploring these edges of con­
sciousness to find ways of expanding them. This has
required probing into areas that would be more easily
avoided, the inner most spaces of the self that become
blocked with fear, superstition and inhibition. These
blocks are accumulations of learned responses to what
life deals us and like all vicious cycles the cause leads
to the response and the response leads back to the cause.
The door out of this constricting space actually leads
deeper in the mind to those inner spaces which are being
enough for it to lose its importance.

The objects within the five installations, strongly connotative or symbolic, were chosen to tell a story. However, some object such as the snake were placed within the tableau originally as intuitive impulses, their meaning unclear until sometime later. These objects seem to affect the viewer in a much the same way, perhaps not understood by the conscious mind but felt on a deeper subconscious level. Like the elements of a disturbing dream that is just outside the grasp of the rational mind, the objects bring us face to face with the non-rational within our own minds. The intention is to experience the nonrational in a way that will transcend our fear of it.

The story told in sequences in the five spaces is of this search for transcending fear. A child in her innocence dreams of angels resting on clouds (ill. 1), a peaceful dream until it becomes a direct confrontation between child and "angel" and the child runs away (ill. 2). When the confrontation is no longer unavoidable the value of this encounter with the nonrational becomes more apparent and the child now an adult realizes that the search for self has just begun (ill. 3). A spiritual rebirth occurs and the material world is seen for what it is, a vehicle for reaching a non-material goal (ill. 4). This realization is a step in conquering fear and brings
partial fulfillment in the search for self (ill. 5).

Among the repeating elements throughout the five pieces are the snake and the bed. An object of fear or an object of veneration throughout history, the snake’s meaning within the pieces was unclear at first, but as each piece evolved it became more and more apparent that its presence for me at least related to the idea of rebirth. The fact that our society views the snake with fear when other societies have deified its regenerative nature may be the result of our inability culturally to accept our own mortality. We try to replace the natural cycles of change and rebirth with material objects that are intended to support our limited conception of universal laws. The snake then as representative of these natural laws, makes us confront a different reality, a reality in which life and death are equal partners, one ultimately resulting from the other and continually leading back to itself. Our own personal growth follows these same cycles, rebirth resulting in the death of the old self, and it is the fear of this death that makes us avoid change and create an artificial reality.

The bed was used because it is there in the quiet and darkness of night time that we must confront ourselves unavoidably. With nothing visible of our material reality we sometimes even invent insomnia or try to conjure up dreams to avoid the dark, undiscovered spaces
within ourselves. Like the environments themselves these inner spaces are both curiously inviting and repelling all at the same time.

As in the room environments, the portrait series (ill. 6-12) deals with inner space and is actually a documentation of an event, a sort of performance, in which each person materialized what they felt to be the essence of their self. Each person chose the environment in which they felt most free and through body movement and interaction with the environment and with me as photographer/voyeur, expressed what they felt to be their spirit or non-material self. The resulting photograph is the final distillation of this event and represents not only the exploration of the innermost spaces of the self but as well of the relationship of that inner space with the outside material space which affects it. Each photograph in a less obvious way also represents the emotional spaces of interaction between people as it was necessary for a certain level of trust and nonverbal communication to exist between photographer and subject before the portrait could be realized.

The performance, "Moonshadows", (ill. 13) took place in May 1978, in the Alabama Hills, Lone Pine, California. It took the form of a ritual enacted by six people in which the light of the full moon and its movement across the sky was used to illustrate the fact that
time, light and space can only be defined in relationship to one another. The performance began at nine and ended at midnight. Each person within the circle laid six stones on the ground to mark the shadow the person to their left. This was repeated around the circle until each shadow was delineated for that segment of time, symbolizing our interdependence on each other. The intervening time was spent in meditation, a conscious attempt at understanding inner space by defining outer space and vice versa. This cycle was repeated at each half hour culminating at midnight with a celebration of the interdependence of people with each other and with all participating: Lynn Creighton, Erin King, Donnal Poppe, Karen Valentine, Lee Walker and Dianne Wohlleben.

The way the artist has dealt with the concept of space throughout history has been one of the most interesting aspects of western aesthetic tradition to me. The contemporary artist has expanded traditionally accepted definitions of art to create a new aesthetic which is more relevant to the concerns and media of our time. With the acceptance of new art forms such as performance and environmental work, and with the artist's concerns being oriented more toward those of society in general, it follows that aesthetic considerations will change to better express these concerns. The redefinition of space in terms of art seems particularly relevant now
as our concepts of the nature of the universe change with new information being rapidly gathered and assimilated, and with society's present interest in altered states of consciousness, methods of self healing, right brain function and other possibilities of the untapped power of our minds. Hopefully the artist can function as a guide, helping others in society to recognize the flow of creative energy that exists within all of us.
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Illustration 3
Illustration 4
Illustration 6
Illustration 7
Illustration 8
Illustration 9
Illustration 10
Illustration 11
Illustration 13

(Photograph From Installation)
Illustration 14
(View of Installation)

Illustration 15
(View of Installation)