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The Study of contrast

Ku-ho Han

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The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

The Study of Contrast

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The Contrast in Glass

The purpose of this MFA thesis is to investigate contrast within the material glass. Issues to be investigated include: transparence in contrast to the opaque, architectonic structure in contrast to organic surface and cold working methods in contrast to hot glass technique.
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INTRODUCTION

During the past two years I have developed a perspective on my works as an artist. That perspective is explained in this thesis. Before I became involved in glass as an artistic material, I worked in ceramics. I see similar characteristics in these two crafts disciplines. They both demand constant work and devotion. Another parallel for working in glass has involved focusing on fundamental of form. My perspective in art has been developing since early childhood, and now my thoughts are once again enhanced by creating sculpture with new materials, primarily glass.

My sculpture possesses my memories and thoughts while I am working with it. It is my personia and introduces me to my viewers. “Sculpture is the poetic statement of form.”¹ When I was in my first year of glass studies, I did not realize what my thesis concept would be. I was interested in so many processes and concepts; I was just beginning the exploration of glass. I was fascinated with the glass casting process; for that reason I changed my concentration from ceramics to glass. At the end of my second quarter, I recognized my interests in glass related to the concepts of contrasts. I explored transparency and opacity in glass and began to focus upon geometric form architecture in contrast to organic texture. Transparent glass characterized

architectural form. Opaque glass symbolized organic forms to me.

I created each object similar to the way in which the mind shapes memories. Opaque cast glass incorporated rough textures and lines, and the transparent glass created geometric patterns and shapes. What I attempted to say in my sculpture was personal and a result of my own experience. I was concerned about the expression of the material without the baggage of preconceived notions. However, I was strongly influenced by other artists, architects, and their works.
ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

In contemporary art, modern architectural beauty is formed from dots, lines, and basic geometric pattern. We each interpret a personal concept of space. Geometry brings logic to special concepts. Art is composed of geometric components, in this way, geometric shapes which are formed by connecting between each line into a hieroglyphic. This solution for expressing art represents my artistic direction. I utilize geometric forms such as the triangle, rectangle, and circle, and make architectonic forms that address the basic structure of organisms.

During my first year of graduate studies, I had opportunities to investigate architectonic modes. An architect, Bruce Goff, introduced me to the basic format used in the majority of my work. The Irma Bartman house (figure 1), Triaero is based upon the clear articulation of geometric parts, and it reflects classical beauty, and modern lines of stability. It was easy to understand geometric shapes by viewing this work. After looking at Goff's work, concepts of form became clear to me. A Studio (figure 2) was designed with irregular architectural elements. I investigated many different forms based upon this work. This house appears independent and separate, like a piece of sculpture.

For a long time I have been interested in the architectural structures of the boat form as well. Boats have high recognition as a human construct. At the beginning of my second year, when I was researching the structure of the boat
Figure 1) Bruce Goff  "Triaero"  1941
Figure 2 | Bruce Goff  Joe Price Studio  1956
form. Their source of architecture also became an element that influenced my work.

I also believe that the work of Howard Ben Tre (figure 3) is extremely simple yet powerful. His work, "Column 20" motivated me to cast in glass. This form connects bold lines, harmonizes with a burly cast piece, and expresses life (figure 4). Ben Tre’s sculpture involves opaque glass created by sand blasting or devitrification, and transparent glass is used as well. Moreover, the work challenges our belief that glass has a fragile character, it has a soft appearance, and it is enhanced with a contrasting, rough texture. I was inspired by Ben Tre’s use of mixed media, cast glass combined with metal. These materials are incredibly dissimilar. I use this aspect of contrast in my work by incorporating opaque glass and rusty steel. These elements represent a journey into my dreams of past and future.

At Rochester Institute of Technology, I have had the opportunity to work with Michael Taylor, a glass artist, who continues to experiment within a series of geometric forms (figure 5).

"Taylor has created an alchemical symphony in his sculpture constructed of optical glasses. Using dichroic glasses that form the hearts of the blocks, Taylor causes planes to jump from foreground to background, lines to appear and disappear as the viewer moves around the sculpture.”

Figure 31  Howard Ben Tre  Column 20  1984
Figure 4 | Howard Ben Trè  First Flask  1989
Figure 5 | Michael Taylor  Alchemy Symphony, Cadmium, Neodymium, Crystal 16  1991
What I fine special in Taylor's work is the elegant, formal compositions of geometric components which alter appearances in their specific placements. Work like "Alchemy, Symphony, Cadmium, Neodymium" provide me with a sense of the fourth dimension, actually a phenomenon of optical illusion (figure 6).
Figure 6 | Michael Taylor  "Selenium Sonnet"  1996
DISCUSSION OF THE SCULPTURE

Glass by definition is an amorphous, artificial, noncrystalline, substance which is usually transparent, but can also be translucent or opaque. Transparent glass suggests a psychological richness, exhibiting cold and extremely sharp qualities to me. In contrast, my intention is to create an opaque glass that produces visual softness in my work. I merge both transparent and opaque in my sculpture; this becomes an investigation of contrasts. My aim is not to produce simply three-dimensional composition. Instead, I strive for a balanced state between the transparency and opacity, between laminated glass and the Pate-de-verre techniques. My work is not made to please clients or for a specific audience. It is created because I have a need to express myself through my work. I personally want to emotionally feel the message that my sculpture communicates. My work is a reaffirmation of my own identity. The sculptor, David Smith communicates this idea best.

"I haven't named this work nor thought where it would go. I haven't thought what it is for, except that it is made to be seen. I have made it because it comes closer to who I am than any other method I can use. The work is my identity. .... Any why should you expect understanding when i do not? That is the marvel, to question but not to understanding."3

3 David Smith by David Smith. Published by Holt, Rinehart and winston, Inc., 1968, p,164.
The Study of Contrast I (figures 7, 8) is based on an investigation of the laminated triangle form which is cut and polished. This becomes large faceted sections. The opaque surfaces are cast as organic structures. In this piece, a part of the laminated glass was cast by a basic triangular mold, reflecting an element of modern architectonic form. The sculpture suggests movement, a subject of conversation in the opaque surfaces and imagination in the inside of laminated parts. The bottom of the cast section is an organic form suggesting human, bird, or fish forms. The texture of the base portrays my personality. It is unpolished. In addition, basically both glass types describe simple, geometric figures; a truncated pyramid whose edges are defined by the three or four connected horizontal rods on which the whole structure stands.

The Study of Contrast II (figure 9, 10) is related to my earlier studies in vertical balance and this sculpture tries to unify the two elements. The laminated glass is connected with different colored glass components and is arranged with structural exactness. The faceting allows light to penetrate the glass surfaces, letting us look deeply into the glass itself, through highly polished surfaces. The cast section is bone white, suggesting the rhythmical beauty of a river stream, streaky in texture.

The drawings (figure 7, 9, 11, 13) of my work are included in this thesis because they represent a part of my visualization process. The drawings are studies for the purpose of solving problems and seeing the work before it is completed.

The Study of Contrast III (figures 11, 12) is a unified piece that contains other elements of contrasting material and different chemical states of glass
Figure 7 | Drawing
Figure 8 | The Study of Contrast I 34 \times 8 \times 28^1 \text{ cm} \hspace{1em} \text{cast, laminated glass, steel} 1995
Figure 9 | Drawing
The Study of Contrast II | 7 × 6 × 82" cast, laminated glass, steel 1996
Figure 11]  Drawing
Figure 12 | The Study of Contrast III  10 × 10 × 44"  cast, laminated glass, steel  1996
Cast glass resides inside a plate element, which serves as a container. The cast form depicts organic figures. The plate container expresses both the technical beauty of modern tectonic art and also modern technologies. I would like to subtitle this sculpture "Personal Contrast". I want the viewer to contemplate their own contrasts. Someday, I hope to make sculpture which will encourage viewers to reflect on their own problems or other social difficulties in contrast or relationship to my work. Currently I am not concerned with the viewers interpretation of my work.

All geometric forms find their counterparts in sculptural and architectural form. *The Study of Contrast IV* (figure 13,14) is concerned with the aerodynamics of its edges in space, as seen at each tip where the metal comes in contact with two different masses of glass. These contact points describe a triangular pyramid. While the work begins with a geometric concept, it is more dependent on the artist's expression and arrangement of form. With the use of structurally strong materials, in this case steel, it is possible to keep the balance and the gravity of the piece and thus heighten the universality of the form.

When metal is successfully juxtaposed with the glass successfully, both the metal and the glass can express greater quality and energy than alone or as single elements. I tried to exult the steel, featuring its attributes and beauty. Accordingly, I heated the metal and then emerged it in water. After this process, I painted the metal with salt to induce rust. Then, I cleaned the surface with oil.

For *The Study of Contrast IV*, I have attempted to call attention to the
Figure 13 | Drawing
Figure 14 | The Study of Contrst IV  $43 \times 9 \times 24''$ cast, laminated glass, steel  1996
surfaces of this sculpture while I anticipate a viewer appreciating the overall form. Flat planes and sharp edges became the focus of our attention.
CONCLUSION

After working on my thesis work for almost two years, I can now reflect upon each sculpture that I researched, designed and produced. I appreciate the processes necessary for competing each work. I found that it was extremely challenging to selectively work with two contrasting considerations, yet bridge differences into a singular solution. I chose geometric definitions and straight line to contrast with my organic texture. Opaque cast glass and transparent glass were the visual contrasts selected to define an architectonic and organic considerations. Organic forms were transformed into angular, geometric shapes, then juxtaposed or placed in interlocking relationships. Opaque glass, transparent glass and steel were my media. These materials are the media I will continue to investigate, as I create my future work.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


