Arrangement of form and space

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Rochester Institute of Technology

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The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
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Master of Fine Arts

Arrangement of Form and Space

By:

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July 10, 1997
Approvals

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Introduction

Flowers and plant forms have been a recurring subject for many artists. Artists utilize the endless variety by interpreting the structure or using the actual flowers and natural material to create aesthetic compositions. I see nature as a constant source of ideas and inspirations; thus, I want to use flowers and plant forms as motive in my exploration of sculpture.

At first, I proposed to explore the teapot. I wanted to focus on the architecture of the teapot (handle, body, spout) while keeping the structure within the anatomy of plant forms, leaf and stem. For example, I created handbuilt pieces from slabs of clay where the leaf functioned as the body of the teapot and the stem became the spout. I made the pieces quickly and had the construction process resolved.

However, Professor Hirsch constantly reminded me that the pieces were "too wooden" and the clay looked "overworked and tired". In many ways, I agreed. The smooth and minimalist surface were too stylized and the pieces became too predictable. Although the work conveyed gestural line qualities, my reductive style became stagnant in other areas. I quickly took his advice and moved on with a new approach.

After Christmas, I began a new body of work and explored the vessel, still maintaining the dialog between the main vessel form and a secondary part. These pieces consisted mainly of thrown vessel pieces and an attached appendage in the form of a vine. Each week, I produced a different variety; however, many of the responses were negative. I continued to create pieces where the two parts interacted more by making the vine pierce the vessel element. My advisors indicated that the pieces still looked tight and confined.

I attempted to resolve each piece by having all the parts joined completely into one. I saw what needed to change after consulting with my advisors. At this point, I relinquished this body of work but
maintained many of my discoveries.

I continued to develop from week to week. My advisors demanded more and I produced, changed and grew. Finally, my work took a drastic change when Professor Hirsch advised me to break the structure into units that I would later assemble. I turned towards the clay extruder because this equipment allowed me to rapidly produce units that closely resembled each other. In addition, the potter’s wheel provided the means to throw large and different vessel forms simultaneously. For example, while I waited for one to stiffen in order to add another coil or section, I threw the beginning of another form. With this method, I was able to make the individual parts, fire and arrange the compositions quickly. This new approach allowed me to produce works that were larger in scale and contained multiple parts.
Approach

With a refined concept, I began to throw the vessel form using the Korean coil method. I threw the bottoms of each piece using 10-15 pounds of clay and gradually attached coils to achieve the height and size, I needed. My pieces increased tremendously in scale. While the wheel pieces were drying, I extruded rod or snake-like units that I later fired inside the thrown forms to ensure better survival since most of the extruded parts measured more than 30 inches. Additionally, I wedged nylon fiber into the clay before extruding to keep the rods from breaking.

After I bisqued all the parts, I arranged the compositions according to my sketches. Three pieces in particular called for the inclusion of another medium. I utilized round reed, rattan, and grapevine because of their flexible nature and because they gave me the flowing lines necessary for the compositions.

For instance, in Figure 6 (page 10), I bundled round reed together with wire and tied raffia on top of the wire to conceal it. At first, I intended for all the parts to be constructed out of clay. My results were limited. The structures were small in scale and they did not provide the dynamic curves I wanted. Furthermore, the factor of time and the nature of clay prevented me from investigating the best method to construct the linear forms that I now replaced with the natural material. Hence, I incorporated the bundle of round reed because the natural quality provided me with the curvature and the scale necessary to make this particular composition more dynamic.

Similarly, Figure 2 consists of rattan that I inserted into slits between the two white thrown forms as well as into the holes in the extruded parts. Likewise, in Figure 4, I used grapevine. More importantly, I used the natural elements to emphasize the formal aspects of my pieces. Finally, these natural elements also reiterate my reference source and trace my pieces historically while placing them within a contemporary context.
References

With these throw forms, what did I want to say? My peers reminded me that the pieces still looked "pottery-like" and contained too much pottery references. By all means, I wanted to move away from the utilitarian and place my thrown forms within a sculptural context and speak of form.

Making these thrown forms visually and conceptually provocative were my primary goals. The boundaries I set upon my quest were to refine variation on the simple theme of form exploration based on flower arrangements. In addition, I used Ikebana or the floral arrangement vocabulary of form to focus on the concept of space.

Ikebana developed from a long history in Japan and each period is characterized by its original style of flower arrangement and the different schools. From the main Ikebana school there have emerged numerous other schools, each differing slightly in detail but the fundamental principles remain the same within all of them. Each school consists of two main groups classical and naturalistic where the first expresses the natural state of flowers while the other stress the humanistic feeling, respectively. The classical is made up of three main divisions: formal, semi-formal, and informal. On the other hand, the naturalistic contains two main styles: Nageirebana and Moribana. For example, formal and semi-formal are reserved for use in temples or mansions. Nageirebana demonstrates the greatest freedom and ease where the three-point principle of the formalistic group is retained, with more or less precision. Moribana depicts or reproduces in narrative the appearance of a garden scene or of a view.

The Ikebana artists base their works on the fundamental principle founded on re-creation, more or less conventional, of floral growth, and bases its precept on line, rhythm and color. The main principle underlying the art pertains to the three main parts or lines, symbolic of Heaven, Man, and Earth.
Modern Ikebana is what the West has come to know. Established in 1925 by Sofu Teshigahara, the Sogetsu School of Ikebana, "emphasizes freedom of expression while conforming to the traditional Ikebana (Teshigahara, 89)". Although deeply rooted in Japanese tradition, the Sogetsu School incorporates anything, displays anywhere and in any circumstances.

Sofu Teshigahara defines "Ikebana as sculpture with flowers" and cautions that, "it must not be regarded as separate form sculpture (84)". Since his death and his daughter Kasmui, Hiroshi Teshigahara has taken over as "iemoto" or traditional master in 1980.

For Hiroshi Teshigahara, he sees Ikebana as “three-dimensional composition” and "believes Ikebana arrangements should not blindly follow tradition but should meet contemporary requirements (H. Teshigahara, overleaf)". He says,

"The source of creativity lies in the spirit of play. Art can fairly be defined as a nonsensical game. I wish Ikebana to be understood in a broad sense as a sort of creative game. It is my desire to liberate it from the confinement of Japanese tradition, with its narrow and rigid ideas, to make it something which belongs to the broad world, which can be explored and enjoyed by one and all (14)".

Figure 7 made by Wana Derge illustrates a soften curve that adds subtlety and charm. It draws the viewer’s attention to the cluster of objects in which she arranged at the base of the protruding fern. This particular composition influenced me in the development of "Arrangement in Chartreuse, Black and Red" (Figure 6, page 10). Similarly, Figure 8 also by Wana Derge demonstrates the balance in color and form composition. Note the various masses and line direction she employs. I incorporated these concepts in composing several of my sculptures.
In Figure 9, Hiroshi Teshigahara uses varied sizes and shapes to create harmonious arrangement with Deutzia crenata, Onicidium and Butterfly Orchid. In addition, the colors of these flowers and the container also become key elements in tying the parts together. These key principles function as the main ingredients in organizing the structure of “Arrangement in Bronze, Yellow and White” (Figure 5, p.8).

Likewise, Figure 10 (Page 25) made by Hiroshi Teshigahara illustrates the use of color to fortify form. Note, how the green balance the dominant gold and silver. The harmony in the three colors make this particular sculpture intriguing. I adopted this color principle in creating Figure 4 (Page 6).

Furthermore, I chose Figure 11 and 12 (Page 26 & 27) as examples of color influence and its depiction of form. I resorted to intense colors to sharpen my forms. These paintings by Mark Rothko illustrate the use of intense color juxtapositions involving “hot” colors contrasted with black and white. He achieves tension not only form the sharp contrasts or clash of the rectangles’ colors but also from the constricted spatial situation in which the blocks of colors appear.

Rothko is quoted as saying, “I’m not interested in color” and “I’m not a colorist”. Color he explained, “was nothing more than an instrument for expressing something larger: the all important "subject" in his paintings (Rothko, 13)”. I have used color to maintain the principle of three, the basis of flower-setting: the Triad, symbolic in many religions and cultural aspects. Mainly, the colors became another means to tie the forms together as well as to enhance them. These colors function to enrich the environment in which the sculptures were placed.

In applying color, I maintained the basic principle Wana Derge suggests, “When using several colors it is usually better to use a larger proportion of one, less of the second and still less of the others (Derge, 55)”.

In all these reference illustrations, note also how the space develops the composition as well and how the captured space enhanced
the sculptures. I utilized this important concept in creating my pieces. For example, Figure 2 (Page 2) demonstrates open space which gives the piece distinction while Figure 5 (Page 8) portrays closed space in order to establish a focal point. In addition, I incorporated this principle in my display of the pieces.

Hiroshi Teshigahara writes,

"The essence of Ikebana lies in grasping space in a three-dimensional way and imbuing it with new life. Thus, Ikebana is composed on the basis of the character of the space in which it is located, and should possess a lively correspondence with that space. This is why it is impossible, strictly speaking, once an Ikebana has been completed, to move it to another place. The form engendered by the unique space, and the materials of which the form is made, fit that space and that space alone. They can never be at home in other surroundings (12)".

Likewise, much thought was given to the environment in which the sculptures were placed. For example, the set up, lighting, space, and composition were given careful attention in order to convey the essence of the work.
Description of Pieces

"Arrangement in White, Green and Orange" (Figure 2, p.2) consists mainly of three parts. The bottom two sections contain thrown elements while the mid-section holds all the extruded green elements. I used the twisting and bending of these linear units to mimic plants such as tall weed and allowed the random lines to draw the eyes downward. In addition, I left the tips of them open and the hollow space adds to the overall composition by directing the viewer not only to the surface but also inward towards the negative void. Together the extruded rods also became one mass. I incorporated the orange rattan to speak about lines, tie the sections together and envelope space. The negative area defined by the orange lines work to make the sculpture more playful and energetic. Variety in length of the protruding units and space divisions add overall interest to the piece. This sculpture can also be called "Homage to Hiroshi".

"Arrangement in Purple, Yellow and Black" (Figure 3, p.4), this particular piece contains a strong center of interest highlighted by the glowing yellow interior. Subtle texture covers the exterior surface and is heightened by the bright interior yet subordinate by the mass exodus of finger-like projects from the inner cavity. The flower shape holds many extruded parts that appears to flow away from the opening. The black snake-like parts are organized as a whole to enhance the overall form. The movements created by these undulating individual units illustrate great commotion; however, the black makes them subordinate to the yellow interior. Thus, the inner surface of the vessel draws the attention of the viewer and becomes the most important aspect of the piece.

Space gives Figure 4 (Page 6) "Arrangement in Green, Silver and Gold distinction. The flowing grapevine captures a great deal of space. The subtle details in this piece point in many directions because of the abundance of space around this composition. The lines definitely draw the eye towards the thrown form. The flowing lines come in contact at
the rim. Here, a slight twist at the rim indicates the contact between the two elements. The bark texture keeps the eye wandering over the details. From any angle a sense of balance is conveyed in this piece.

A bulbous form compose much of “Arrangement in Bronze, Yellow and White” (Figure 5, p.8). The simplicity of this piece conveys its strength. The vessel form pushes outward from the immense pressure of the content. Cracks mark the pressure from the fruit-like units. The stretch marks decorate much of the surface but are subdued by the darkness of the color on the surface. The lone white element draws one’s attention. Here, it sits surrounded by many yellow units similar to itself. A warm glow radiates from all the openings and directs the eye towards the voluminous interior.

Figure 6 (Page 10): The composition of this piece is achieved by the repetition of lines created by the bundling of the round reed. This massive bundle conforms to the overall design by the orderly divergence of line direction. The line repetition introduces an element of action. This design element is also picked up in the base of the piece. Together with the top section, they both emphasize rhythm and harmonious flow. The massive bundle thrusts away and quickly curves inward to make contact with the vessel form. The extreme curve expresses power.

I limited the body of work to these five sculptures and displayed them according to the space allocated for my work. I wanted a presentation that would reflect a strict observance of cleanliness and order. I originally planned to have all the pieces stand individually on different pedestals at varying heights. However, when Professor Hirsch saw my assigned space, which resembles a room, he suggested that I use the space to my advantage by stressing my reference source. He suggested that I look at Japanese interior setting and described how he had seen Ikebana displayed in Japan. So, with this input, I considered the possibility and saw it as a potential to further my concept of space.

I purchased straw mats and built bases that were 18 inches high and constructed caps for the bases in the shape of a “u” out of particle
boards (See Fig. 1, p. 1). The caps or top of the pedestals were made slightly larger in order to leave a 1 inch border around the mats. The particle boards worked well because the texture was reminiscent of Japanese decor. In addition, I placed one pedestal away from the "u" shape arrangement in which I placed Figure 6 (Page 10).

Prior to the construction of the pedestals, my discussion with Professor Lenderman further improved the installation of my work. He suggested moving the pedestals away from the walls a few inches. This suggestion changed and added to the whole concept of space dramatically. The negative area between my work and the wall highlighted my pieces. For example, the space became a means to frame the individual sculptures. Although, the sculptures were already framed individually by the black edges on the straw mats, the negative area enhanced the concept further not only by strengthening each piece, but also by tying the whole group of sculptures together. (Thus, I adjusted the pedestals accordingly to fit the limited area.)

This arrangement proved to be most pleasing because it allowed the sculptures to be viewed collectively and individually without becoming too dense and haphazard. Furthermore, the display strategy fortified my concept of form and space. Finally, it worked also at defining the mood. Viewers spoke of this quality and how it evoked a sense of contemplation and a meditative atmosphere.

Alfred Koehn states it best, "... that which always remains most surprising is that a vase, two or three branches, and a few flowers, can express to the Japanese thoughts that raise the mind to higher conception and aims (1)". Overall the work draws upon a long tradition of floral arrangement, yet my development of these pieces give them a contemporary niche.
Figure 7: “Companions”, Wana Derge
Figure 8: "Windswept", Wana Derge
Figure 10: “Ishi (Stone): Japanese apricot, Yellow pine, Polygonum filiforme”, Hiroshi Teshigahara, Original Stone Vase
Figure 11: “Untitled”, Mark Rothko, Oil on Canvas, 1949
Fig. 12: "Green, Red on Orange", Mark Rothko, Oil on Canvas, 1950
Technical Information

Stoneware Body Cone 10

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<td>OM4 Ball Clay</td>
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<td>Edgar Plastic Kaolin</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grog</td>
<td>7</td>
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Added 6% of Ferro Frit 3124 to make the body more dense and fired to cone 04 bisque.

Duncan Low-Fire Glazes:

- GO 135 Candied Apple Red
- GL 632 Tangerine
- GL 657 Orange Peel
- GO 137 Black Cherry
- GO 134 Calypso Red
- GL 614 Matador Red
- Go 136 Victorian Red
- SN 135 Orange Fizz

T.M. Patina

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The following degussa inclusion stains were tested using T.M. Patina; however, they were not incorporated in the sculptures.
I purchased the stains directly from Cerdec and used 3-8% in my test samples. Although the stains maintained its brilliant colors at cone 04 and did not burn out like mason stains, the colors were still not intense enough for what I was seeking. Professor Hirsch indicated that since my pieces spoke the language of sculpture rather than functionality; intense colors could be achieved by other means such as an suggested acrylic lacquer. The lacquer came from Paintmaster in Rochester and all safety precautions were used. I limited my palette to primary colors, black and white. I quickly embraced the idea and began applying the paint by spraying and brushing.

While applying the paint to certain pieces, I also pit fired several pieces to see if the smoked surface would add contrast to the bright colors that I was trying to achieve. When I combined the pit fired sections with the painted units, it became evident that the sculptures lacked clarity. For example, form distinctions became difficult because they could not be separated visually. At this point, I began to spray all my pieces with the acrylic lacquer, with the exception of one piece (Figure 5). I glazed the interior of the round fruit-like units with commercial low-fire glazes. I chose warm, bright reds and oranges because I wanted the interior to radiate and glow.

In addition, the round reed and the rattan were also painted with the lacquer. These materials came form the Textile Department, while the grapevine came from the woods and coated with spray paint. Finally, for presentation, the straw mats were purchased from Pier One Import.
Conclusion

In summation, Margaret Preininger writes, “The producing of a cheerful atmosphere, the bringing of tranquility and peace to the mind, the promoting of spiritual growth, and the beautifying of the home are emphasized by the Japanese as benefits of flower arrangement (2)”. Knowing that my works have done the same comes as great satisfaction and contentment.

I see a continuation of this concept with all the parts made of clay as the next step in future works. These sculptures will contain multiple parts and several forming methods as well as various firing processes. More importantly, I want them to function in other surroundings.

Producing this body of work proved to be quite a discovery and it has been a challenging and great learning experience. This thesis came together with the support of people who believed in my ability to get my work accomplished.

Above all, the most important learned experience were my: limits, potential, integrity, what matters most and the many lessons in life.
Bibliography


