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TIDE TO CYCLES

By

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Thesis

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Tide to Cycles

Chairperson: Brad Allen

Abstract Content:

An exploration of the psychological effects of light, sound, and objects within installation art and specially regarding David Tarullo's thesis show, "Tide to Cycles".

General Themes in My Work

Over the past three years, my work has vastly shifted in appearance. However, the themes that I explore in the work have remained consistent. I continue to explore my personal experiences and interpretations of the world. How I respond physically and emotionally is central to my ideas and the concepts I portray. I am constantly seeking to better understand how I communicate with myself and others and the implications of these interactions. I believe that the stories people tell us about themselves, the stories we tell ourselves, and the moods we possess are what generally color our experience in the world.

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Water Imagery and Personal History

Water has become a prevalent symbol in my work. Although its presence in my work can be traced back to long before attending graduate school, water has become a central guide to my installations as well as a means to give the viewer a strong sense of movement and suspension.

Growing up on the Southern California coastline, water, especially large bodies of water, has been consistently present in my life. As a child, my relationship with the ocean was complicated. I was not a beach bum as many have assumed. My family spent a significant time at the beach, but rarely ventured past the safety of the shore. At times, when the ocean was calm, I felt at peace and was able to venture out past the break and experience the water while floating on my back with my ears submerged and my eyes closed—an act that was primarily attempted in the safety of pools. It was in these moments that I first felt connected and fascinated by the power of water. This was a wonderful game for me, especially in pools where I could lie for long periods of time and focus my breath so that I would sink down on the exhale and rise up when I inhaled. I was suspended peacefully on the surface yet attempting to get as close to sinking below the surface where I could not breathe. This act of carefully navigating my fear of

drowning continues to dominate my relationship with the ocean to this day. It was not until my mid-twenties that I got the courage to seriously pursue surfing, a sport that fascinated me as a young child watching surfers carve the face of waves in beautiful rhythmic patterns. Paddling into a wave, viscerally aware of its power, facing the fear of being thrown into a mass of liquid and robbed of my most basic need to breathe, is chasing that same feeling I had as a child floating on my back. I was testing that precarious balance between the thrill of suspension and the fear of death.

The sensation of being in the water, suspended by something so powerful and vast that also holds the potential to end my life in a moment, is what drives the imagery of my work. There is nothing I have felt more deeply or known more clearly than the experience of being enveloped in water. The complete immersion that I feel in the water is what guides the imagery of my installations and what makes me strive to create an experience for the viewer that mimics the excitement and vulnerability I feel in the water.

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I use water in my work as the metaphor for how I experience the world. It holds the whole spectrum of emotions for me. Calm waters speak to being grounded and at ease, where communication and connectedness seem simple and natural, though somewhat banal. Rough or choppy water speaks to loneliness and abandonment. Swells refer to mood swings. Comparing my experience in the water to my relationships and emotions gives me a key to understanding how I navigate my world, and how situations and people affect me.

Installation Art

Installation art expands the ways art can affect the viewer through the use of immersion. In an immersive installation, the artist has access to all the senses of the viewer and can use them to more effectively impart the goals of the work. The installation artist takes on an expanded role, becoming the director of an experience with more variables than any other means of communication. The challenge, and the potential, of working within an almost limitless field of expression are both invigorating and daunting. Finding the elements that maximize the impact of the artist's concept requires a careful examination of the ways humans sense the world. This includes the five basic senses but, most importantly, how a combination of the senses creates the viewer's experience as a whole.

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Synopsis of "Tide to Cycles"

"Tide to Cycles" is essentially an emotional experience of building tension, the sensation of release, and the ability to rebuild in a new way. When the viewer enters "Tide to Cycles," soft white light illuminates three large cellophane box forms. These forms and a false wall obscure the rest of the gallery. On the false wall is a small LED button, which starts the cycle. The lights fade out as the first subtle base tones of the soundscape begin. As the sound slowly increases, the first three boxes slowly re-illuminate, followed by light that starts to reveal the underside of the

largest section of boxes in the gallery. This low light draws the viewer into the first area of the installation and gives them the opportunity to explore a small pocket under the main form. As the sound increases, another light reveals a mass of suspended boxes that resemble a giant chandelier or the underwater structure of a floating plant. The light on this piece begins to pulse slowly and reflects light into the room, exposing a wall of boxes in the shape of a wave that encloses the first area entirely. The main area of the gallery remains dark although the reflected light partially exposes it. As a new layer of sound is introduced, the first light in the main area fades in, revealing the small passage through the wall of boxes and inviting the viewer to follow the light in through the wave-like structure. Once the audience enters into the center of the gallery, the first atonal sounds are heard. These are synchronized with flashes of red lights foreshadowing the first large shift in color.

The first shift is the transition of white light slowly replaced by red light. This choice of color shift alters the space dramatically. We no longer see things as they appear in natural light. The boxes that were green shift to black, resembling giant charcoal blocks. Their translucency diminishes and they become solid and foreboding. The pace of the sound increases dramatically, becoming increasingly atonal. The red lights flash and shift with increasing speed, casting bold flashes and shadows, which shift in a frantic pace. Suddenly, the sound falls to a low steady tone and the room goes completely dark. A bell rings slowly as one light flashes in synch on the chandelier piece, appearing far off in the distance. The room goes completely black and the viewer is left with only long, drawn out bass tones.

The gallery remains dark for just over one minute before three deep thumps are played in short succession, synced with red lights that cast glimpses of the viewers' shadows on the large wall. Then the space returns to complete darkness for another thirty seconds. The darkness provides the viewer with something completely unexpected by interrupting the ability to move about the installation and making the soundscape their only frame of reference.

Slowly, the sound begins to increase, preserving the majority of its original tones while lacking the atonal sounds. These are replaced by subtle sounds, mimicking waves, which were created by squeezing, releasing, and stretching the same cellophane used on the surface of the box forms. Slowly, lights activate and the boxes begin to reappear, transformed into an electric blue color. A soft magenta light fills in the gallery—shifting not only the color of the boxes, but also the viewers' skin tones and the color of their clothing. The space takes on a surreal quality

as the light increases, then holds steady, giving the viewer time to take in the new landscape before it fades momentarily into darkness and slowly returns to the white light of the beginning, revealing the boxes' natural color. The cycle has concluded.

Integrated Body Psychotherapy

In 2003, I began practicing Integrated Body Psychotherapy under the instruction of David Lindquist. The methodology was developed by Jack Lee Rosenberg Ph.D. and Beverly Kitaen Morse Ph.D. and stems from the hypothesis that psychological triggers can be grouped into two basic categories: abandonment and inundation. These two triggers are experienced in the body prior to intellectualization or conscious thoughts related to the experience. The result of experiencing these feelings is what they call fragmentation. "Fragmentation is like a period of insanity that intermittently disrupts your state of mind, causing you to see life in a distorted fashion." (Rosenberg, Morse 29). The first trigger, abandonment, links back to childhood and is present when one feels left behind and incapable of tolerating that experience. The second, also traceable to early childhood, occurs when an individual feels unable to shoulder expected responsibilities. . It is important to understand that both of these triggers are experienced in the body as an accumulation of sensations. In effect, one experience will trigger all past moments of inundation and abandonment. Again, it is important to emphasize that this is experienced physically in the body prior to the intellectual response that links together all the moments of fragmentation. It is also important to note that as a general rule, an individual is more likely to be triggered by *either* abandonment *or* inundation and will.

Effects of Density on the Viewer

In my installation, I aim to get the viewer to experience the physical sensations associated with fragmentation, with the possibility of re-experiencing moments in their lives. My goal is to carry them through these experiences. I'm looking to create a strong emotional effect that elicits the uncomfortable feeling of fragmentation. I want them to feel a release at the end of the cycle when the magenta light builds in the gallery and finally returns to white light. It is my intention for this last section to bring them back to a more centered state. I am using what I call density as a means to evoke sensations associated with inundation and abandonment in the form physical space, sound, light, color, and shadow movement. All of these attributes shift and change

throughout the timeline of the installation to portray the spectrum of inundation and abandonment.

The first aspect I considered when creating my installation was how the viewer would react to the density of objects in space. Because we primarily navigate the world with visual cues, the way objects obscure our ability to see greatly affects how comfortable we are. When objects are close to us and we cannot see more than a few feet around us, we become vulnerable and anxious. When we have space around us and can perceive a larger distance, we can relax. I use this simple idea in order to create emotional tension and release in the viewer. In my original sketches of "Tide to Cycles," I placed a large focus on the density of objects and their effect on the viewer. Although the final piece did not place the same importance on physical density, I still used this principal in transitions, specifically the passage between the main areas, to create a moment of tension between two relatively open and serene spaces. Physical density exists in the wave of boxes that cascade into the large area of the installation. Although it does not surround the viewer, this watercourse evokes a deluge about to drown the viewer, thus activating an overwhelming or inundating experience.

In general, I'm looking at how we respond to stimuli. I'm using density to create a moving experience where the viewer can experience abandonment and inundation, then ultimately a new almost surreal experience all together. Density is formed through a layering of sounds that increase and decrease in intensity through the cycle of the exhibition, through the movement of light and the shifting shadows the light creates, and finally through the shifts in color and how these affect the cellophane boxes.

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Sound

The soundscape for this installation was created through the layering of sounds that increase in pace, volume, and atonality before flattening out and finally rebuilding with similar tones in a major key. These elements increase into a frantic state as a means of engaging the viewer and evoking a state of inundation. I want the viewer to feel overwhelmed by the experience to a degree that is nearly intolerable. This period of increased inundation induces a feeling of powerlessness.

We are affected by sound differently than by other stimuli. It holds a power that no other sense does. Unlike our other senses, there is no way for us to completely interrupt our sense of sound. We can easily close our eyes. We can plug our nose with a quick squeeze of our fingers. We automatically pull our hands away from something that burns our skin. With sounds, the best we can do is put our hands over our ears in the attempt to mute what we are hearing, but this only reduces high tones and creates an echoing sound in our heads. We can never fully escape sound; for this reason, we are always vulnerable to its effects.

Sound can also serve to protect us when we are most vulnerable. It alerts us of danger. We are shocked awake at the sound of a dog barking or a child crying. Even an unidentifiable loud noise can instantly arouse fear and panic.

One of the most interesting functions of sound is how it unites us through patterns. When we hear a piece of music, we recognize various rhythms and melodies and begin to anticipate what will come next. This serves as a puzzle for the brain to solve, pulling us into the music's structure. We become part of the song--our bodies continuing the pulse by tapping our foot or

dancing. It is important to note what happens when we decide we dislike something that we are hearing. "Noise is a stimulus, and when we have little control over the source, we often experience more stress and anxiety (Pelusi)." We are forced to operate in opposition to the sound or discord. We become increasingly agitated the longer we are forced to remain in the situation. In some cases, we can mentally block out the sound in order to function normally, but this takes energy and slowly wears on us.

The conscious addition of sound is new to my work. I have been deeply affected by music outside of the gallery, but have not experienced an installation that successfully used it to impact the viewer. In these instances, I felt the sound to be separate and distracting from the work. It is my goal to incorporate sound that moves as seamlessly as possible and amplifies the experience.

Because I do not have a background in music or sound design, I worked with Dannon Rampton, a violinist who specializes in string arrangements, to create the soundscape for "Tide to Cycles." This proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of the installation. Despite the fact that we worked for two months to create the score, I felt as though the process and final outcome were largely out of my control. We worked closely with my concepts for the show, and Dannon responded to my input and feedback as the soundscape took shape over the course of many versions. However, the final interpretation of the concepts belonged to Dannon, and when I listened to the track for the first time in the space, with all the physical objects in place I felt that his soundscape and my concept were entirely out of sync. It was an intense struggle for me to let go of control of such an impactful aspect of the installation, and I was halted in fear that all my work was being usurped and altered into something that did not match my ambitions. I have often worked with others in my installations and have welcomed input and suggestions, but this was the first time that I was forced to integrate someone else's creation into my own. When I was finally able to release control and accept Dannon's interpretation of the concept, I realized this was the first time I had truly collaborated with another artist. I realized that most of my struggle was not about whether the work meshed, but rather it was about learning to release control. I also realized that the incongruity that I saw would ultimately be bridged through the lighting sequence I was to create.

Light, Color, and Shadow

For the past two years, I have been consumed by the impact of light and shadow and have explored ways to implement them in my work, taking inspiration from the light and space movement of the seventies. I was transfixed by how colored light shifts perception when I had the opportunity to see "Breathing Light," a James Turrell room at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This work, as well as his Skyspace pieces, inspired my use of color changing L.E.D. lights. I realized the power that color holds in engaging emotion in the viewer.

In my installation, light and color are synched with the soundscape in order to amplify the experience of inundation and abandonment. As the intensity of the music increases, so does the movement of light and the shadows they create.

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For "Tide to Cycles," I chose four basic color palettes: white, red, black, and magenta in order to elicit specific emotional responses in the viewer. White light was the closest to natural light and was used to establish a ground or base for the viewer to see things as they would appear in daylight. Red light created a darker and more foreboding atmosphere with the potential to

overwhelm the viewer. I used black, or no light at all, as means of taking away the viewers' primary means of navigation and to evoke a sense of being lost or left behind. The last lighting palette, magenta, transformed the space into a surreal landscape and aimed to inspire curiosity and a new way of seeing. Together, this cycle of color carried the viewer through states of inundation, abandonment, and rebuilding.

I was first drawn to using red light because I knew that it would transform the color green to black. Because red light is a primary color in light mixing, it lacks green light entirely. When red light strikes a green surface, all of its light is absorbed, rendering the object black. This transformation was ideal for what I wanted to portray. The green boxes turned to charcoal and became opaque and daunting under red light. This shift from their light and translucent green in white light formed a stark contrast and created a change in their density, closing the room and adding even more substance and weight to further the experience of inundation.

Under the red light, the color red itself is strongly present on the walls and shadows of the objects. Red has the potential to create emotional intensity. Its importance and effect is seen throughout our culture and the rest of the world. It is used as a symbol of impending danger on motorway warning signs and medical hazard labels. There might be an even more basic reason for our reaction to the color red. Red falls at the very bottom of the spectrum of visual light. This means that it has the longest wavelength and carries the least amount of energy of all visible color. "In the visible spectrum, red has the highest wavelength, and lies in the range of 650-750 nm. Its depth of penetration into human tissues is...much higher than the other wavelengths present in the visible spectrum (Kamath)." The color red is scientifically proven to penetrate more deeply and to be perceived with more intensity than any other color.

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During the red phase of the installation, the most dramatic effect is created through the shifting of shadows on the main wall of the gallery. I used a series of ten lights mounted above two clusters of boxes to create shadows that faded in and out in an increasing pace. This movement produced the most visually dense section of the cycle. I borrowed a method of film editing where smaller and smaller sections of video are spliced together to create building tension, anticipation, and anxiety. The shadows shift, just as clips in a film, to an extreme point where the viewer is captivated and overwhelmed. This adds another layer to the density of this moment and further activates the sense of inundation in the viewer.

Perhaps the most important section of the installation follows directly after the intensity of the red section, the blackout. This huge shift immediately reduces the built up density of all the layers of information the viewer is experiencing. A last bit of light and sound are experienced in the distance with a white light and a bell. Then, there is complete darkness and the low, long hum of base tones. At first, this moment releases all the tension built into the last section and the viewers can breathe and relax. However, the sustained period of darkness shifts the viewers from

the intensity of inundation to the loneliness of expanse and abandonment. The overbearing boxes, the intensity of sounds, and the wildly shifting lights all disappear along with the viewers' ability to visually perceive their surroundings. Three flashes of red light cast the viewers' shadows on the wall, leading them to believe that vision will be restored, before once again dropping off into darkness, adding a more intense sense of abandonment.

Initially, I thought the blackout period would force the viewer to imagine the forms that they had been walking through. I anticipated that my audience would have to access their memory in order find a bearing for themselves in space and that this would force them to imagine and internally render the installation in which they still stood. However, I believe the installation was too large to force the viewers to re-imagine the work. When darkness fell, the viewers were only thinking about their immediate surroundings, things they might knock into if they took a step forward or backward. I imagined something akin to the figures in Anthony Gormley's "Blind Light" (see image below), reaching and stretching and feeling their way through the darkness. Instead, most people stood still and incredibly quiet, waiting, with the understanding that light would return, though not exactly sure when. I'm sure there were those who grew impatient because they were being forced to wait in the dark, but overall I think the darkness became a marker, a reset--the absence that I would next fill with the surreal effect of amber light.

For many, the rebuild was the magical moment. It was the new dawn after the long night. Without doubt, it created another point of relief and more than likely a hint of gratitude that I hadn't left them in the dark forever. One of the most exciting discoveries I had during the process of building this installation was when I first saw my green boxes in magenta light. It was something I never would have believed. Pale green transformed into electric blue, a blue that I had never seen before. All I could think was that this could never exist in nature. This was going to be the dream state, the surreal. I chose to bring the light up slowly from the black out and hold it in its glory without any of the movement of the red phase. I just wanted the viewer to see this miraculous transformation and find joy in the almost ridiculous color of the boxes hanging in space around them. Then, while the moment was still sweet and desirable, I slowly pulled it away before returning once more to white natural light for the cycle to begin again.

Two days into my installation I was scanning through my Instagram feed when I saw it--the color combination I thought could not exist. At the base of a row of cherry blossom trees ran

a shallow stream. The water was the same electric blue as my installation rendered this way by the magenta light that filtered through the pink cherry blossoms. Bewildered and a little tickled, I wondered how many people believed that this photograph was real. I knew I wouldn't have believed it six months ago.

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Plastic as a Medium

The choice to use plastic as the dominant material in "Tide to Cycles" is based on its rarely noticed beauty. The material, specifically cellophane, has attributes that are commonly associated with precious materials such as glass and gems. When stretched over the metal framework, its translucent and reflective qualities are highlighted. It allows the viewer access to the interior of the form and even an obscured view through the form when the material is layered a minimal number of times. This translucency has historically only been available in highly polished stones, bodies of water, and more recently glass—all materials that are very important and have even been considered magical do to their unique accessibility. Unlike with opaque forms, we can understand the inner properties of objects that have the ability to transmit light. In this way, we get to know more about the form. The form is not only accessible but more open and, in a way, more vulnerable. The translucent form contains a quality that we don't possess physically, but greatly desire emotionally. We want to people to understand us and we also strive to understand ourselves. We desire to be more transparent and not carry the burden of hiding

aspects of ourselves. We greatly admire the courage of people who are open and willing to express their desires and weaknesses. We seek to relate beyond our external forms. This is one reason why translucent objects draw our attention and pique our curiosity. As humans, we have a basic instinct to understand and be understood. Translucent objects embody this instinct and serve as a metaphor for the process of understanding.

Plastics, even translucent ones, have rarely been associated with the ideals of understanding and emotional intimacy. Instead, we have come to stigmatize plastic because it represents how we are destroying our planet. Human use of plastic will leave a lasting effect on the geological timeline of the planet. "Once buried, being so hard-wearing, plastics have a good chance to be fossilized - and leave a signal of the ultimate convenience material for many million years into the future. The age of plastic may really last for ages (Zalasiewicz)." It will become a layer in the earth's crust, a residue of the period in which humans populated the earth. It is our mark, our creation, and we shame ourselves for it. I argue, however, that this shame and self-hatred is causing more harm to the planet. In the process of creating this show, I have come to appreciate plastic in a new way. I have learned to see its beauty, I have learned to care for it, and my shift away from hatred changed the way I interact with it. I no longer resist it. In fact, it has become precious to me. Initially, I was drawn to its reflective and translucent qualities because it fit my purposes. Through the process of creating the piece, however, I came to better understand and care for plastic. I hope that the continued use of this material in my work can move others to a balanced perspective of plastic and an appreciation for its positive qualities.

Drawing Conclusions on My Work and Process

As my time in graduate school closes, I look back at the woodfired sculptures I was making before I arrived. Placing these raw abstract forms side by side with this latest installation, it would be difficult to believe they came from the same artist. What ties them together is my spirit of investigation, my searching for the unconscious parts of myself. My pieces are mirrors reflecting who I am in a particular moment and time. I create in order to better understand myself and my experiences, with the hope that I can use this newfound understanding to grow and evolve.

Like many, or perhaps all artists, I want my work to be seen and affect the viewer in a profound way. I want to know that my story relates to the viewer's. I want them to appreciate

what I have spent so much time creating, and I want them to hold dear the experiences that my work has provided. The viewer's response adds another layer of satisfaction for me, offering an even larger understanding of the work and how it reflects us all. Sharing this experience allows us to see ourselves in new ways, giving us a bit more insight into who we are.

Artistic Influences

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James Turrell

I have garnered the use of color light more from Turrell than any other artist. It is perhaps due to the fact that he has reduced light to its most basic elements. It is as if he has laid out a pallet before me, inspiring me to incorporate his use of light. With rooms stripped bare of any detail that is not absolutely necessary, his light becomes all there is to see. His work shows the simple beauty and ambiance of colored light. We respond very differently to a painted wall as opposed to a white wall with colored light cast onto its surface. The colored light also strikes

the viewer and renders change in their skintone. The walls mirror the light. Turrell's color is so vivid that it seems palpable in the air. Turrell sparked my curiosity with colored light, however the way in which I use the medium is quite different. Turrell's work is about the slow glide of shifting colors, where the viewer feels suspended above the clouds, frozen in time. In my work, it is about the drama and emotional impact. Where Turrell slowly transitions his colors, I shift lights quickly and abruptly. Whereas Turrell is a minimalist, I fill the gallery and its wall with objects and shadows and fast shifting lights. Turrell wants to give you the experience of flying weightless in space. I want you to feel the swell of water lifting you up and holding you. My work is not about keeping a safe distance to observe and engage your intellect. My work is about pushing your boundaries and immersing you in an emotional experience.

Tara Donovan

Donovan installations have had a strong impact on my work. Although her multiples are always comprised of commercial objects, her ability to transition them into emotive objects that fill space is incredibly exciting. Her pieces containing Styrofoam cups were a strong influence in how I hung both "A Subtle Mark" and "Tide to Cycle". Her smooth flowing forms, dependent on their translucency for full effect, call the viewer to wonder. They possess an otherworldly topography or resemble an amoeba colony growing into space, uncontainable. I don't believe that Donovan is as interested in immersion as I am. Much of her work allows the audience a safe distance to explore and not be impeded. I do believe Donovan and I seek out materials in similar ways, looking at the qualities materials might contain and their power to transform into an entirely new object when grouped together. Donovan and I are also both fascinated by the way a material can be affected by light.

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Antony Gormley

Gormley's "Blind Light," impacted my installations more than any other piece I have seen. I am captivated by the idea of immersive installations, and I believe this piece, in its simplicity and effect, may be the quintessential example of such an installation. Viewers walk into a glass enclosure filled with fog blasted with white light. The experience is two-fold. The interior viewer is forced to navigate the space without sight and the exterior viewer observes this experience when the interior viewer approaches the glass barrier. The experience in the interior requires the viewer to explore the space interacting with others while deprived of much of the information we usually use to understand another person. Here everyone becomes equal through anonymity, and the sense of touch becomes incredibly important. Those outside have a voyeuristic view of the people inside as they move close to the glass. The observers get access to how people operate under these odd circumstances, maybe even getting a glimpse of innate human nature. This piece showed me the power of immersion and inspired its use in my work.

Placing Myself Within Contemporary Art

Of the marked movements that are currently operating in the art world, I most closely align with Post-Structuralism. My work is, and has always been, about examining existing structures and finding ways to expose and understand them. Unlike most artists working within this movement, I am not focused on the societal structures that operate around us, although these often come into play. I work to understand and break down how underlying structures are operating in our individual lives. My focus is on the individual, the single viewer, not society as a whole. I'm not concerned with bucking a whole system or even discrediting societal injustices. I'm most interested in breaking down the system that affects me directly. I don't assume or find it necessary to define the structures that are operating in other people. I believe giving them the framework of my experience, in a generalized and abstracted way, allows them to explore the unidentified structures that are operating in their lives. I'm not looking to criticize Post-Structuralists that are breaking down specific injustices. In fact their work helps me to understand societal notions that are affecting me. However, it is more interesting to me to offer an emotional experience that is based on my life with the hope that it can reflect an aspect of the viewer's.

Other Artists and Comparable Works

James Turrell - LED light shifting

Robert Irwin - Flourescents

Judy Pfaff - Suspension of Ephemeral Materials

Do Ho Suh - Fabric Houses

Anish Kapoor - Funnels

Ernesto Neto - Amophous Forms, Interactivity, Pillow Forms

Tara Donovan - Simple materials and Translucency

Antony Gormley - Blind Light

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