



3 x 6 INTERPLAY

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Yaacov Agam (born, Jacob Gipstein) was born in Richon-le-Zion (Palestine) 11 May 1928. As a Jewish settler, he fought for the new state of Israel upon its founding in 1948. As the son of a rabbi, Jewish religious themes have always influenced his art. According to Agam, the Talmud teaches that “life is a passing shadow, that nothing in life can be anchored, and that no image or visual perception is static, but that all these are merely parts of a greater entity.”¹ (Los Angeles Times, 2 April 1985, p.7)

Agam started creating art while studying in Jerusalem at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in the mid-1940's. Following this, he moved to Zurich, Switzerland, where he was influenced by the Bauhaus ideas and the art of Vasily Kandinsky. While there, he studied color theory under the mentorship of renowned artists Johannes Otten and Max Bill. While at ETH Zurich University he was inspired by architectural critic and historian Siegfried Giedion to transform the concept of static paintings into something more interactive with the viewer.² (Popper, p.15) Agam has, in fact, had an effect on architecture, as seen by the painting of the condominium building in Miami, with its interplay of colors.

Early in his career, Agam was influenced by movement within art itself. He is a pioneer within the kinetic art movement (some even consider him to be a founder of the movement). His goal was to involve the participation of the spectator. He has stated, “I influenced a Fourth Dimension of Time - the unexpected,”³ (you tube, October 2012) referring to how his work changes in the eyes of the spectator over time.

Yaacov Agam has dealt with various forms of media over his lifetime with perhaps the major portion of his art being serigraphs and wood wall art sculptures. Other media used at various times include jewelry, porcelain, gouaches, stainless steel, as well as both watercolor and oil paintings, including transformable paintings utilizing the agamograph process developed by Agam in 1971. “In an attempt to create an ‘impression’ which is not static and a print in movement, a Plexiglass lens plate highlights the colors of an offset print, according to the cutting angle of the lens. A line invisible to the eye is magnified twenty times. Different themes appear, fleeting images emerge and withdraw.” 4 (Regon, p.11) This clearly is in keeping with Agam’s Talmudic studies.

I feel that Yaacov Agam has had a monumental effect on different media – art, sculpture, stainless steel, etc. Art critics, both in the United States and in Europe, have lauded praise upon him and the work he has produced. His work has been shown in countless shows on both sides of the Atlantic, starting with his solo exhibit at Gallery Graven in Paris in 1953, followed by a group exhibit at Le Mouvement Exhibition in Paris in 1955, and even including the Palm Springs Art Museum in 1971. 5 (Popper, p.16)

3 x 6 Interplay is a particularly refined sculpture, each piece smooth, sleek and moveable. 3 ft. x 6 ft. Interplay is the size of the sculpture, and there were 3 ft. x 3 ft. sizes available as well. 3 x 6 Interplay has had a long history

of being associated with the museum, as mentioned above, the year it was created.

Before we discuss the sculpture itself, we should discuss the zeitgeist surrounding the development of stainless steel. Emerging as a product after the second world war which could be used by the masses, stainless steel flatware eliminated the polishing time required by sterling and silver plate. Kitchen cabinets were produced using stainless steel. Even today, stainless steel kitchen appliances are the most popular.

However, few artists have utilized stainless steel as a medium. Agam began his sculpting of stainless steel in 1968 and continued to dabble in the medium until 1972. Throughout that time he was able to sculpt several pieces, some ranging as large as ten feet tall, while the smaller pieces were designed to be displayed on a table top, a pedestal, or in a vitrine. Agam often worked in editions – small, medium and large versions of the same design (as he has done with other media); of course, this delights dealers and fans, it also can rile critics who see his art as mass production. All the pieces were designed for both indoor and outdoor usage. While the majority produced were in stainless steel, some were created in gold-plated brass. Each piece was designed with moveable parts, thereby fitting into the artist's use of kineticism as an emerging art form.

3 x 6 Interplay is an ideal example of kinetic art. As the elements are rotated, countless variations of design are created. The art piece exerts a strong will on the part of the observer to become involved by reaching out to touch one of the elements to start the rotation process. “The sense of touch has always played a role in Agam’s art, as a facet of the complex multi-sensual aesthetic experience he desires to create.” 6 (Metken, p.15) In fact, my first impulse upon seeing 3 x 6 Interplay each time is to begin movement of the arms. This movement expresses beauty, order and harmony. Of course, in an outdoor setting, a strong breeze can elicit the same effect.

Yaacov Agam has long given credit to the influence of Alexander Calder on the artistic world of kineticism, and to him as well. The Palm Springs Art Museum is fortunate to have Lezard (Lizard) by Calder in its collection. Although the two sculptors did meet each other, there is no record of a continued friendship. Often viewed as a seal balancing balls, Lezard is identified in the long run only by way of its curved tail. Although the museum maintains a “Do not touch” policy regarding artworks, Lezard is always in motion – the “balls” rotating as guests, volunteers and staff pass by and by air current movements provided by the ventilation process. Therefore, each time a person approaches the sculpture, depending upon the continual movement, that person will see something different from the time before, no matter how slight. Perhaps the major contrast between 3 x 6 Interplay and Lezard is that 3 x 6 Interplay is designed with the idea that it can be set in motion by the viewer, whereas Lezard is designed as a stationary art piece with slightly moveable parts, probably more fragile than the parts of 3 x 6 Interplay.

Hyper-Ellipsoid, a piece of wall art by Gisele Colon, is an ideal comparison to 3 x 6 Interplay as well. Although not a sculpture, Hyper-Ellipsoid is a piece of kinetic art where the viewer is enticed to view color and shape changes while walking from side to side in close proximity to the front of the art. From the front of the piece, viewers describe the dominant piece as anything from a space ship to an eggplant – this same piece takes on various color and shape changes as the viewer walks back and forth in front of it. It is definitely a piece of kinetic art, as the viewer is involved with seeing the many aspects of the art. By contrast, where Hyper-Ellipsoid moves only for the eye of the viewer, the sculpture 3 x 6 Interplay is a moveable piece of art which thrives on its ability to generate as many views as possible for the viewer. Hyper-Ellipsoid, however, also relates well to much of Agam's wall art.

Docent Tour Tips

3 x 6 Interplay is an ideal piece of artwork to include on a docent tour. If beginning with the piece, it is a great lead into the discussion of kineticism and can be used to remind the touring guests when other forms are included in the tour. If it is used later in a tour, it is a great example of how kinetic art does not have to be stationary but in fact can be quite moveable. Questions to ask the guests could include:

- 1) What do you see initially when viewing this?
- 2) How does this sculpture make you feel?
- 3) This type of art can be made in editions of size and quantity. How does this make you feel?
- 4) What would be your reaction to seeing this indoors?

The Palm Springs Art Museum is indeed fortunate to have 3 x 5 Interplay in its collection. 3 x 6 Interplay is on an extended loan from Gallery West since 1975-1976. Loans of this length are highly unusual, and one reliable resource has suggested that Gallery West may have actually written it off, leaving it in a limbo status but allowing the museum to keep it. Hopefully, this is the case.

WORKS CITED

- 1) Los Angeles Times, 2 April 1985, Part VI, p.7
- 2) Modern Artists – Agam, Gunter Metken, p.15, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.
- 3) Contemporary Artists, 5th Edition, Volume 1: A-K, Frank Popper, pp. 15-17, St. James Press
- 4) Agam: 54 Words for a Polymorphic Reading of Agam, Michel Regon, Palm Springs Desert Museum, 1976, p.11
- 5) YouTube: “Yaacov Agam at the Dizengoff Fountain in Tel Aviv, Israel, October 2012

