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Gisela Colon Interview: Kinesthetic Minimalist Sculpture @ Diane Rosenstein Gallery

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GISELA COLON IN HER SCULPTURE STUDIO WITH HER MINIMALIST SCULPTURE, PHOTO BY ERIC SANDERSON

Introduction

Gisela Colon is an artist who is very conscious of her own historical lineage and position within an ongoing dialogue on light and space. She expands the dialogue on space comparable to introducing chaos to strong hierarchies wherein we cannot see until we physically interact with her sculptures, by moving around them to change the perspective and experience the sculpture from different angles. Her work is very continually mutable which gives them a more organic quality from her perspective to work. Rather than a static twine lasting out at an external world, her sculptures have a dynamic interior life which is set in motion by the viewer's movements - recalling transformational processes we observe working in nature.

This organic leaning expands the dialogue on minimalist concerns and use of industrial materials and processes. Colon's work is very much in the contemporary tradition of Minimalism, but she is moving forward to her Latin Spanish and Minimalist predecessors but she adds a contemporary feminine twist to the dialogue. Her love of bound shapes obviously relates to female organic forms like breasts, cocoons and wombs but generate new life resembling pupae and larvae. Colon was initially known for riffing on Craig Kauffman's organic bubble forms, but she has moved on by introducing more prevalent forms into his geometric economy - going from a fertile interior life. But Colon remains very much a contemporary artist and her sculptures reflect this. These new works are a further play on gender fluidity because she transforms male phallic shapes into feminine ones - leaving her combining dualisms, internal floating forms, in a play on monumentality and delicacy - which recalls the sexual ambiguity of Louise Bourgeois' wifty sculptures.

Colon captures the stain of our times in her dynamic minimalist sculptures by demonstrating that sexuality is a spectrum and that as an artist she is not constrained by outmoded gender definitions. She owns her freedom to explore lessons she learns from her predecessors and add the best: Colon embraces the legacy of female predecessors and incorporates this history with her own instinctive understanding of human body rhythms. It is a powerful alchemy for creating sculpture which is unashamedly beautiful.

GISELA COLON'S SCULPTURE, PHOTO BY ERIC SANDERSON

Interview with Gisela Colon

Bernie: The thing I find most interesting about your work is the kinesthetic quality. You expand the dialogue on space by earlier Light and Space and minimalist artists by adding greater emphasis on changes caused by the viewer's bodily motion. Your work is not a lens looking out at the external world because it has an interior life we don't see until we move around and interact with it physically.

Colon: Kinesthetics is a very interesting concept which has been around for generations. In the mentioned era it goes back to artists such as for example, Alexander Calder who made objects that had movement in them. However there is a difference between my work and the Minimalist sculpture of the 1960's and contemporary work because the movement wouldn't generates vision. With respect to Minimalism, we see that Exist Coast Minimalism is somewhat different from West Coast minimalism in that Exist Coast Minimalist pieces were what they were, aesthetic objects that didn't have any changing characteristics. Artists didn't intend those works to interact with the environment or viewers, they were just self contained. West Coast minimalist objects possess ephemeral qualities that result in ambiguous viewing experiences, yet the objects themselves are pretty static in terms of their visual physical characteristics. Thus any resulting kinesthesia didn't reside in the object itself but the viewing experience. Kinesthesia is a very important component in my work and it is a very active factor of meaning - I'm focusing on making sculpture objects that have inherently variable characteristics. My work is kinesthetic in the sense that movement actually causes physical and internal changes in the objects. For example, the viewer can alter the color as their body affects the light flow. In addition, external conditions such as natural light versus artificial light, the orientation of the work, will also alter the object, allowing a kinesthetic quality above and beyond the concerns of classic Light and Space and Minimalism.

Bernie: The difference lies in the dynamic range of interior changes created by the viewer's movements.

Colon: There are several layers to that interior change. One is color and then there is the form that is embedded inside the object. The color is very fluid and activated into a spectrum by light which is the visible factor in the equation. There are both external and internal forms that materialize and demateralize depending on the position of the participant viewer.

GISELA COLON'S SCULPTURE, PHOTO BY ERIC SANDERSON

Colon: No, in addition to color and form, there is another dimension of kinesthetic quality because of the multiplicity of occurrences in the series of progressing forms revolving and protruding. Multiplicity and seriality are inherent in our biological being because we want to repeat things over and over in our social repertoire is embedded in our sub-conscious to neuromotor reviews things.

Bernie: And they are having a conversation with each other.

Colon: Yes the effects multiplied when you move across and around not one, but many iterations of the same form and configuration causing each unit in the whole to have a slightly alternate location, so when you see the whole together the parts cause a realization or sensation of movement and change. You are seeing each one transform and the whole. I have seen some people have body's vertigo and become asymmetrical to the piece. I love that sheer element inside - like a little silver worm - because it has an asymmetrical, amorphous quality that creates tension. One significant thing I learned from Judd is that polarity is important in the work, there is a need to create tension through a juxtaposition between durative and ephemeral qualities.

Bernie: Interestingly, you are also having a conversation with Donald Judd by introducing this silver worm into your work since we visited Donald Judd last year I watched how you loved moving around those silver aluminum boxes studying them from every angle. You absorb your influences in a subtle way because you internalize and then expand on them - making them your own while at the same time engaging in a dialogue with your predecessors.

Colon: Yes I started using the metallic materials after that trip. I started pursuing the aspect of reflection and how it relates to subject in metallic materials that fluorescent colors outside environment. Robert Irwin's new seminal work Untitled (down to dust) also had an influence on my increased use of metallics. His use of gradations of grays and whites are models of pristine subtleties.

GISELA COLON'S SCULPTURE, PHOTO BY ERIC SANDERSON

Bernie: Another quality I see in your work that I don't see in other Light and Space work is liquidity. There is a watery mess to the work although it is solid.

Colon: I've always seen these works fluctuating between solid, liquid and gas. Almost like I imagine the substances they have underneath. I've always said I love my work as it's most rudimentary level from life itself: from cells, organisms reproducing and from weldong ore ends. Their organic quality is a strong illustration from the way the planet is made up and it is our life essence.

GISELA COLON'S SCULPTURE, PHOTO BY ERIC SANDERSON

Bernie: There is also a strong female quality to your work. I don't mean gender, which is culturally constructed. But in nature there are female forms and they are strong in your work. You engage in a dialogue with male artists yet you address but from a different feminine sensibility and a woman drawn to organic unique forms.

Colon: To define my work with the label of "female" or "feminine" would also be a construct. If you didn't know that the forms were created by a woman, perhaps that gloss of femininess would not be seen. I'd rather converse in terms of "gender fluidity" which is a term that you coined in 2016. At the outset, foundationally, my work is not intended to be referential. It is an autonomous object devoid of meaning. Nevertheless, I'm a woman and I can't help my experience as phallic or sexualized in certain ways. And that will be seen and perhaps expressing a female quality of generating life we see in vessels and forms within forms.

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GISELA COLON'S SCULPTURE, PHOTO BY ERIC SANDERSON

Bernie: It recalls the fecundity we see everywhere in nature: in pods and eggs. But when you make an obvious phallic shape like the Silver Monolith you combine a liquid quality which recalls the interior of a women - like a room. So you explore a sexual spectrum rather than a sexual dichotomy, which actually reflects current ideas about gender fluidity.

Colon: Yes that is correct. The work is fluidly on a spectrum; it can embody gradations of all those qualities. I made this big heavy massive piece and I wanted to finish it in the softest colors that disappear and color-shift, creating a contrast of strong and soft, sexes and body of masculine and feminine, yang and ying. It's really about oscillations and transformations, not being fixed, static and determined, but rather fluidly liquid.

Bernie: So you play with the aesthetics of shapes that you enjoy, to create a spectrum of visual complexities.

Colon: The underlying reason is I was also trying to simplify form and take it to it's real foundation. If you look at the pods you will see the silver forms floating inside. I thought what if I take that form out of the pod and made it an independent form that is irregular, that stands for itself, that further eliminates extraneous elements and is even more minimal. That also generated the creation of this Silver Monolith.

GISELA COLON'S SCULPTURE, PHOTO BY ERIC SANDERSON

Bernie: Were you working on these two pieces at the same time?

Colon: Yes, they were simultaneous.

Bernie: It is interesting that you were simultaneously working on repetition and serility in one series and uniqueness in another. You are really attracted to opposing contrasts.

Colon: Yes, I wanted to examine both the concepts of multiplicity and also singularity, the idea of just one thing and seeking purity and clarity of form. To start with, the Silver Monolithic sculpture, which is a reduction in color complexity. Since color shift is a trademark quality of my work, my version of monochrome silver is also holographic and shifts depending on the viewer's movements and perspective. I felt that the Silver Monolithic sculpture has no corners, no lines, no seams, it has no place to rest the eye. The lip is perfectly rounded. So you get this sleek uninterrupted purity of form. Then on the other side you have the multiple of the Untitled Proportional which is a recursive repetitive experience, yet they both have a common denominator, which is clarity. Clarity and purity of thought, to me is very important.

Bernie: Just as you top gender lines you also blur the lines between art and nature.

Colon: Although they can feel organic, I also want them to have an industrial quality attributed to them. This is in keeping with the minimalist tradition I mentioned before I had do not want the hand of the artist to be a visible element of the work. I am seeking a harmonious balance between contrasting aspects such as natural and artificial, organic and man-made, industrial and life-like.

Bernie: Or anything autobiographic or about being a woman. You deal with formalism but in a different way that is more organic.

Colon: Yes, I combine things from our childhood in Puerto Rico: random chaos, the jungle and things that grow. As a very young child, for example, I studied Gauguin with my mother, who was a painter, and learned about his with odd use of colors. his way was purple, grass was yellow, his unnatural use of colors. I studied Picasso, Wilfredo Lam, and lots of other painters. I painted and created lots of art in my early years. Many things inside my psyche have come to germinate years later. Like drawing from studying and lives artists from South America, like Carlos Cruz Diez and Jesus Rafael Soto.

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UNTITLED (MONOLITH BLACK) 2016, BLOW MOLDED ACRYLIC, 111 X 34 X 24 INCHES. PHOTO: COURTESY OF DIANE ROSENSTEIN GALLERY

Barrie: What made you decide to move away from the wall to the free-standing pieces?

Colon: A desire to create more space, to allow more space around the object, to mediate space and generate movement around the object. It was also a step in the direction of further exploring simplicity of form, distillation of form, and clarity. *Monolith Black*, the first stand-alone work, was created so the internal form would end before the base of the piece. So it is hovering and looks as if it is floating. From the side the color disappears and the internal form turns to translucent matter. The bisecting black line is intentional because I wanted the eyes to separate. When you look at John McLaughlin paintings, one eye wants to go to one side and one eye wants to go to the other. There is a perceptual aspect to bisecting one piece into two hemispheres. There is a simultaneous separation and joining of form, again, an oscillation derived from movement.

Barrie: You are constantly distilling down.

Colon: But I'm still not just dealing with formal qualities because the work also involves transformation and change which is part of life itself and the human condition of existence.

Barrie: Every time I look at your work I see something I didn't see before.

Colon: This is due to the inherent mutability of the object, causing that perceptual ambiguity, the appearance of change and transformation. Nothing is more real than the actual subjective experience of perception. It is a conduit to an experience, and hopefully that experience is one of aesthetic pleasure, or do I dare say the "b" word, "beauty," an experience of beauty?

Barrie: I agree. Of course, we are bombarded with culturally-constructed superficial images of beauty in mass-media because advertisers understand how to manipulate us with their commercial definitions of beauty. Unfortunately many artists have abandoned the pursuit of beauty to pursue the abject and transgressive as though ugliness is more serious than beauty. But great artists, philosophers and even psychologists have always investigated beauty at a much deeper level to understand the power it has over us.

Colon: I believe aesthetics and the appreciation of beauty is something inherent in our genetic make up. We have a capacity biologically to crave beauty, to appreciate beauty, to want to be surrounded by an environment that possesses beauty. But again what is aesthetic beauty? It is of course, a subjective pursuit. For me there has to be some form of order, not necessarily a rational order, but a sequence, progression, formula of organizing the world around you, which yields balance, colors, forms, a conglomeration of aspects that come together to produce some form of harmony - something that the human eye can see and the entire body can sense and recognize as similar to what we see in untouched nature, or in untouched parts of the planet. The planet has life inside it, whether organic or inorganic. We live on this floating moving ball of Earth that is traveling through the stars, and has a life force that rules everything on this planet. We are part of that greater life force that wants us to seek aesthetic pleasure, to pursue beauty, balance and order.

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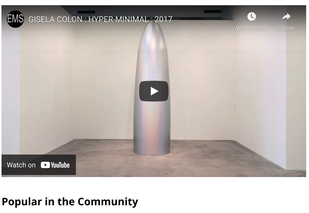

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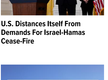

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